An Alternative Comedy History – Interrogating Transnational Aspects of Humour in British and Hungarian Comedies of the Inter-War Years

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Abstract

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This thesis is a historical research into British comedy traditions made during an era when numerous creative personnel of Jewish backgrounds emigrated from Central and Eastern European countries to Britain. The objective is to offer an alternative reading to British comedy being deeply rooted in music hall traditions, and to find what impact Eastern European Jewish theatrical comedy traditions, specifically urban Hungarian Jewish theatrical comedy tradition 'pesti kabaré', may have had on British comedy. A comparative analysis is conducted on Hungarian and British comedies made during the inter-war era, using the framework of a multi-auteurist approach based on meme theory and utilising certain analytical tools borrowed from genre theory. The two British films chosen for analysis are *The Ghost Goes West* (1935), and *Trouble Brewing* (1939), whereas the two Hungarian films are *Hyppolit, the Butler* (1931), and *Skirts and Trousers* (1943). The purpose of this research within the devised framework is to point out the relevant memes that might refer to the cultural transferability of Jewish theatrical comedy traditions in the body of films that undergo analysis.

The hitherto prevailing assumption that in order to understand British comedy one has to look back to music hall traditions ignores the possibility of alternative readings, despite the influx of creative personnel and the evidence suggested by the films made during the inter-war years. This research offers an alternative understanding of British comedy traditions, whereby a particular type of Jewish comedy, the urban 'pesti kabaré', can be seen as a relevant corresponding tradition to the films in question.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1 Aims, Objectives and Structural Specificities of the Thesis

Throughout the 20th and into the 21st Centuries theoreticians such as Vincent Brook, Mark Winokur or Stephen Whitfield have worked on establishing a link between American comedy and immigrant culture, with special emphasis on Eastern European Jewish comedy traditions including the works of artists like the Marx Brothers, George Burns, Woody Allen or Jerry Seinfeld. Within its American context, humour is considered predominantly to derive from discrepancies between the old and new ways of life of immigrants, and their links to Europe, most prominently to the Eastern European Jewish shtetls (or villages), as outlined in Mark Winokur's seminal work on Hollywood comedy traditions linked to immigrants and immigrant culture (Winokur). American vaudeville, variety and music hall, as well as silent and talking film comedy, and subsequently television comedy are all considered to be rooted within the context of immigrant culture, and dominated by Jewish humour and Jewish comedians, artists and filmmakers.

The assumption that British comedy is embedded in the music hall traditions, emphasised both by contemporary critics such as Roger Manvell and by scholars like David Sutton (Sutton 18), Andy Medhurst (Medhurst) or Rachael Low (Low), however, has left little space to study whether Jewish humour may have had any influence on these films, specifically in the inter-war era, when creative personnel like the Korda brothers, Leslie Howard or Emeric Pressburger were active in the British film industry, and when certain textual elements seem to appear in the films of both countries' film output. The figure of the childlike, physically rotund, verbose nouveau riche, for instance, appears not only in the 'pesti kabaré' (cabaret of Pest), the characteristically urban Jewish comedy of Hungarian theatres and subsequently films, but also in British comedies.

Whereas there has been a small, but significant amount of academic interest both in British comedy in the inter-war years, as well as in emigre filmmakers in Britain, the intervention of these studies have not made a link between the two, that is to say, between British comedy traditions and the influx of Central and Eastern European film personnel. The aim of this research is to carry out a comparative analysis within the framework of Hungarian and British films made in a period when Eastern European Jewish humour, hitherto particular to cabaret stages and theatres, gained ground in films. The objective of the

research is to seek whether Eastern European Jewish theatrical comedy traditions, more specifically the aforementioned urban pesti kabaré, had a potentially corresponding effect with British comedies of the inter-war years, thereby offering an alternative reading to the prevailing music hall-influenced approach.

The aim of the analysis is to indicate the occurrence of cultural transference, without arguing whether these findings correspond with a particular author or genre. The comparative analysis, therefore, is conducted using the framework of a multi-auteurist approach based on Kate Distin's and Daniel Dennet's definitions of meme theory and utilising methods of textual analysis offered by genre discourse as suggested by theoreticians such as Andrew Tudor, Steve Neale or Mark Jancovich. The aim within this framework is to identify and isolate small segments that indicate cultural transference from Jewish theatrical comedy traditions to the films chosen for analysis. The reason why meme theory is the most appropriate basis for this framework is that it does not imply direct authorship, genre connotations or causality, while allowing the isolation of small segments. Basing assertions on meme theory bears the possibility of a multi-auteurist approach whereby each contributor to a film is equally relevant. Within this analysis, thus, the aim is not to justify whether these patterns, features or segments may be linked to a given author or genre, rather to indicate where cultural transference occurs, which is the reason why meme theory serves as the methodological basis.

As mentioned above, several scholars of British film history take the default position that music hall traditions serve as the sole and original basis to British comedy. David Sutton (Sutton) argues, and bases his findings on the notion that British film comedy, at least its dominant, working-class form, originates in music hall traditions right from the beginning of his work on inter-war British comedies *A Chorus of Raspberries*; a concept that is present throughout the entire book. It already comes up in the introduction: he closes the chapter with stating that what he classifies as working-class comedy is 'dominated by comedian comedies featuring well-known variety stars, and forms which themselves derive from the loose organization structures of music hall and variety programmes' (Sutton 5). In the following chapter, where he provides an overview of British film comedy and culture, he draws a parallel between the documentary traditions and comedy traditions within British film history, arguing that comedy 'grew out of the earthier ones of working-class culture – music hall, popular song, saucy postcards…' (Sutton 15) The next chapter, which describes the theoretical background to British comedy of the 1930s, begins with an aim at

defining its origins, enlisting ‘ a number of traditions inherited from the silent cinema, pre-cinematic forms of music hall and variety, and more recent stage traditions such as revue and farce.’ (Sutton 23) Later in the chapter Sutton elaborates on this argument by claiming that 1930s British comedy drew mostly from ‘specifically “low” comedic forms arising from music-hall and variety’ (Sutton 28). Yet further in the chapter he states that ‘[v]ariety is both content and form in the British comedies of the 1930s’ (Sutton 48).

The following chapter in Sutton’s book is entirely about defining early British film comedy by its origins in music-hall tradition, as the chapter’s title also reflects: *Good Old Days – Music-Hall Roots and Early Film Comedy*. He provides a chronological outline of early cinema, and specifically early comedy traditions, starting with the 1890s, when the earliest forms of cinematic entertainment were available in the music halls, thus already linking the two entertainment forms together. The parallel he draws between music hall and early cinema, however, is a more extensive one than simply the fact that the first projections of film took place within the realms of the music hall. Sutton argues that music hall entertainment, similarly to the evolution and expansion of cinema, grew from a relatively small, spontaneous form of entertainment of attractions into an industry. He goes on to quote Andy Medhurst’s article on music hall’s relations to British cinema, claiming that ‘in the earliest years film can be seen as occupying a similar social and cultural space as the precursors of the music hall’ (Medhurst, in Sutton 67), adding, however, that unlike music hall, film, given its quality as a medium of mass reproduction, was aimed at a mass audience. Furthermore, while Sutton indeed points out various parallel features of music hall and early cinema, he argues that the true influence the music hall exercised on British films, specifically comedies ‘would only really come to maturity after 1929’ (Sutton 71). Regarding the period until the late 1920s he mentions mainly the performers who started their careers in music hall, as well as the instances when a particular music hall scene or performance was recorded on film.

Sutton argues the significance of the music hall traditions in the British comedies of early talking cinema, thus the era covered by the book, between 1929 and 1939, on the one hand by pointing out that the one of the most wide-spread comic sub-genre, the ‘comedian comedies’ starred performers who were already established music hall stars, lifting their music-hall persona into film plots – performers like George Formby or Gracie Fields. On the other hand, Sutton points out the existence of what he calls “forms and structures”

found in music hall entertainment. He goes on to elaborate on this argument, linking the comedies of the 1930s and music hall by claiming that

> British film comedy is marked by its refusal of the straightforward narrative paradigms of classical cinema, and tends instead to create a performance-based, interruptive form in which older, pre-cinematic elements of popular entertainment co-exist with specifically cinematic codes. (Sutton 80)

While this predominant reading of the origins of British comedies from the early talking cinema – as well as before – lying in music hall traditions is a significant and relevant aspect, in the thesis I am arguing that it is not the only aspect to be considered.

In order to do so, this project also calls for extensive research into the origins of the examined comedy traditions, that is to say both into the British music hall traditions and into the Hungarian pesti kabaré in order to be able to conduct the subsequent textual analyses. Utilising the methodological framework based on meme theory to indicate possible cultural transference requires an understanding of the cultural connotations of the compared traditions. In the case of music hall traditions in Britain, monographs by scholars such as Barry Faulks, Jacqueline S. Bratton or Archibald Heddon, memoirs of some of the personnel involved, like Henry Chance Newton or Colette and works on British social and political history of the era provide a rich source to the history of this type of entertainment. Furthermore, works on British cinema history, and particularly on British comedy before World War Two provides insight into the traditional readings of the genre, specifically the works of David Sutton, Jeffrey Richards, Tony Fletcher, Andy Medhurst, Frank Scheide, Michael Hammond and Amy Sargeant. Jewish comedy traditions in Eastern Europe, and more specifically in Hungary, may be understood on the one hand, through researching the Jewish emancipation movements of the 18th-19th Centuries; on the other hand, by studying archival data concerning cabaret and variety theatres of Budapest, such as theatre programmes, leaflets and contemporary reviews where available.

The thesis, thus, will be an extensive analysis of Hungarian and British comedies made roughly between the period of 1929 and 1945, where the emphasis is on reading the texts and the paratexts within the context of Jewish humour. The reason for using these two dates to frame the scope of this thesis is on the one hand the wide-spread introduction of talkies; and on the other hand, the end of the Second World War, which marks a cut-off in social and cultural changes in both Great Britain and in Hungary. After the introductory

chapter and a chapter that provides the methodological framework of the project, outlining the theoretical sources used to devise this framework, the following chapters will aim at identifying memes in different fields of analysis. Such fields include the narrative and the visual aspects of the films chosen for analysis, as well as performance and the rather fluid aspect of humour.

The aim of the first of the analytical chapters, the chapter on narrative aspects is to indicate what memes show cultural transference on a narrative level within the body of films chosen for analysis. The arguments will be presented based on a close textual analysis conducted within the framework of the methodology devised in the previous chapter. The argumentation in this chapter focuses predominantly on romantic plotlines reaching across class barriers, narrative structures outlining feudal values and discrepancies between the aristocracy and the petit bourgeoisie.

The objective of the next chapter, on visual and aural aspects is to point out what memes indicate cultural transference on the level of cinematography, sound, costume and set design. This is to complement the findings of the previous chapter, and is also presented on the basis of close textual analysis conducted within the devised methodological framework. The arguments within this chapter will revolve around mise-en-scene forming concepts of traditional masculinity; the theatrical nature of the cinematography in the films in question as well as discrepancies between old and new interior and exterior set designs, the use of national wear and colours to indicate the perceived nature of given characters.

In the following chapter, the chapter on humour and types of jokes the aim is to indicate what type of humour is present in the films in question by analysing the jokes within these. The analysis in this chapter is conducted partly along the lines of the methodological framework devised for the thesis, partly based on a quantitative analysis; and as the purpose of the thesis is to provide a better understanding of the cultural transferability of Jewish comedy traditions, is crucial for the study and will complement the memes found in the chapters above.

The purpose of the next chapter on aspects of acting and performance is to provide an outline of the memes that indicate cultural transference on the level of acting and performance in the films in question, complementing the memes found in the chapters above, utilising the theatrical traditions used as the basis of this thesis, and scholarship on stardom to contextualise these performances. This chapter is also presented in the format of

close textual analysis conducted within the methodological framework, and synthesises of some of the argumentation presented in previous chapters before the Conclusion. These include theatricality, class conflicts, and the prevalence of stock characters apparent in the films in questions, specifically the figure of the childlike, physically rotund, verbose nouveau riche.

The last chapter of the thesis provides a conclusion based on the arguments presented in the above chapters. Apart from providing a synthesis of the findings of the textual analyses that revolve around different aspects of the films in question, which point to various different angles of cultural transference, it aims at outlining the implications of this intervention in the fields of Film History, Comedy Studies and Jewish Studies, and the directions debates on transnational cinema and cultural transference may be taken forward as a result.

1.2 Historical Contextualisation

As indicated above, this introductory chapter, as well as providing the aims and the structure of the thesis, also offers an outline of the traditions this comparative analysis uses as bases. The question of Jewish humour and theatrical traditions in the former Habsburg Empire, as well as the history of the emancipation of the various Jewish communities will be examined within the context of possible cultural transference. In a parallel fashion I am also looking at British comedies made in the era in question, for Britain this encompasses the years between 1929 and 1939, with reasons expanded on below; and the traditional reading of the cultural origins of these comedies. I am also taking into account the extensive, though rather marginal exile-literature that exists within the framework of the British film industry, and what this literature suggests regarding German speaking/continental/potentially Jewish cultural transference.

As mentioned before, thus, in order to understand some of the implications of the cultural transference of Hungarian urban Jewish comedy, in the paragraphs below I outline briefly the historical background of this tradition. In Eastern Europe, from Russia, the Ukraine, Poland and throughout the entire Habsburg Empire, including its Hungarian territories, there were significant Jewish populations, both in urban and rural communities. In Hungary the feudal regime permitted the peaceful co-existence of the Jews, the Hungarians

and the various other minorities living there (Croats, Slovaks, Romanians, etc.), and the landowning classes, usually uneasy about modernising tendencies, welcomed the Jewish immigrants and their business skills, as well as their good contacts with communities abroad (Romsics). Thus the urban Jewish populations grew rapidly, and by the late 19th Century consisted largely of assimilated, middle-class Jewish families of commercial or intellectual backgrounds, many second (third, fourth, or subsequent) sons of which, instead of taking part in the family business, decided to become entertainers (Lugosi). Among the multiple reasons why Jewish communities could exist within the realms of the Habsburg Empire in the first place were the comparatively liberal and decidedly non-ecclesiastic views of absolutist emperor Joseph 2nd, who ruled in the late 18th Century. His 'Orders of Tolerance' granted the non-Roman Catholic religious communities the right to exercise their own religion, including not only Christian Churches, like the Lutheran, Reformed and Greek Orthodox ones, but also the Jewish communities (Tarján). This, together with the ideas of Enlightenment and the ambition for Jews to achieve intellectual goals or social status outside of the limited realms of their communities, motivated and allowed a slow movement towards Jewish emancipation. It becomes clear from the diaries and letters of writers, composers or intellectuals of Jewish background that they saw their origins within a dichotomy whereby they either remain loyal to the culture and religion they were born into, at the expense of their personal ambitions, or renounce these to be able to achieve their goals (Prawer).

In Hungary the Jewish emancipation coincided with the waking nationalist movement, at this stage markedly different from the form it would take a hundred years later. In the early to mid-19th century nationalism in Hungary meant embracing Hungarian culture and language, and defining it as opposed to the prevailing Germanic influences of the Habsburg Empire. The movement was spearheaded by enthusiastic aristocrats, as well as the rising bourgeoisie, and embraced by artists, mainly poets and writers of the time. Influenced – amongst others – by the works of Herder, it included a literary-linguistic oriented movement, whereby a new, specifically Hungarian lexicon/terminology was created instead of the German and Latin dominated everyday speech; and even the formerly Latin parliamentary language was changed to Hungarian.[1]

While both the linguistic renewal and the broader nationalist movements were directed mostly at the oppressing Habsburg cultural (and at first covertly, then gradually more and

[1] For the influence of this movement on Hungarian theatrical traditions, see chapter 6.

more overtly political) influences, the only alternative they offered were Hungarian national sentiments. They, therefore, did not take into account the existing minorities living on the territories of Hungary, which accounted for roughly half of the population; who were less than keen on this new cultural oppression after the Habsburg rule. This negligence would prove catastrophic after the First World War – more of that later – some minorities, however, namely the Jewish and, paradoxically, the German ones, embraced these nationalist movements of the early and mid-19th Century wholeheartedly (Romsics).

In Hungary, the next significant turning point in the process of Jewish emancipation was the 1848 Revolution and the War of Liberation that followed. This was the culminating point of decades of the above mentioned Hungarian national movements and sentiment, directed mostly against the perceived oppression of the Habsburg Empire and their administration, and embraced not only by the Hungarian population, but equally by some of the minorities living in the Hungarian territories of the Empire. By the mid-19th Century this included many assimilated Jewish families, who, partly due to the Orders of Tolerance, could accumulate enough wealth to be able to support the nationalist movements and the subsequent uprising and war both morally and financially. The War of Liberation of 1848-49 concluded in the defeat of the Hungarian revolutionaries, which was greatly welcomed by those minorities that, as mentioned above, did not embrace the Hungarian nationalist movements; minorities such as Croats, who took active action against the Hungarian troops on the Habsburgs' side. The Jewish minorities, however, were declaredly on the Hungarian side throughout the war and bore its consequences equally. After the defeat of the War of Liberation, it took nearly twenty years to consolidate the political tensions between Austria and Hungary. The consequences of the diplomatic actions of the two countries led to the creation of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1867, a dualist state where apart from a common Foreign Ministry, Ministry of Defence and Treasury, both Austria and Hungary had separate, independent governments.

Furthermore, partly as a reward for their loyalty during the 1848-49 armed conflict and its aftermath, this agreement gave equal civil rights to various minority groups, amongst them the Jewish populations of Hungary, which inspired Hungarian patriotic sentiments, further enhancing the assimilation of Jews in the country. These emancipation laws offered the Jews citizenship in exchange for their giving up their own traditions and adopting Hungarian language, culture and lifestyle instead, which deal they accepted happily (Gerő 306-308). This resulted in a curious dichotomy of national sentiment and belonging: while

Jews still spoke with an accent and dressed in a way that might have seemed peculiar, they spoke in Hungarian and were backing the budding Hungarian nationalist movements with full force (the first comedian to sing in Hungarian in the cabaret, for instance, was a Jew called Károly Baumann (Molnár Gál, A pesti mulatók 185-187)).

Hungarian Jews during this period, while renouncing significant aspects of their own culture and traditions, did not feel obliged to hide their Jewishness (or whatever traces of it): during this relatively short time period (between the Jewish law of 1867 and the rising of fascism in the interwar years) the Jews were a generally accepted minority, at least in the entertainment business. Quite similarly to contemporary USA, Jews dominated light entertainment (and not just the stages of Pest, but also of Vienna, Prague and Berlin), if this had any relevance to their audiences, however, it must have been a neutral or a positive one (similar to the 'Jewish' sitcoms referred to by Vincent Brook (Brook 124), like *Seinfeld* or *Friends*).

Jewish humour, thus, quickly gained ground in small theatres, casinos and variety programmes, and evidence based on the locations, the interiors and the programmes of these cabaret stages suggests that this was a more middle-class oriented type of entertainment than traditional British music hall. The buildings of the cabaret theatres were largely located within the emerging middle-class neighbourhood of Budapest's 6th District – the area around Király utca, Andrássy út and Nagymező utca; whereas the contemporary reviews and trade press describe the interiors of these buildings as rather lavish and luxurious. The programmes indicate that various acts were imported from different parts of the world. In the last days of 1891, for instance, the programme of the Herzmann Orfeum offered entertainment by French singer Jeanne Weyl, the unusually short Dutch comedian and acrobat Prinz Mignon, and Said Bourdwan, Indian juggler; while in 1929 Josephine Baker was the guest performer at the Royal Orpheum (Molnár Gál, A pesti mulatók). The comedians of the pesti kabaré offered a rather intellectual type of humour, which appealed to the middle class audiences who, as the evidence suggests, seemed to be the primary recipients of the pesti kabaré entertainment.

The Hungarian Jewish population's shift towards aspiring to an assimilated, middle-class social status, thus, coincided with the emergence of the cabaret-type entertainment in the capital, Budapest, aimed mainly at middle-class audiences. In this respect the pesti kabaré resembles the later, more mass-produced, middle-class oriented incarnation of music hall, rather than the lower-class entertainment prevailing in traditional music hall. This

difference seems apparent based on evidence regarding both the types of venues used for the programmes, the ticket prices, as well as the various acts appearing within the context of the two kinds of entertainment (Koch). Nevertheless, when examining the particular traits of the Hungarian pesti kabaré and the British music hall, one may remark on the fact that their evolution follows similar trajectories (Bratton). Both the pesti kabaré and the music hall used satirical overtones and comic allusions to express critical opinions towards the political system and structures, as well as towards controversial social issues, including the class-conscious nature of the respective populations they were entertaining. Moreover, both the pesti kabaré and the music hall promoted various different acts and incorporated some form of cinematic entertainment from its earliest incarnation in their programmes, though the proportions of these acts and their functions are somewhat different in the two types of entertainment.

As it appears from the works of theatre historian and journalist Molnár Gál Péter, music hall scholar J. S. Bratton, comedy scholar David Sutton and the contemporary press releases the pesti kabaré theatre programmes placed greater emphasis on short, humorous plays and non-musical comedy acts than this was the case in music halls. In the pesti kabaré this was the principal way of conveying satirical content, whereas in the music halls this type of critical material was communicated largely through songs or other, various musical numbers. There was, thus, also as the name suggests, greater emphasis on music and musical delivery in the British music halls than in the more verbally oriented Hungarian pesti kabaré (Molnár Gál, A pesti mulatók). This more verbal, perhaps dryer, more middle-class oriented nature of the pesti kabaré is further emphasized by evidence regarding set designs and costumes, which seem more subtle and functional on the pesti kabaré stages, at least the non-imported material, than in the music halls in Britain.

Another significant difference between the two types of comic entertainment lies in the figures of the entertainers themselves, and the way these figures stepped over from the pesti kabaré/music hall stages to celluloid. From the accounts of the theatre historians it appears that the comic personae of the Hungarian pesti kabaré characters were more separated from the actors and actresses playing them, which might also stem from the different nature of the acts performed in these theatres. Actors and actresses either played distinct characters in the aforementioned short, humorous types of plays, which were written by playwrights, rarely for the actor or actress in question, or appeared under their own name as entertainers delivering satirical skits, rather like present-day stand-up

comedians. It seems that it was more common in British music halls than in the pesti kabaré for a comedian – whether male or female – to create a comic persona that they, in turn, would act as both on the actual music hall stages and largely in their public lives. It is this trait, corresponding to comedians such as George Formby or Gracie Fields, which becomes relevant in the British comedy films of the 1930s that are perceived to be derived from music hall origins.

Many of the comedians appearing on the stages of the pesti kabaré and their specific type of humour gradually found their way to cinema as well. This, however, as opposed to music hall acts recorded on film from the outset, with the exception of Pufi Huszár[2], only happened in the talking film-era, due to the verbal nature of this traditional, urban, middle-class Jewish humour, which, in fact, is still called in Hungary simply 'pesti humour' or 'pesti kabaré (humour or cabaret from Pest, the flatter, more urban part of the capital, with a flourishing Jewish community before the First World War and during the inter-war era). The stars of the late 1920s, early to mid-1930s' immensely popular comedies were undoubtedly those Jewish cabaret actors, who later, as extreme right wing politics gained terrain in the parliaments of Hungary, as well as in other territories of the former Habsburg Empire, such as Czechoslovakia, Romania, or Yugoslavia, found themselves elbowed out of first the industry, then subsequently of their home countries.

This gradual shift towards a more and more radically right-wing state of mind and political regime did not start in the 1930s, however. As mentioned above, during the 19th Century Hungary's nationalist movements, while aiming at standing up to the Habsburgs as their oppressors, failed to take into account the minorities living on its own territories, to whom Hungary and the Hungarian language and culture seemed just as oppressing a force. As a consequence, after the First World War, during the Paris peace treaties Hungary lost roughly two-thirds of its territories precisely to those minorities they had ignored in the decades and perhaps centuries before – Transylvania now belonged to Romania, the Northern parts, Felvidék, to the newly formed Czechoslovakia and the South, Vojvodina (or Vajdaság), to the once again newly created Yugoslavia. This was such a traumatic event, referred to simply as Trianon, after the palace it was signed in, that the atmosphere was that of victimisation in Hungary, where instead of acknowledging and appreciating the remaining minorities, such as the assimilated and loyal Jewish populations of the cities and rural areas, they were regarded with suspicion, despite the fact that the Jewish communities

[2] More details on Pufi Huszár and his relevance in pesti kabaré traditions in Chapter 6.

– much as in the case of the 1848-49 War of Liberation – embraced the Hungarian cause during and after the First World War wholeheartedly.

The rising anti-Semitic tendencies were exacerbated by the short-lived communist coup d'état in 1919, which was led by a Hungarian Jew, Béla Kun, and a large number of the other important functions were also held by Jewish men, including, as also mentioned below, Alexander Korda, leading to the prevailing image of the communist Jew, linking the threat of communism with a perceived Jewish conspiracy (Romsics). By this time in Hungary many high-profile professions, such as medical doctors, lawyers or journalists were dominated by Jews, that is to say their presence was of a far larger percentage in these, and other intellectual professions, than their number in society, giving rise to further discontentment and anti-Semitic feelings. Consequently, the following right-wing regime introduced the first anti-Semitic law in Europe in 1920, thirteen years before Hitler's ascent to power, the numerus clausus, which restricted the entry of students of Jewish origin to Hungarian universities.

Many of the above events – the Trianon peace treaty of 1919, the fall of the short-lived communist uprising, the ensuing right-wing regime, the numerus clausus – were motivating factors in the brain drain that took place during the 1920s and 1930s in Hungary. Intellectuals and artists chose to leave their home country and live the life of an exile, unsure of where their life would continue, or whether they could ever return. Exile usually did not mean a straight route to one country or another – most of the time these men and women first went to another city formerly belonging to the Habsburg Empire: a city like Vienna or Prague, or even as far as Berlin, as German would have been the second language to those growing up in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. It was often after Hitler's ascent to power that they decided – or were forced to – leave yet another city, and yet another existence and leave for Britain or the United States.

It is perhaps this pan-continental quality of many of the exiles that led to the majority of the British academic exile-literature to generalise and refer to their work as studying German or German-speaking émigrés instead of using a broader and/or more accurate term. Tim Bergfelder and Christian Cargnelli's edited collection (Bergfelder, Tim and Cargnelli, Christian) on émigrés in Britain specifically speaks of German-speaking film personnel, even though a number of the articles featured in the collection are precisely about Hungarian émigrés. These include Laurie N. Ede's study of Ernő Metzner (Ede), Tobias Hochscherf's take on British anti-Nazi films, as it takes as the bases some of

Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger's films (Hochscherf), and Florian Schneding's work on Mátyás Seiber's film scores (Schneding). Furthermore, this collection aims at examining some of the lesser known émigrés, mentioning that the edition deliberately does not include studies about the Korda brothers, specifically Alexander, and Emeric Pressburger, as their life and work, as well as their contributions to the British film industry have been extensively covered. These men, however, while indeed knowing German and having worked in Austria and/or Germany, were Hungarians, Hungarian Jews.

Both the Korda brothers and Emeric Pressburger, selected in this instance to illustrate how émigré film personnel might have arrived from Hungary to Great Britain, thus, followed the aforementioned non-linear trajectory in their emigration that was rather common amongst the Hungarian Jewish émigré intellectuals and artists of the time. Alexander Korda, after establishing himself as one of the most financially and critically acclaimed film directors and producers in Hungary, actively participated in Béla Kun's short-lived communist regime, after the collapse of which he was forced to leave the country in order to avoid imprisonment or execution (Drazin). From then on it took him over a decade to settle down in the United Kingdom – a journey that took him first to Vienna, then to Berlin and Hollywood. Unlike other European, or 'German-speaking' émigrés, such as Ernst Lubitsch, Szőke Szakáll, Peter Lorre, Billy Wilder or Fritz Lang, Korda did not stay in Hollywood, but returned to Europe, to the UK, taking his brothers Vincent and Zoltán with him.

Although whereas for the Kordas, at least for Alexander, except for the first step, leaving Hungary, these moves were largely based on choice – taking into account factors such as where he and his family could be most comfortable or where he could work with the most artistic freedom, Emeric Pressburger left one country after the other from political or financial necessity. While still in school Pressburger, as a consequence of the Trianon peace treaty, suddenly found himself in another country without having moved an inch; and by the time he could apply to university in what was left of Hungary, the numerus clausus was in effect, denying him the chance to enter higher education. His following choices of applying in Austria or Germany were hampered by a difficult visa-situation, therefore he went to another city of the former Habsburg Monarchy: Prague in the brand new Czechoslovakia, without speaking a word of Czech (MacDonald). After the financially crippling university years he did reach Berlin, only to encounter more financial difficulties. Slowly, however, he did establish himself, only to have to leave again after

Hitler's ascent to power. He started over first in Paris, then in London, both times not only struggling financially, and establishing a new existence complete with colleagues and friends, but also having to learn yet another language, which for a scriptwriter is a crucial tool for his work. As Laurie N. Ede points out with regard to Ernő Metzner, this was a lifelong struggle to many émigré writers (Ede), and Pressburger was among the lucky few who could successfully overcome this difficulty.

Despite the influx of these Eastern European Jewish émigré film personnel in the inter-war years, both into the British and into the American film industries, however, there was a distinctive lack of overtly Jewish characters in the film output of these industries. In Britain one prominent example for a film with explicitly Jewish characters is *Money Talks* (1932), where the characters are largely overtly identified as Jewish within the diegesis, rather than 'passing' or being identifiable by a set of covert traits. In this sense *Money Talks* is particularly significant culturally, as it showcases both what overtly British Jewish characters looked like in the 1930s British film industry, and some identifiable Jewish archetypes within this cultural context. In her article on Jewish stereotypes, Bernice Schrank uses the term 'pass' for Jewish people in popular culture contexts who do not look, sound or act Jewish. Schrank explicitly identifies the 'Jewish nose' as the trait that being able to pass, and to successfully adapt to a dominant cultural context hinges on, and claims that 'Jews with non-Jewish noses are often able to "pass", by which I mean being able to blend into the dominant culture and thereby being able to become invisible as Jews' (Schrank 18).

The question of how overt and covert Jewish identities, as well as particular Jewish stereotypes can be identified and negotiated with the dominant cultural forms, particularly within a British cultural context, is a subject revisited in more detail in the conclusion of this thesis. It is important, however, to raise the subject on the one hand of Jewish stereotypes and on the other hand of the lack of overtly Jewish characters in British films at this point, as in the chapters below various character traits and archetypal characters identified as Jewish are evoked. Acknowledging, therefore, the notion that stereotypical and/or archetypal characters and character traits are negotiable within cultural contexts, that is to say particular speech patterns, personality traits, or markers of appearance – such as the Jewish nose for instance – can be examined from and negotiated with a Jewish perspective, positions my argumentation in the below chapters as more applicable, and allows for an easier interpretation of cultural transference.

1.3 Academic Context and Justification

Academic discourse on émigrés in British cinema, however, is not a broadly discussed issue, and the literature specifically on this subject is not extensive, the reason for which, I argue, lies partly in the aforementioned music hall-based approach to British comedy history. Kevin Gough-Yates's work, the aforementioned volume edited by Tim Bergfelder and Christian Cargnelli, as well as chapters in the history of Gainsborough Pictures, and biographies of specific personnel, while launching a significant discourse, cover little ground. Furthermore, comprehensive volumes on British cinema history, as well as literature on comedy, whether regarding specifically early talking cinema, or treating a wider scope of British film history, tend to marginalise this aspect or disregard it entirely. As seen above, David Sutton's book on British film comedy from the early talkies to the outbreak of the Second World War, *A Chorus of Raspberries* (Sutton), not only classifies film comedies according to class and gender divides, but also provides what he regards as the roots to British comedy. In the chapter about origins of British film comedy, he names the music hall as the source and inspiration for early British comedy; and even in the subsequent chapters he presents his arguments based on this assumption, which is most apparent in the section on working-class, and to a certain extent female comedy, mostly concerning Gracie Fields. The dimension of émigré culture, émigré personnel in these productions is missing from his, otherwise well-constructed, well-researched and well-argued volume.

This era of British film making coincides with the influx of émigré film personnel, rendering their presence a relevant dimension to consider. Furthermore, as it has been pointed out both in émigré literature, as well as in other sources, such as the edited volume on the history of Gainsborough pictures for instance, international co-productions were frequent in the era in question, not merely on the continent, but also between Britain and other countries, most notably Germany. British film personnel went on their own initiative, or were sent by their studios to learn from their German colleagues, and vice versa. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why in a significant proportion of émigré studies and literature concerning this era the authors choose not to differentiate between German and other continental film personnel, using the umbrella-term 'German speaking', as by the time these co-productions became a wide-spread practice, numerous Eastern European

– including several Hungarian Jewish – film personnel were working in German studios, most notably in the UFA studio in Berlin.

Based on the historical contexts of the thesis drawn up above – Jewish emancipation in the Habsburg Empire and beyond, as well as the significance of music hall traditions in the conventional reading of British comedy in the inter-war era – it seems necessary to point out the practical aspects of the thesis's aims. Firstly, as a basis I will use David Sutton's taxonomy regarding comedies between 1929 and 1939, as well as the catalogue of films made in that period to obtain an overview of what British comedies of the era were like. Secondly, once more based on Sutton's system of classification, I shall attempt to draw up an outline of a parallel study on Hungarian comedies of the period in question and choose relevant and suitable examples from both countries that will, in turn, undergo analysis in the subsequent chapters of this thesis.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Sutton in his book, after providing an outline of the scholarly discourse of British comedy; a theoretical basis and what he perceives as the roots of this comedy, presents film comedy in the 1930s in particular, then classifies what he had outlined before into working-class, middle-class, female and situation comedy, devoting a chapter in the volume to each of these. In the paragraphs below I aim at briefly summarising his findings and applying this method to Hungarian comedy films of the same era, also pointing out the possible problematic aspects and restrictions this classification may raise in case of Hungarian comedies. The aim of this synthesis, however, is drawing as a conclusion what particular films would be chosen for analysis in this work.

The system of classification David Sutton uses in his book *A Chorus of Raspberries* mostly goes along the lines of class and gender divides. In the particular chapters he enlists and describes those comedians who belong in the category in question, providing an outline of their careers, as well as attempting to describe their particular comedic styles and traits. Firstly, he differentiates between working class and middle class comedy, these two only concerning male comedians, each section in the two chapters describing a male comedian in various degrees of detail: the more significant the comedian is considered by Sutton, the longer the section is and the more detail he provides on the individual career and comedic style of the man in question. In both chapters he indicates why he considers a

particular man either a working-class or a middle-class comedian. While in the chapter on female comedians there is no need to indicate why that particular comedian was classified to be discussed in that specific chapter, as Sutton chooses to discuss both working-class and middle-class female comedians in the same chapter, this raises the supposition that their female-ness was overriding their class distinction. Nevertheless, both in the case of Gracie Fields, Jessie Matthews, as well as Cicely Courtneidge, the three comedians discussed in the *Female Comedy* chapter, he indicates whether he considers them working- or middle-class. The last, short chapter before the conclusion, entitled *Situation Comedy*, seems to comprise all comedy that is not what he calls 'comedian comedy'. As seen below, it is of significance to note that while in case of working-class, middle-class and female comedy Sutton takes the person (or persona) of the comedian as the basis of creating sub-sections, in the *Situation Comedy* chapter he rather chooses producers and/or studios as the basis.

One particularly interesting example that Sutton positions as situation comedy, but when interrogated from a different angle it carries traits of middle-class comedy, is *The Ghost Goes West* (1935), a curious and successful co-operative effort released by London Studios, and a film, as seen below, crucial to the argumentations of this thesis. At this stage, however, examining it from the perspective of David Sutton's taxonomy is both informative of how this classification works and what potentially problematic aspects one has to take into account, and foreshadows some of the angles/issues the methodological framework and the overall argumentation of this thesis hinges on.

As mentioned above, thus, Sutton clearly classifies *The Ghost Goes West* as one of the situation comedies of the 1930s, which is evident not only by the fact that it appears in that particular chapter, and as a successful example at that; by there being no mention of Robert Donat, in a dual role as the two leading male characters of the film in the Middle-Class Comedy chapter; but also from the way Sutton briefly describes *The Ghost Goes West*, emphasizing its international and collaborative aspects:

> One film which did do well was another comedy, *The Ghost Goes West* (1935), a success with both critics and audiences (the latter voting it best film of 1936 in *Film Weekly*'s annual poll). One element of Korda's internationalism was his tendency to look abroad, to both Europe and America, for personnel, not just designers or cinematographers, but also directors; [...] what emerged is the best of

> the London comedies and one of Korda's best films of the 1930s [...]. (Sutton 211-212)

The value judgment, and the fact that Sutton clearly gives Alexander Korda the credit for *The Ghost Goes West*, is suggestive of Korda's status within British film history, and in particular in the assessment of this film, particularly in terms of the evidence suggesting[3] that Alexander Korda exerted control over the productions released by London Film beyond the expected responsibilities of a producer/studio head. Furthermore, the fact that there is an entire section on Korda in the Situation Comedy chapter, emphasizing his collaborative endeavours, these being the main reason his films appear in this particular chapter, is noteworthy not only in an effort of trying to establish whether *The Ghost Goes West* is a middle class, or rather a situation comedy, but also in terms of cultural transference, as elaborated below.

When writing about Alexander Korda, Sutton claims that 'Korda had no interest in, and probably little knowledge of, the music-hall tradition of British comedian comedy' (Sutton 208), classifying the Korda-comedies as situation comedies precisely because of the collaborative nature of the films and the production practices: 'relying on polished scripts, on actors rather than comic stars, and on plot rather than performance' (Sutton 208). In this, what Sutton describes has a strong resonance both with the collaborative theatre troupe-mentality of Yiddish theatrical traditions, as seen in Chapter 6, and with the Hungarian comedies of the 1930s, which tended to use a set of performers and put a larger emphasis on plot rather than on the comic persona of a particular performer, thus suggesting cultural transference, in this instance partially linked to Alexander Korda's person – the significance of which will be expanded on in Chapter 2, section 2.2.

So far, *The Ghost Goes West* fits within the framework of situation comedies, as established by Sutton in the relevant chapter, therefore by looking at his defining criteria of middle class comedies, one may observe how various traits may link *The Ghost Goes West* to that category as well. On the one hand, Sutton quotes Andrew Higson, who establishes a connection between British middle class comedies and American comedies, arguing that 'it was [...] nearer to the "extended, casually developed, goal seeking" narratives of dominant, American-style cinema' (Sutton 157); and identifies middle class

[3] In the majority of Korda's biographies - by Karol Kulik, Paul Tabori and Charles Drazin for instance – there are sections devoted to his tendency to interfere with the directors working on films released by his studio, as seen below in greater detail in Chapter 2 section 2.2.

comedies as mid-Atlantic. On the other hand, by describing *The Ghost Goes West* as 'a lavish "quality" production from Alexander Korda' (Sutton 97), and the above mentioned international and collaborative aspects of the film, combined with its focally – and literally – mid-Atlantic plotline, an argument can be made for *The Ghost Goes West* to be categorised as middle class comedy, without David Sutton explicitly categorising it as such.

Sutton, thus, seems to place *The Ghost Goes West* within the category of situation comedy almost as a default, solely on the merit of its being 'an Alexander Korda picture', a film produced by Korda and released by London Studios. Looking at it, however, from the taxonomic perspective of a middle class comedy, one can argue that *The Ghost Goes West* is in fact a middle class comedy, with one crucial difference: that it is not a comedian comedy. Sutton's middle class comedies, indeed his working class and female comedies as well, hinge on the premise that they are a series of comic films exploiting the commercial value of a particular comedian. Identifying *The Ghost Goes West* as a middle class comedy, minus the central comedian, thus strengthens the initial suggestion of cultural transference in this film. If, therefore I were to establish a similar model within the Hungarian comedies of the same era – the 1930s, and as mentioned above and expanded on below, including the early 1940s – it would be a rather more difficult matter to classify these films according to class, and to a lesser extent according to gender. This would probably prove difficult on the one hand because of Sutton's auteur-based approach, the fact that the basis of the classification is either the comedians themselves or the producers who were associated with certain films, which method may prove problematic for Hungarian comedies of the same era, given that film making put neither comedians nor producers in the same position as in Britain at the time. On the other hand, the classification would raise issues as class distinctions in the Hungarian societies of 1930s were manifest in a different manner than in Britain during the inter-war years. In Hungary there was more social mobility, a comfortable middle-class position being a sought after status, and accordingly, a more defined middle-class basis to society.

In order, however, to draw a parallel that works for Hungarian comedies of the period in question I will, thus, attempt at regrouping films according to certain film personnel working in these productions, though omitting the classification according to class, given the more fluid nature of this notion in Hungary. The actors and actresses in case of Hungarian comedies, as opposed to a number of British comedians, especially those

whom Sutton places in the working-class comedy chapter, rarely come with well-defined characters or screen persona devised and popularised in the theatre or on the cabaret stages[4]. The most popular comic film actor of the early to mid-1930s, Gyula Kabos, for instance, while being an established theatre actor before working in film productions (Fővárosi Moziműsor), had taken both comic and straight roles in the theatre before appearing in his first film, *Hyppolit, the Butler* (Hyppolit, a Lakáj, 1931).

By choosing this actor, Gyula Kabos, his career and the roles he played and use it the way Sutton treats his comedians, comparing it to George Formby for instance, the differences between the two societies and comedic styles could be pointed out in an efficient manner, and the potential cultural transference easier to point out. Formby stepped into the shoes of his father, a music hall comedian of the same name, and if accounts are to be believed, of a very similar physique, first in the halls, then playing this character subsequently in films, appearing in them as the same persona: George, the shy, working class boy, who expresses his suppressed sexuality through saucy songs, and who, through hard work and diligence, saves the day and gets the girl at the end of the films. Kabos, however, even though he also came from a – broadly speaking – theatrical background, as mentioned above, not only had no specific comic persona on the stages, he had appeared mostly in straight roles before *Hyppolit, the Butler*, his first film role (Koltai). In *Hyppolit*, as it will be mentioned in more detail below in the following chapters, he plays one of the main characters, Mátyás Schneider, a nouveau riche of working class background, whose wife aspires for elegance beside their wealth by hiring the former butler of an aristocrat, while he, Kabos's character, remains quite contented in his unsophisticated ways. This premise indicates not only that Kabos was merely one of the leading characters in the film – the others being his wife, his daughter, his assistant at his firm and the intended main character, the title character Hyppolit; but also that his class, and indeed the class of the film itself, is difficult to indicate. It is precisely the fluidity of class that is the subject matter of the film, therefore labelling it as either working- or middle-class comedy would be problematic.

As mentioned above, Hungarian comedies of the 1930s, whereas having popular comedians of the time play in them, cannot be classified as what David Sutton defines as 'comedian comedy', for the popular comedians more often than not appear in supporting roles, with other actors and actresses in 'straight' leading roles. In these films, similarly to

[4] Once again, for more detail, see Chapter 6.

what Sutton describes as situation comedy in *A Chorus of Raspberries*, the source of comedy lies in the situations presented to the characters. In the aforementioned *Hyppolit, the Butler* the comic elements lie in the discrepancies between the Schneiders' own lifestyle and the more sophisticated manners Hyppolit, their new butler wishes to force upon them. In *Dream Car* (1934) the comedy comes from the mistaken identity of the chauffeur/CEO and the situations arising from his deception. In another comedy from the 1930s, *Kölcsönkért kastély* (Borrowed Chateau, 1937), the source of humour is a plan devised by two cousins to deceive their prospective fiancé and fiancée into thinking that she, who is the rightful owner of a castle and the land around it, is merely an impoverished relation, whereas he, her cousin, who only aspires to own the property to woo a girl, is the real owner.

After it became harder and harder for Kabos to secure any work in the late 1930s due to the rise of fascism and anti-Semitic tensions, another comedian took over as the nation's favourite. Today they live side by side in the collective memory: Kabos and the considerably younger, thinner and better looking Kálmán Latabár, a singing-dancing comedian from a well-known and established family of actors. Latabár, even though he was originally of Jewish descent, could work in the years directly preceding the Second World War, and even during the war. Because of his different physical traits he, as opposed to Kabos, did play leading roles as well, in his two most well-known pre-communist films appearing as the romantic lead.

These two are the 1942 *Egy bolond százat csinál* (One Fool Makes a Hundred, 1942) and *Egy szoknya, egy nadrág* (Skirts and Trousers, 1943) from a year later. In both of these films Latabár plays dual roles[5]: in *One Fool Makes a Hundred* he does this literally, as the film's plot involves a poor but resourceful waiter, who, after being fired from his job, finds out from a newsreel that if he put a fake beard on as part of a prank, he would look exactly like a game hunting aristocrat, who is just returning to Hungary from a hunting trip in Africa. He, then, pursues to impersonate the aristocrat, winning the heart of the leading lady on the way. In *Skirts and Trousers* Latabár plays a popular actor, who, in order to get his rival out of the way and thus win the heart of an aspiring actress, as well as to prove his own abilities as a capable actor, decides to impersonate a Spanish heiress in drag.

[5] The subject of dual roles is revisited in greater detail in Chapter 6.

As seen above, these films starring Kálmán Latabár were made in the early 1940s, it is therefore appropriate at this point to discuss the time frames for choosing the films for analysis in more detail. The aforementioned framework of 1929-1945 is relevant when discussing the context of the films chosen for analysis, however, I propose a limit for choosing British films to analyse in 1939, and Hungarian films in 1943. The reason for the different cut-offs, where it is legitimate to analyse Hungarian films from the early 1940s, but limiting the research to British comedies made in the 1930s lies in the outbreak of the Second World War and the following shifts both in film contents and in film making practices. While Britain entered the conflict only two days after the German occupation of Poland, it took Hungary over one and a half years to enter the war in April 1941. Furthermore, in the case of Hungary this meant – at least until early 1944 – no occupation or even threat of occupation, whereas Britain was heavily involved in the war after the short period of the Phoney War. While in Britain the war required a change in the lifestyle throughout the entire society – blackouts, air raids, evacuations and rationing affected both genders in all classes, in Hungary those who were not directly threatened by extreme right-wing policies of the regime – Jews, Gipsies, communists, homosexuals or other 'enemies' – or did not volunteer to go fighting in the Russian front, could carry on with their lives virtually undisturbed until the German occupation and fascist coup d'état of March 1944. Since film making practices also did not change significantly throughout these years, as opposed to a shift in focus towards the war and various aspects in everyday life concerning it in Britain, the films made in Hungary in the period between 1939 and 1943 remain relevant to the thesis.

The aforementioned four Hungarian films, *Hyppolit, the Butler, Dream Car, One Fool Makes a Hundred* and *Skirts and Trousers*, can be seen to be amongst the most prominent film comedies from the pre-communist era, as these were the ones that were not only habitually re-released in the cinemas (Molnár Gál, Egy szoknya, egy nadrág) (Kovács)[6], were on the programmes of film clubs and film societies (Pörös), but also were restored and released first on VHS tapes, then on digitally re-mastered and frame-by-frame restored DVDs as collectors' items. The other factor in understanding the wide-spread reputation of these comedies lies in the fact that from the late 1990s onwards, in a wave of nostalgia – and potentially a lack of creative inspiration – these four films were the subjects of remakes. *Hyppolit, the Butler*, released simply as *Hyppolit* (1999), was the first

[6] Pesti kabaré comedian Béla Salamon commemorated the 20th anniversary of releasing *Hyppolit, the Butler*, and there was another re-release in the 1970s as well.

in 1999, followed by *Dream Car* (2000), translated into English this time as *Fairy Tale Auto* in 2000 (Békés, Arany országút csillogó gyémántporán (Meseautó)), *Skirts and Trousers* (2005) in 2005 (Békés, Harmadik nekifutás (Egy szoknya, egy nadrág)) and *One Fool Makes a Hundred* (2006) a year later (Kárpáti). The popularity of the films, as it is clear mostly from the regular cinematic re-releases between the mid-1950s and the late 1980s, as well as the restored VHS releases, did not wane during the decades of communism, even though officially they represented 'reactionary' ideas and were the remnants of a regime clearly opposing communist ideals. The DVD releases and the remakes, thus, were not the results and products of a newly-found admiration for a long forgotten genre, as opposed, for instance, to the re-introduction of Powell-Pressburger productions into the canon of British films, but the continuation of an established tradition.

David Sutton throughout *A Chorus of Raspberries* aims at re-introducing British comedies into the canon of British films, as well as into the academic discourse, conscious of the lack of critical respect towards comedies in the history of British cinema. While admitting that the comedy genre is "one of the most popular, profitable and persistent genres of the British cinema" in the first sentence of the book (Sutton 1) he continues the introduction chapter with describing the controversial nature of the comedy genre in the academic discourse, raising also the issue that the term British comedy encompasses "an incredibly diverse and heterogeneous body of works" (Sutton 3) What Sutton describes in this chapter is a genre that has barely been acknowledged in critical responses of the time and the academic discourse since:

> The reception afforded comedies (and other generic materials) in contemporary discourses around the cinema – especially criticism of a 'serious' nature – was often one of, at best, disdain, or, at worst, a complete refusal to acknowledge their existence. Added to this is the startling paucity of retrospective academic/critical study of the British comedy film. (Sutton 3)

In the chapter on comedies specifically from the inter-war years, *British Film Comedy in the 1930s*, he attributes this controversial nature of the comedy genre in British cinema history partly to the Quota Act of 1927, leading to the production of the so-called 'quota quickies; which, together with the introduction of sound into films,

> Created a new mode for film comedy; one which, while absorbing but not necessarily assimilating many disparate traditions, emerged as 'the bastard offspring of the film studios and various branches of live entertainment' […] [T]his meant that it was usually a cinema beneath critical notice […]. (Sutton 90-91)

Within the academic discourse on British film history, the 1930s, and not just the comedies, but the overall film output of the entire decade has been viewed with mostly disdain and suspicion, as Jeffrey Richards describes it, the 1930s is 'the least known and least appreciated decade in the history of the British sound film. […] [I]t still languishes under the reputation of being a "dud decade"' (Richards, The Age of the Dream Palace - Cinema and Sociey in Britain 1930-1939 3), attributing this partly to the aforementioned Quota Act of 1927, and claims that the reputation of British films suffered greatly as a result.

While there exists a considerable debate on the place of British comedy in general, and specifically British comedy in the 1930s in the academic discourse on British cinema history, this seems to be far more straightforward in case of Hungarian comedies of the period in question. As seen from some of the evidence above regarding the four aforementioned Hungarian comedies from the 1930s and early 1940s, as well as – apart from popularity amongst audiences at the time and numerous generations since – critical acclaim and an esteemed status in the academic discourse, the comedies from the 1930s and early 1940s are seen as not only a golden age of the genre within Hungarian film history, but also of Hungarian film making in general. Instead of a lack of interest, or at most a controversy surrounding the comedy genre of this era, as it appears to be the case regarding British film history, in Hungary there is a prevailing sense of sugar-coated nostalgia towards these films, which are regarded as national treasures.

The aim of describing the era, the genre and some of the specific films in question is essentially to be able to make an informed choice regarding the films that would undergo analysis in the following chapters of this thesis. As seen above, thus, on the one hand, the Hungarian comedies from the first half of the 1930s, those with Gyula Kabos as their principal comedian, whether in a main – or as it was more often the case – in a supporting role, resemble the comedies that are described by David Sutton as 'situation comedies'. On the other hand, Hungarian comedies from the late 1930s and early 1940s with Kálmán Latabár show greater resemblance to Sutton's 'comedian comedies'. Therefore, it seems

logical to choose one situation comedy, as well as one comedian comedy from both countries' film output of the era in question to undergo comparative analysis. One significant aspect in choosing the specific films is availability: whereas many of the Hungarian films of the period in question are available on various formats – as seen above in case of the four aforementioned films. The availability of British comedies of the 1930s, however, is rather limited, as indicated by Sutton in the filmography section of his book. As a preliminary analysis to this thesis I have done relevant work on two situation comedies of the era, a Hungarian and a British one: the aforementioned *Hyppolit, the Butler* and the 1935 British comedy *The Ghost Goes West* (1935); continuing work on these films, thus, appears a reasonable choice. Regarding the comedian comedies, aside from choosing one of Latabár's aforementioned films, *Skirts and Trousers*, I am also to pick an available George Formby film, the 1939 comedy *Trouble Brewing* (1939), as it is closer in time to the 1943 *Skirts and Trousers*, while still within the discussed time period.

Following the chapter outlining the methodological aims and practices of the thesis, thus, the subsequent chapters of this work shall use the four chosen films to undergo textual analysis as indicated in the next chapter below. These films are *Hyppolit, the Butler*, Hungary, 1931; *The Ghost Goes West*, United Kingdom, 1935; *Skirts and Trousers*, Hungary, 1943 and *Trouble Brewing*, United Kingdom, 1939. The aim, once again, will be to indicate cultural transference in these films where this is relevant.

Chapter 2 - Methodology

2.1 Aims and objectives

Having outlined the principal aims and objectives of the thesis in the previous chapter, the purpose of this one is to present in detail the methods whereby this research is conducted, focusing on finding a methodological framework that allows the most efficient analysis of cultural transference. In the paragraphs below I once again present some of the crucial aims of this project within the context of methodology, and position it in the existing academic discourse on cultural transference, émigré literature and comedy history.

Extensive and widespread research seems to have established the notion that American comedy since the beginning 20th Century has been strongly influenced by a critical mass of

Eastern European Jewish immigrants and their comedy traditions – from the Marx Brothers to Woody Allen to Jerry Seinfeld and Larry David. Numerous studies, theses, monographs and collected editions chose this particular cultural transference as their subject (Whitfield) (Brook) (Winokur) (Shifman); there has been, however, very little research conducted on whether Eastern European Jewish humour may have had any influence on British comedies, specifically in the inter-war era. Perhaps this is because there has been none, because it would be extremely difficult to point these out, or simply because British comedy seems to be so deeply embedded in music hall traditions that it seems perverse to suggest cultural transference in this particular context. The reason why I shall nevertheless attempt such an undertaking relates on the one hand to industrial, and on the other hand to textual elements: the aforementioned influx of émigré film personnel; as well as initial evidence that seems to suggest that certain crucial elements apparent in Jewish theatrical traditions in Eastern Europe – from particular tones of voices to the physical appearance of characters to specific narrative structures – may be found in British films made during the inter-war years as well. A particular character, the childlike, physically rotund, verbose nouveau riche, for example, is not only a well-known stock character of the 'pesti kabaré' (cabaret of Pest), the characteristically urban Jewish comedy of Hungarian theatres and subsequently films, but appears in inter-war British comedies as well.

The aim of this research is to carry out a comparative analysis whereby the cross cultural aspects and nature of humour may be better understood, conducted within the framework of Hungarian and British films made in a period when Eastern European Jewish humour hitherto particular to theatres gained ground in films; and when numerous creative personnel working on these films immigrated not only to the United States but also to Britain. The objective is to find whether there is cultural transference from these Eastern European Jewish theatrical comedy traditions, which have been an influencing factor on American humour, to British comedy. The comparative analysis shall be conducted on Hungarian and British comedies made during the inter-war era, using the framework of a multi-auteurist approach based on meme theory and utilising certain analytical tools borrowed from genre theory. The purpose of this research within the devised framework is to point out the relevant memes that might refer to the cultural transferability of Jewish theatrical comedy traditions in the body of films that undergo analysis. The reason why Hungarian comedies are selected for comparison lies in the fact that the aforementioned urban Jewish theatrical comedy tradition 'pesti kabaré' is a specifically Hungarian occurrence.One of the possible reasons for this comparative research never having been

conducted may be related to the general assumptions connecting British comedy to music hall traditions asserted by British cinema historians, such as Andy Medhurst (Medhurst) and Rachael Low (Low), as well as by British comedy scholars like David Sutton (Sutton). The aim of this thesis is to offer an alternative reading to this accepted understanding, the significance of which is suggested by preliminary data provided below. Since the study of the cultural transferability of Jewish humour, as mentioned above, is a well-covered field concerning Jewish American comedy, it is worth exploring whether the methodological frameworks offered by these works may be applicable to this thesis. Various theories utilised in these works may seem appealing at an initial stage, although their problematic aspects need to be borne in mind.

In the passages below I attempt to apply methodological frameworks offered by literature on Jewish American comedy in order to see whether these approaches provide a working methodology for the research. By conducting textual analyses on the same excerpt from a preliminary study I attempt to negotiate various, occasionally contradicting, other times complementing, yet other times mutually inspired theories to create an applicable framework for the present work. The theories I attempted to utilise in this piece are firstly, auteur theory; secondly, genre theory; and thirdly, meme theory; also taking into account and using certain aspects of Stuart Hall's encoding and decoding model. The purpose of this is to try and bring together these theories and find those relevant sections that may be indicative of the methodology of the research. In order to be able to point out these appropriate aspects, however, I also need to select and indicate what would be problematic to include within the framework of my research and why those parts are non-negotiable with the methodology of the work in progress.

It is important to note at this stage that within the framework of this thesis the four films chosen as case studies in Chapter 1 will undergo a certain degree of content analysis beside close textual analysis, as it is by examining the film texts in detail, as well as to a certain degree some of the extra-textual features of the four films, that cultural transference may be interrogated most effectively. Within Chapters 3-6 *Hyppolit, the Butler*; *The Ghost Goes West*; *Trouble Brewing*; and *Skirts and Trousers* undergo textual analysis and content analysis from various perspectives, as outlined in Chapter 1. Content analysis fits both within the methodological framework of meme theory, as elaborated below, and the other methodological tools utilised within the context of this research.

As Berelson describes content analysis, its aim is 'the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication' (Berelson in Williams 157), which is useful within the context of the thesis, as it allows for easier quantification of the memes sought through means of textual analysis. This is particularly relevant within the chapter concerning humour, Chapter 5, where a quantitative analysis is conducted, utilising some methodological tools of content analysis. Despite concerns regarding the limitations of 'counting categories' (Woollacott in Williams 157), within the larger context of meme theory and specifically in Chapter 5 – where the aim is counting – this method is of relevance.

2.2 Auteur theory

One of the methods used by studies on immigrant, and more specifically Jewish American comedy is auteur theory, seen for instance in Mark Winokur's work on inter-war era American comedy (Winokur), covering similar themes in approximately the same era as this thesis. Therefore, the first attempt involves a study on the possible influence of Hungarian Jewish humour on British comedy in the inter-war era using auteur theory, selecting those directors, producers, script-writers, set-designers or actors settling in Britain in the era in question, who might have had a decisive impact on the film industry, and more specifically on comedies. A preliminary study on a narrative aspect found in three films I have chosen for analysis, the Hungarian *Hyppolit, a lakáj*, the British *The Ghost Goes West* and the Hungarian *Borrowed Chateau* is used to conduct the analysis within an auteur theory framework. In these three films the narrative revolves around an aristocratic estate, whether an actual land with a castle on it, as in the case of *The Ghost Goes West* and *Borrowed Chateau*, or a symbolic one, the butler in *Hyppolit, the Butler*, which the nouveau riche protagonists aspire to use in order to provide them with social status.

Analysing this aspect based on an auteur theory approach involves firstly determining who the main contributor, thus the author of each film in question is in order to be able to carry out the subsequent analysis of the author's oeuvre with respect to the analysed films to find corresponding patterns that might indicate cultural transference. In case of *Hyppolit, the Butler* is the author the director István Székely, who directed not only this film, which

became the most emblematic Hungarian comedy of all time, but also various other prominent films of the decade (Burns), including the literary adaptation *Lila ákác* (Purple Acacia 1934); the bittersweet *Lovagias ügy* (A Chivalrous Affair, 1937); and the comedy mentioned in Chapter 6 of this thesis, *Nászút féláron* (Half-Price Honeymoon, 1936). Or is it the writer of the original play, István Zágon; or the screenwriter Károly Nóti, both of whom were acclaimed pesti kabaré writers; or perhaps the actor in the lead role, Gyula Kabos, who became the star of the early to mid-1930s Hungarian films, creating the character of the loveable Jewish everyman? Similarly, in case of *The Ghost Goes West* is the author of the film its acclaimed French director, René Clair, director of avant-garde silent films such as *Entr'acte* (1924) or *Paris qui dort* (1924); or its producer, Alexander Korda, head of London Studios and director of the popular and critically acclaimed *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (1933 and *The Private Life of Don Juan* (1934)? Again, the same question arises in case of *Borrowed Chateau*, whose director, László Vajda, could equally be the author as the aforementioned Gyula Kabos, star of this film as well as numerous others in the era.

Setting this problematic aspect aside either by deciding to include all the aforementioned contributors of the three films or by choosing one of them, the next step in the analysis is to see whether the narrative element found in the three films is an integral part of the authors' oeuvres: does the acquisition of aristocratic estates appear in any other René Clair films; any other Zágon plays or Nóti scripts, for instance? In the case of auteur theory, it also seems relevant to find out whether the authors in question had any personal experience connected to establishing social status by acquiring an aristocratic estate. What seems to further problematize this approach, however, is that even if I could provide a satisfactory and justifiable answer to these questions, the analysis of the various oeuvres of the chosen creative personnel and their possible personal connections to the narrative element found in all three films proves inconclusive as to whether this aspect of the films indicates cultural transference.

This approach, as seen above, thus, would be a rather problematic one, partly because the features in question may be minute ones and not necessarily dependent on the personality or artistic style of one or more of the creators. Being aware of the lives and oeuvres of the artists creating the films in question is an important tool in placing the pictures in context; rendering this as the focus of the analysis, however, would be over-emphasizing their significance. While some of the Hungarian immigrants who entered the British film

industry in the early 1930s, such as the Korda brothers, Alexander, Vincent and Zoltán; Emeric Pressburger, or even the actor Leslie Howard, originally of Hungarian Jewish descent, did have a lasting impact on the circles they entered, and this influence is definitely worth noting, the use of auteur theory would raise questions about precisely the authorship of the films in this context. May we consider the Hungarian/Jewish descent of these artists in question the reason for any cultural transference? I would argue that since any film is the co-operative product of the numerous creative personnel involved, unless there is specified data on certain features of a film demonstrating direct causality from an artist's descent to the finished product, auteur theory, should not be chosen as the primary methodology.

Looking at the Korda brothers as examples here, specifically Alexander Korda's work, his studio London Films, the production practices there and the film personnel he frequently collaborated with could be informative of how auteur theory does or does not fit into, and can or cannot be used in practice within the methodological framework of this research, particularly further showcasing both the effective ways to integrate it in my methodology, as well as the problematic aspects of this theoretical approach. In the paragraphs below I interrogate Alexander Korda's place in British film history of the 1930s, his collaborators, the production practices at London Films, and examining the circumstances of the production of *The Ghost Goes West,* focusing on how these relate to cultural transference. I argue that while looking at Alexander Korda's work is crucial to the argumentation presented in this thesis, particularly in terms of overall cultural transference, this in itself is not a reliable method of tracing how, in case of *The Ghost Goes West* in particular, cultural transference occurs.

In terms of overall cultural transference, I argue that Alexander Korda's relevance is twofold: as already mentioned in the Introduction[7], his working methods, particularly employing ensemble casts, are similar to both Yiddish theatre practices, as well as film making practices of 1930s Hungary; which are combined with his tendency to exert significant control over the films produced in his studio. These two complementing traits can be seen effectively when interrogating the context in which *The Ghost Goes West* was made: while aiming at making an international picture with big names both in the cast and the crew, Korda is thought to have interfered with the production and there is evidence to

[7] Chapter 1, section 1.3

suggest that he re-shot some of the scenes originally recorded by director René Clair. (Kulik 352)

There is a paradox at work here when one looks at Korda's film making practices: while there is an aspiration from his part on the one hand to cater for international, particularly American audiences, and Korda seemed to have been aware that employing film personnel from various cultural backgrounds could work effectively to achieve this aim; there is strong evidence from all of his biographers to suggest that he tended to exert too much control and this affected the productions released by London Films. This ambivalence to invite film makers he considered talented, and proceeding to interfere with their work is a trait present throughout Korda's years of leadership at London Films, and highlights both the reasons why examining his work cannot be omitted from this research, and the reasons why successfully examining his work from the perspective of cultural transference can only be achieved through using meme theory as part of the theoretical framework. The reason for this is that whereas there is evidence suggesting that Alexander Korda had a defining presence in all of the productions released by London Films, there is no data, at least no data in relation to *The Ghost Goes West* to suggest precisely which parts were re-shot or re-edited by him, which defies the purpose of auteur theory in this context.

R. C. Sheriff's assessment of Korda's ambivalent goals, quoted by Karol Kulik, seems to sum this conundrum up accurately:

> He would bring in famous directors like René Clair, give them their heads, then find himself at odds with them because he felt the urge to stamp his own personality on their work. Maybe he was right. He wanted every picture to have the Korda stamp, but the only way to do that was to make them himself from start to finish... (Kulik 140)

The closest we can get to understanding the process of Korda's interference with the work of the rest of the creative personnel on the set of *The Ghost Goes West* comes from Kulik's account, and while it contains some detail on approximately which parts of the film Korda altered, it is not specific enough to suggest which elements – memes – have come from Korda himself. In the filmography Kulik only inserts a remark in parentheses '(Alex Korda re-shot and/or re-shaped some of Clair's material.)' (Kulik 352), which leaves both the specific location of the changes, as well as their nature – did Korda re-shoot or re-shape

these scenes? What does re-shape mean precisely? – unspecified. Elsewhere he gives a more detailed account of Korda's influence on the film.

> When Alex returned in late September 1935 from his Hollywood trip, he apparently took a look at Clair's rushes. He wasn't happy with the transition scenes aboard the ship – when the castle is being taken from Scotland to New York – and so he threw out some of Clair's footage, remaking certain scenes himself and 'pushing around' parts of Clair's other material.

While this description indeed clarifies some of the aspects of these changes, it does not explain which scenes or sequences Korda 'threw out', how he replaced them, and what precisely the 'pushing around' might mean in this context. Furthermore, Alexander Korda's other biographies do not mention any changes made by Korda in *The Ghost Goes West*: Both Charles Drazin and Michael Korda devote very a limited space to the film in their works; and Paul Tabori gives a slightly different account of Korda's attitude to *The Ghost Goes West*. Tabori describes the international aspect of the film by stating that 'Korda brought over two American stars – Jean Parker and Eugene Pallette – and left the direction in the extremely capable hands of René Clair' (Tabori 166), which does not suggest that there was any doubt about the director's work in the film. Tabori continues by claiming that 'when the picture was finished, Korda and his associates were in a quandary – they didn't know whether it was really funny or not.' (Tabori 166) This statement, as the one before, shows little evidence regarding Korda's dissatisfaction with Clair, and leaves his precise contributions to *The Ghost Goes West* unclear.

This is not to say that Korda did not interfere in the making of the films released by his studio in the 1930 (and beyond), or even that it is only Kulik's biography that asserts this fact. Tabori describes the making of *The Rise of Catherine the Great* as somewhat of a clash of ideas:

> Paul Czinner, the director, and Elisabeth Bergner both had their very decided ideas of what they wanted and how they wanted it. Alex, quite often, had other ideas. As a producer he itched to be a director and this unavoidably led to clashes. (Tabori 137)

Kulik gives a similar account of the same production when he claims that

> shortly after filming began troubles arose between Czinner and Korda. Korda was not pleased with Czinner's handling of the actors other than Elisabeth Bergner and began intruding to direct some of the scenes himself. (Kulik 102)

Kulik also attributes this production as the beginning of Korda's discontentment to remain just the producer of a film, claiming this was 'the first warning of Korda's inability to restrain himself in the role of "producer".' Kulik then proceeds to describe the means by which Korda exercised his overall control, such as his need to 'supervise every production on the floor: watch the day's rushes, make or demand alterations or re-takes, and take over directing if the director was not willing to accept his "suggestions".' (Kulik 104) Furthermore, on numerous occasions it was not only Korda by himself who exercised his right to alter the contents of the films he released, but together with Lajos Bíró and Arthur Wimperis they seemed to oversee every script that went through to production at London Films. Kulik describes this 'the Korda-Biro-Wimperis machine' (Kulik 109) and asserts that the three of them together fulfilled the role of dramaturge at the studio, a role particularly important to Korda[8]. Nevertheless, in spite of all the accounts of Alexander Korda's and his co-operating creative personnel's influence on the films released by the studio, I argue that in case of *The Ghost Goes West* while there is evidence supporting the assertion that Alexander Korda actively participated in the making and shaping of the film, perhaps more so than his role as producer would necessitate, this evidence is not sufficient basis to utilise auteur theory as the only methodological tool within this research.

Furthermore, another aspect why auteur theory in its form defined by the critics of Cahiers du cinema and Movie, as well as the theory proposed by Andrew Sarris seems problematic is because it seems to imply a hierarchical structure and is generally evaluative in its implications. John Caughie in his introduction to the BFI Reader *Theories of Authorship* asserts that

> [*A*]*uteurism* shares certain basic assumptions: notably, that a film, though produced collectively, is most likely to be valuable when it is essentially the product of its director (Caughie)

[8] Korda saw the importance of this role as early as his Hungarian film making days during the First World War, stating that the dramaturge is a key person in any studio structure, and should be someone well-versed both in literature and in film making practices. Their task would be to mediate between the film practitioners of a studio and the more literary focused authors and scriptwriters. (Kulik 19)

This implies not only the Romantic ideal of regarding the director as a film's centre of creation and god-like figurehead, essentially rejecting the idea of multi-auteurism, but also that there is a value attached to the individual films based on their director and to the directors based on the extent to which he or she is considered to be an author by critics and theoreticians. When Bazin and the Cahier critics make a distinction between 'true auteurs' and 'metteurs en scène' (Bazin) the same evaluative viewpoint seems manifest: the terminology suggests a qualitative hierarchy, ranking and classifying films based on the "merits" of their authors.

Edward Buscombe's argument regarding the usefulness of auteur theory in the classification of films (Buscombe) also seems to support this evaluative angle of view, even though Buscombe doubts whether it is merely the personality of the author that provides the principal criterion of evaluation. He does point out and question the Romantic ideal behind the Cahiers's *politique des auteurs* as well as Sarris's claim that 'The *auteur* theory values the personality of the director' (Sarris). He goes on to quote Peter Wollen's 1972 edition of *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*: 'My own view is that Ford's work is much richer than that of Hawks' (Wollen) pointing out that it also implies individuality as the basis of evaluation; he expresses no uncertainty, however, as to whether such an evaluative aspect exists or not within the framework of auteur theory, only questions whether the author's personal and individual characteristics are the focal points of this evaluation.

In my research this form of evaluative classification is irrelevant: the implication that any collaborator in any production, any film, any culture or any tradition is better or worse, richer or poorer, more or less individual or valuable than any other would pose further problems within the framework of this research, as my analysis is set out to be descriptive and not hierarchical; comparative but without assigning value to one or the other of the compared films or cultures. Applying auteur theory in the evaluative and hierarchical form that was proposed largely in the 1960s and 1970s mainly by the critics of *Cahiers du cinema*, *Movie* or *Screen* and Andrew Sarris in the United States, thus, would pose significant problems within the framework of this research.

Another reason why I find this form of auteur theory problematic is its largely dismissive approach to multi-auteurism. This viewpoint is quite clear already in the above extract from Caughie's introduction to the reader: although even this seemingly unified branch of auteur theory manifests various, occasionally conflicting ideas, it finds consensus in

claiming that the basic premise of auteur theory is that the director is the creator of a film and it is through his or her point of view that a film should be seen and interpreted. The director is to a greater or lesser extent the focus of these studies and the critic's role within this framework is to understand the intentions of this creator. In certain exceptional cases the theoreticians allow another one of the creative personnel – such as the photographer or the actor – to be the author of a film in question. There is little room, however, for acknowledging the co-operation of all participants in the creation of a film. Fereydoun Hoveyda in his 1960 Cahiers article (Hoveyda) is quite fierce in his dismissal of those critics who take into account the input of other personnel working on a film:

> [W]ith the regularity of a clock, some critics keep harping back to how necessary it is not to neglect the importance of the screenplay, of the acting, of the production system. While they are about it, why not take into account as well the influence of celestial bodies?

Peter Wollen also asserts the director's overall importance in *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (Wollen) firstly, when he emphasises the process of experiencing a film as a deciphering of the director's intended message; and secondly, when he uses the term 'noise' to describe the contribution of other personnel in a film. 'A great many features of films analysed have to be dismissed as indecipherable because of "noise" from the producer, the cameraman or even the actors.' He goes on to define auteur theory as a means to structurally analyse the works of one director and find the common traits and characteristics, eliminating all other elements from the analysis, discarding them and pronouncing them irrelevant and secondary in importance. He claims that even though it is 'often said' – Wollen does not indicate where the statement originates – that a film is the product of various factors, created in a collaborative process, he regards the director's contributions as primary. The fact that he views this process as a structure, however, is a significant element that will be elaborated on below.

Ian Cameron in his 1962 article in *Movie* (Cameron) is more compliant when he allows that on occasion it is another person, not the director who is the author of a film, listing photographers, composers, producers or 'stars'; although he does go on to suggest that none of these films are 'more than moderately good' (Cameron). Furthermore, this viewpoint also does not dismiss the idea of there existing an author for a film in question, merely shifts the emphasis from one role to another. His treatment of *Casablanca*, however, might propose an applicable approach, even though the problematic aspect of

assigning value to the films' creators does appear in his assertion as well; moreover, he lists this as a mere occasional occurrence.

> Occasionally, though, something really remarkable can come from an efficient director with magnificent collaborators. Such a film was Michael Curtiz's *Casablanca*, which contained Humphrey Bogart, Ingrid Bergman, Paul Henreid, Claude Rains, Sidney Greenstreet, Conrad Veidt, Peter Lorre and Marcel Dalio. (Cameron)

2.3 Conscious or unconscious catalyst; Structuralism

As seen above, thus, auteur theory generally regards the director, or in exceptional cases another contributor, as the primary source of ideas, the focal point of a film, whose viewpoint the critic ought to take and channel to the audience. A significant question arises both in auteur theory and in meme theory – which latter aspect will be elaborated on below, however, which in my research translates into wondering to what extent are the director's or any other contributors' ideas; or alternatively, to what extent are the memes in a film the products of conscious choices by conscious minds? Neither auteur theory nor meme theory finds consensus on this point. As the quotes above seem to suggest, auteur theory largely regards the director as a conscious executor of his or her concepts, ideas, morals or world views. Certain theoreticians, however, raised the question whether this is indeed the case, whether a film reflects solely the conscious choices of its director. This argument, clearly, is regarded at this stage from the production side of matters, to use Stuart Hall's terminology the 'first meaning structure', leaving the 'second meaning structure' (Hall 128-138) out of the discourse at this stage.

In his 1973 Screen article on 'Ideas of Authorship' Buscombe proposes the possibility that certain themes and subject matters that appear in Hitchcock's or Ford's films do so unconsciously. He quotes '*a priori*' evidence, although does not elaborate what these might be, merely claims that 'the themes of guilt in Hitchcock, of home, and the desert/garden antithesis in Ford, for example, are almost entirely unconscious' (Buscombe). Stephen Heath in his article commenting Buscombe's (Heath) also remarks

on this, quoting Buscombe's own argument attempting to negotiate the conscious creator/unconscious transmitter dichotomy, in which he refers to Wollen's notion of the author as 'unconscious catalyst' (Wollen).

> The either/or situation has arisen, it would seem, because traditionally it has been felt that for there to be meaning in a work there must be someone who deliberately put the meaning there. Wollen is no doubt quite right to resist this notion. But need we throw out the baby with the bath-water? Can't we say that the films of a director may reveal both an unconscious structure *and* a meaning which he has put there? (Buscombe in Heath)

In meme theory the dichotomy of conscious creation versus unconscious channelling arises on the level or meme replication, which is based on the analogy of gene replication. The question proposed by meme theoreticians is whether memes are self-replicators, that is to say whether replication occurs consciously in the human mind or not. While Daniel Dennet claims that the human mind itself is an elaborate meme complex, therefore rejects the idea of an individual, conscious self (Dennet 210), other scholars, such as Kate Distin (Distin), argue that the formation of the mind depends as much on the cultural and physical environment as on the disposition of the mind in question. She, however, still makes no claim as to whether meme replication occurs on a conscious level or not. In the subsequent discussions I will use the terms 'conscious creators' and 'unconscious catalysts' as suggested by the terminology of meme theoreticians rather than the as the terminology of the debates related to psychoanalysis.

If one agrees with Dennet's assertion that regards the human mind as a complex hub of a multitude of memes, one consequently rejects the idea of the existence of a conscious author for any film. It might allow the presence of what Wollen termed as 'unconscious catalyst', it, however, would seem problematic to imply which one particular catalyst should be chosen above all others in my analysis. If the mind is a meme complex, one cannot claim which meme was channelled into the film from which mind of the many contributors. This idea does, however, not exclude a multi-auteurist approach, in which case the film may be regarded as the product of all of its contributors, claiming that they are all unconscious catalysts, not obliging the analysis to assign any meme to any one

person contributing to the film in question. This way an analysis may be conducted that does not imply direct causality, while it permits the mention of any of its multiple authors where such a mentioning is relevant, which could provide part of a methodological framework that corresponds with the aims of this thesis.

Another possibility for creating a methodology that involves an analysis that does not imply direct causality may arise from the work of structuralist theoreticians, both in the field of auteurism and that of genre theory. The two theories – while using their respective methodologies for arguing different points – converge in their similar use of close textual analysis. The auteur-structuralists may be seen to expand the idea of Wollen's 'unconscious catalyst' in the sense that they aim at decomposing films, finding patterns, motives and common features that might lead them to define a structure. The body of films used in their analyses is the oeuvre of a selected director; whereas the body of films used by genre theoreticians is one that supports their arguments regarding their definition of a particular genre. That is to say auteur-structuralists are led in their search for a relevant body of films based on authors, while those analysing genre by finding common characteristics among a number of different films.

2.4 Genre theory

When writing about Jewish American comedy most theoreticians, Brooke, Winokur, Shifman and Katz certainly, evoke genre notions, it would, therefore, be a logical step to explore whether genre theory may be applicable as a methodological framework for this study. I am utilising the same section of the preliminary study as I analysed within an auteur theory framework above, the narrative pattern linking the social aspirations of the nouveau riche protagonists to the acquisition of an aristocratic estate, to establish whether genre theory could be an applicable framework for the thesis. The analysis is thus set out to indicate whether the films in question may be linked by this particular narrative aspect, therefore whether they form a group that might subsequently be termed a genre or sub-genre. Consequently, the study needs to be extended to explore if this aspect is a common trait of the comic genre, which can be achieved on the one hand by examining the oeuvre of the films' directors; this, however, would evoke problematic aspects regarding auteur theory detailed above. On the other hand, quantitative methods could be used, whereby

the aim is to find what amount or percentage of the film output of the two countries in the inter-war era contains this particular narrative trait. Whereas finding this data is relevant within the framework of the research, it is inconclusive when the question concerns cultural transference. The problem, thus, arises once more: by establishing any of these notions I am not closer to finding out whether they indicate cultural transference or not. Consequently, while genre notions are significant within the framework of this research and numerous tools used by genre theory, such as quantitative methods and close textual analysis are relevant within the methodology of the thesis, specifically in Chapter 5 on Aspects of Humour, they are not sufficient to answer the questions it proposes, thus genre theory in itself it cannot be the methodological framework utilised.

While the Cahiers/Movie/Sarris-style auteur theory is largely concerned with the correlations between an author and his or her oeuvre, one of the main questions proposed by genre theory is: what exactly is genre and how can it be described and determined? Barry Keith Grant in his introduction to his Film Genre Reader (Grant) expresses genre as a construction that can be 'structured according to cultural values' (Grant xvi). This statement, again, is significant from various aspects. Firstly, the fact that the term 'structure' is used in this context may be relevant when referred to my earlier claim regarding the methodological similarities between auteur-structuralism and genre theory. If genre can be seen as a structured organisation, and one of the objectives of genre theory is to define this structure, then genre theory is essentially aiming at a similar objective as the auteur-structuralist theoreticians, merely the 'body of films' concerning the two theories is different. Secondly, Grant assigns these structures to a cultural basis, which, once more, is in correlation with the work of structuralists, who seek a myth, an underlying cultural structure. Grant's assertion may be interpreted to imply non-causality, as it can be argued that the creators of a film merely convert these underlying cultural conventions into the structure that constructs the film in question, without necessarily seeking to assign components of this structure to any one of the creators. Andrew Tudor's statement regarding genre seems to support this argument:

> [G]enre notions – except the special case of arbitrary definition – are not critics' classifications made for special purposes; they are sets of cultural conventions. Genre is what we collectively believe it to be. (Tudor)

This definition also seems to imply that there might be a possibility for genre theory to detach itself from assuming auteur theory as its necessary basis. Tudor's concerns also appear to lie in the question of how to define the body of films that could constitute a genre. As the above quote seems to suggest he regards genre as a construction stemming from a cultural framework, which is approachable from multiple points of view: he calls this an 'interplay between the filmmaker, film and audience' (Tudor). If 'filmmaker' is substituted with 'the film's makers' in this context, that is to say, if one extends multi-auteurism to this aspect of genre theory, it may suggest that the feature of the working methodology concerning a film and its multiple authors may be defined in the above terms.

In spite of his suggestion that the film text and the audience be involved in the analysis, Tudor, however, mentions the filmmaker – in singular – at the first place, implying that he or she is the most significant contributor of a film. He, thus, as a considerable number of other classical genre theoreticians, seems to base his arguments at least to a certain extent on auteur theory. Grant, just as Tudor, is concerned with the involvement of the audience in the viewing experience and what he claims constitutes a film (Grant); in doing so, however, he takes auteur theory as a basis, quoting a number of directors who, in his opinion, structure their films taking the audience's engagement into account. As the quote below shows, while Grant emphasizes structure and audience experience in his argument, he also remains attached to both the evaluative nature of auteur theory and its tendency to name the director as the film's one author, rendering his argument problematic from certain aspects of my proposed research.

> In fact, the cinema's greatest artists in one manner or another have all been concerned with the nature of film experience. The films of directors who exploit the viewer's emotions, such as Alfred Hitchcock, Claude Chabrol, or François Truffaut, for example, take as their recurrent theme the psychological/sociological dimensions of the viewing experience, and often are structured in such a way as to depend upon audience identification […] (Grant)

Edward Buscombe goes as far as asserting that the very definition of genre depends on the director rather than on other elements of the film. In *The Idea of Genre* (Buscombe) he rejects the notion that it might be a film's subject matter that defines its genre, suggesting that the outer form of the film is already conceived in the mind of the director, which, thus, is subsequently turned into the actual genre. He claims that 'the things a director wants to say will decide the form he or she uses.' (Buscombe) This, in turn, implies direct causality and correlation not only between author and film, author and genre, but also between auteur theory and genre theory.

Michel Foucault also raises the issue of author and work (oeuvre) in his essay *What is an Author* (Foucault), when he questions the legitimacy of attempting to study a particular author's work as a closed unit without linking it to the author, calling the bluff of those critics who appear to reject theories of authorship in favour of examining a work's structure by pointing out that

> At this point, however, a problem arises: What is a work? What is this curious unity which we designate as a work? Of what elements is it composed? Is it not what an author has written? (Foucault)

In *Genre and Television* Jason Mittell (Mittel) quotes Foucault and extrapolates from the argumentation presented in *What is an Author*, linking it to genre connotations and claiming that

> Foucault reverses this binary by arguing that certain texts or discourses have an active author function that indicates its authored status but does not carry a direct linkage to the "real individual" who created the discourse. (Mittel 15)

Mittell continues to use Foucault's argumentation by stating that rather than interpreting the concept of authorship as 'the process of individuals creating texts', it should be regarded as 'a culturally activated function of texts that links them to a particular figure and system of knowledge named "the author"' (Mittel 15). Elsewhere in the same chapter, Television Genres and Cultural Categories, Mittell argues that instead of taking the text itself as the primary focus of studying genre, it should be interpreted within various cultural contexts and seen 'within the interrelations between texts, industries, audiences and historical contexts.' (Mittel 8) By juxtaposing Foucault's notion of the 'author function' and Mittell's notion of cultural contextualisation, an effective tool

borrowed from genre studies to use in my working methodology is interpreting memes within particular cultural contexts and linking them to 'particular systems of knowledge'.

In my argument on why one particular aspect is found relevant over another I, thus, looked on the one hand at the seemingly evaluative nature of auteur theory, as well as at the apparent disregard for multi-auteurism by several auteur theoreticians. On the other hand, it appears that a significant number of arguments proposed by classical genre theory necessarily pre-suppose the main principles of auteur theory. Furthermore, a large number of the theoretical works both in auteur and in genre theory seem to revolve around the same directors and the same body of films, which is a significant feature from various aspects: first of all, theoreticians of both auteurism and genre refer to the same authors and the same films arguing occasionally contradictory ideas; second of all, even though the different theories may – naturally – argue different points, by using a defined body of work it becomes more lucid in what way their techniques of analysis are similar. Therefore, by selecting a relevant body of work and using the very similar – in some cases nearly identical – methods of close textual analysis proposed by auteur theory and genre theory it would perhaps be possible for me to create a working methodology by negotiating these.

Some of the more recent debates on genre also link auteur theory to genre by mentioning genres and film cycles in relation to directors they deem significant. William Paul identifies certain comedy cycles linking them to directors Woody Allen and Blake Edwards in his essay on Animal Comedy (Paul). Furthermore, when writing about biopics Carolyn Anderson and Jon Lupo not only mention the films they treat in their work in relation to their directors, but one of the sub-chapters is specifically on the authorship of these film cycles entitled 'Biopic film-makers as auteurs' (Anderson). Not all aspects of genre theory necessitate the pre-supposition of auteur theory, however. Certain theoreticians, such as Steve Neale in his piece on the developments of the Western and the gangster film (Neale), Frank Krutnik in his study on the Romantic Comedy (Krutnik) or Peter Krämer in his essay on children's films (Krämer) base their arguments on the productions themselves and on industry-related data. This offers an alternative to the prevailing auteur theory-based approach to genre, whereby archival material and statistical tools are used to indicate or justify an argument. Utilising these quantitative methods to find corresponding memes in the films analysed within the thesis is an applicable tool, although as seen in the preliminary analysis above, insufficient in itself to indicate the occurrence of cultural transference.

2.5 Meme theory

I consider, thus, both auteur-structuralist and certain aspects of genre theory somewhat problematic in their aforementioned structures. This is the case first of all as I consider the evaluative aspects of auteur theory in its form detailed in the above passages, as well as its exclusion of multi-auteurism highly problematic. Second of all, as argued above, certain features of genre theory, such a predominant pre-supposition of auteur theory and its habit of revisiting the same body of films time after time also render numerous aspects of genre theory problematic from the perspective of my thesis, though somewhat less problematic than auteur theory in its aforementioned form. Less problematic, since even though numerous genre theoreticians pre-suppose auteur theory in their arguments, this is not an exclusive trait; moreover, the basis of its selection of films to analyse is wider in its scope and is, at least in theory, driven by a search for common characteristics rather than by merely the person named as the films' author.

Meme theory, from this aspect, seems a yet more applicable form of methodology for my comparative analysis, as it allows the isolation and treatment of small segments without having to attribute them to a mind they might have stemmed from, or to a genre they may or may not belong to. I shall attempt to use the same excerpt that underwent preliminary analysis within auteur theory and genre theory frameworks to examine whether meme theory may offer a more applicable approach to devise the methodological framework of the thesis. Utilising the tools of close textual analysis offered by auteur structuralism and genre theory I am able to indicate that the three films in question, *Hyppolit, the Butler*, *The Ghost Goes West* and *Borrowed Chateau*, have a common narrative trait that involves the acquisition of an aristocratic estate that renders the nouveau riche protagonists of the films socially acceptable. Although, while genre theory was limited to indicating the existence of this common trait and arguing whether it could be the basis of grouping these and possibly other films together, meme theory extends the scope of the research, and offers an insight into, for instance, other fields of comic entertainment as well. Meme theory, thus, also allows the analysis to treat this corresponding pattern as a meme with no author or genre connotations, therefore the research may be extended to music hall and Jewish Hungarian theatrical comedy traditions. Consequently, by utilising meme theory in a combination

with the tools of close textual analysis offered by auteur structuralism and genre theory, it is possible to indicate the existence of cultural transference.

Clearly, meme theory also poses certain problems, most notably the problem of there being no consensus on what a meme might be and the charged theoretical and philosophical debates surrounding meme theory on an abstract level. From the various approaches I shall try to construct a working hypothesis on what I consider to constitute a meme, and enlist a number of examples worth noting. Richard Dawkins himself gives no tangible definition to the cultural unit he conceived, but enlists examples such as 'tunes, ideas, catchphrases, clothes fashions, ways of making pots or of building arches'. (Dawkins 192) This list could, and as many scholars argue, indeed are extended to images, characters, narrative or other elements of films or televisual representations. What seems somewhat problematic in this framework, however, is to provide a more or less precise outline to what these segments might be, that is to say what constitutes a meme, what is defined as a memeplex, and whether these units indeed offer concrete forms of representation. Kate Distin in *The Selfish Meme* extends Dawkins's biological analogy by proposing that as genes contain DNA, memes are defined by their 'representational content' (Distin 35), whereby this representational content is responsible for mimetic replication. While the idea of representational content does offer a neat definition for 'cultural DNA', it does so on an abstract level without proposing a precise outline regarding its nature, rendering this an intangible, rather than an applicable notion.

If the gene-meme parallel is further expanded one may claim that just as genes, memes are also defined by their ability for replication, variation and selection; cultural content that is capable of these, thus, may be called a meme. The problematic aspect of this argument, once more, arises from the lack of consensus on what these notions may encompass. According to Susan Blackmore, for instance, replication can only be achieved by imitation, as this is the only true way of social learning (Blackmore), whereas Kate Distin rejects this concept and argues on the one hand that replication ought not to be used interchangeably with imitation; on the other hand she agrees with Henry Plotkin in his claim that there are two distinct kinds of memes: higher and lower order memes, in which case the replication of the former ones cannot to be conducted by imitation (Distin 100-102).

As an attempt to draw an applicable conclusion from the fierce debates and conflicting ideas surrounding meme theory my working hypothesis for what one might regard as a meme in film at this stage is that it is a tangible, replicable and circumscribable unit that

may be perceived on various levels. These levels within the framework of my research might include – without attempting to provide an exhaustive list – cinematography: camera movements, lighting or frames; subject matter and narrative; costumes and set design; acting, from tones of voice to gestures. In order to avoid using this tool in an arbitrary fashion, the original point of reference I shall be regarding are British music hall and Jewish theatrical comedy traditions, as outlined in Chapter 1 and in more detail in Chapter 6.

2.5 Selection of films

In order to be able to apply meme theory in this context, however, it seems paramount to have a relevant body of films to analyse. As mentioned numerous times above, this is also a significant aspect in both auteur-structuralism and genre theory: what would be the choice of films that would subsequently undergo close textual analysis? In his argument Tudor introduces some of the problems a set body of films may pose in genre theory (Tudor). He calls this an empirical dilemma, whereby critics begin their analysis of films of a given genre with the assumption that there exists a set group of films that are unproblematic in their assertions of the given genre – the western in Tudor's example. From this perspective, as Tudor argues, what the critics see as their true work is the analysis of these films, the discovery of the common traits, patterns, features or motives that make a genre, rather than the selection of the films they aim to analyse.

Rick Altman refers to the same problematic aspect of genre theory in his 1984 article *A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Genre* (Altman, A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Genre) - quoted excessively in Kevin S. Sandler's study (Sandler) on movie ratings – when he claims that critics and theoreticians tend to utilise the same body of films, a generally accepted, 'familiar canon' in their works. He argues that the reason why in the various writings on genre the same films are mentioned time after time is not necessarily because of the exceptionally good quality of these films or how widely they are known. It is due rather to the fact that they apparently 'represent the genre more fully and faithfully' than other pictures, though he fails to elaborate this: it is not clear based on what criteria this 'fullness' and 'faithfulness' is established. Moreover, this limited scope of films may be seen as even more problematic if one takes into account, as Altman does, the manner in

which this set body of films is used for defining the very characteristics of a genre, as opposed to merely enlisting them.

Upon reading the various theoretical works on genre, one may find empirical evidence for this tendency: when arguing what a genre is and demonstrating its specific characteristics, a significant amount of theoreticians choose to use the western as their example. Furthermore, the films they select to utilise when expanding their ideas are also frequently the same handful of pictures as demonstrators; although the same is true of auteur theoreticians regarding the films of John Ford for example. Of all the theoreticians quoted above Altman himself, Buscombe as well as Tudor use the western; other works that utilise various genres often begin with the western or quote it as the first or oldest genre (Neale) (Sobchak) (Altman, Film/Genre).

2.6 Encoding and Decoding Model

In most of the paragraphs above the emphasis is clearly on the production side of films, whereas – as mentioned above – it seems significant to point out certain aspects of the reception of the set body of films. An appealing theory that takes into account both the production and the reception side of matters is Stuart Hall's encoding and decoding model (Hall)[9]; which, however, also proposes a number of problematic aspects. Some of the most significant difficulties of applying Hall's theory to a film related research arise from the fact that Hall defines the framework of his treatment in televisual terms, including his notion of televisual 'events'. This notion refers to the fact that even non-fictional forms of television use the language and codes of television broadcast, therefore 'real events' are also constructed as a story before they could be transmitted as a television programme. In this sense it would be difficult to claim whether a fiction film could be understood in the same terms; firstly, since the 'aural-visual forms of televisual discourse' (Hall) do not necessarily correspond with cinematographic codes and structures – if such codes and structures exist at all. Secondly, as the films in my proposed research seem to be clearly intended as fictional, Hall's treatment regarding televised events and their 'aural-visual forms' appear to be somewhat irrelevant.

[9] Subsequent citations from (Hall).

He, however, adds that when such an event is televised, that is to say when a story is created from the event in question, it is the production side of broadcasting that constructs its message. Aside from the above described problematic aspects of Hall's argument, the fact that he identifies production as the source of the 'message' of a programme – be it a television programme or a film – is in line with my argument in terms of the multi-auteurist approach, although the term 'multi-auteur' seems a problematic one to negotiate with Hall's model, therefore in this context I shall prefer the use of 'creative personnel'. In this sense the creative personnel of a production consciously or unconsciously create a meaning, a 'message' to use Hall's terminology, with the memes. These memes, as it will be elaborated on below, do not necessarily translate into the same memes by the audience members on the reception side.

The actual model described in Hall's treatment, concerning the two levels of understanding or 'meaning structures' seems relevant in my research as it offers a means to observe the reception of texts, while remaining connected to the production side of these. Another attractive aspect of this model is that it describes two distinct processes that involve two separate sets of infrastructure and consciousness without implying hierarchy – that is to say the production side is not considered 'more relevant' than the reception, and vice versa. This model, however, does raise a number of questions, mainly regarding its application, specifically on the reception side. In my working methodology regarding the production side of matters I attempt to provide an applicable consensus as to what I consider relevant, combining auteur theory, genre theory and meme theory, whereby the creative personnel working on a film consciously or unconsciously channel a complexity of memes into the production; which corresponds with the first meaning structure of Hall's model. What appears to be more problematic at this point is the second meaning structure; and as I do not intend to use audience research and tools of reception studies, this level of understanding is of little relevance in my argumentation, other than its cultural implications in a broad sense, as seen below.

Hall argues that both the encoding and the decoding processes are culture-specific, which is the reason why although the two structures can be the same this is not necessarily always the case. This seems to be an argument worth considering, especially if one takes into account the term culture in a broader sense: meaning culture in relation to nationality (language, values), to society (socio-economic status, occupation, education) or on a meta-cultural level (viewing habits, relations and reflexivity towards media itself). This way, it

may be asserted, it is the different cultural aspects that determine to what extent the same encoded memes are decoded by the audience or, indeed, other ones.

In my argument throughout the above paragraphs I have freely substituted Hall's term 'code' with meme, firstly, as it is more convenient in my attempt to negotiate his theory with other aspects of the methodology of my research; secondly, because there are certain aspects of his notion that correspond with my approximate definition of a meme, which might justify my attempt to substitute one for the other. When Hall describes these codes he claims them to be units that link signs into a cultural and social 'map of meaning', which can be ordered, classified and assigned. He quotes Barthes and argues that these codes are in close communication with culture. Codes, just as memes, therefore, may be defined by their isolated and circumscribable nature, their ability to be organised and their links to cultural phenomena. They may be recognised on an individual level, while it is also possible to find their inter-related and corresponding aspects, as it is the case with memeplexes.

Other similar aspects of Hall's use of codes in his encoding-decoding model and the way I attempt to use memes include the fact that both may be evoked on an unconscious level, as well as their potentially reproductive nature. When Hall quotes Eco and relates codes to icons and the significance of the conditions of reproduction, he claims that these are perceived as real precisely because of their reproductive value; similarly to meme theoreticians who assert that one of the defining factors of a meme is its ability to reproduce. Moreover, Hall continues his argument by claiming that the reproduction of these codes might occur on a 'virtually unconscious' level, just as – once again – memes. Hall does not go on to elaborate on the possibility of such unconsciously produced or reproduced codes, just as there is no consensus among meme theoreticians regarding the conscious or unconscious nature of memes. This, however, is irrelevant in my proposed research in the sense that whether the encoding of memes occurs on a conscious or on an unconscious level does not influence the fact that it is those particular memes that are evoked on the individual second meaning structures.

2.7 Synthesis

In order to provide a clearer understanding to the framework I have devised for this research, the image below illustrates those elements of the various theories that I consider

relevant and those that are problematic from the point of the study. The areas shown in grey contain the elements used in the methodology of the thesis, and those left white represent the more problematic aspects. As Stuart Hall's encoding and decoding model provides an additional aspect to the theoretical framework, rather than being at its core, it is not incorporated in the image below. Furthermore, as Hall's model has its own image representation, it should rather be juxtaposed to the model created for the framework of my research.

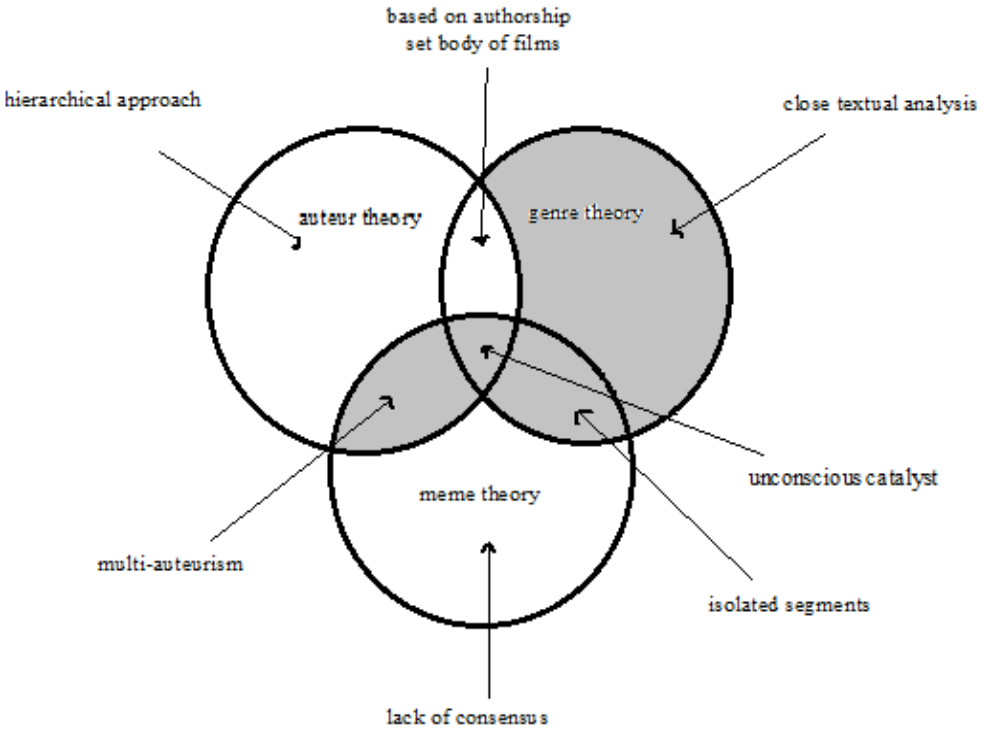

Figure 2.1

To conclude from all the matters mentioned and described above in certain detail, it appears that the methodology of the thesis borrows significant aspects from all the above mentioned theories: auteur theory, genre theory, meme theory as well as Stuart Hall's encoding and decoding model. It also seems quite clear at this point, however, that in order to be able to utilise the aforementioned theories one ought to re-negotiate a large number of the basic arguments offered by these theories, and create a framework whereby the relevant aspects may be applied to close textual analysis. In my research, first of all, I aim at avoiding the evaluative approach that seems inherent in auteur theory, that is to say in the thesis I would not like to suggest that any one of the compared films is better or

worse, is worth more or less than any other. This research is not set out to be either evaluative or judgemental. Second of all, I do not aim at utilising the set body of films offered and generally used for demonstrative purposes both in auteur theory and in genre theory. Instead, I propose to establish a set of criteria based on which I will select the body of films I would analyse.

By dismissing the idea that there exists one single author for a film and proposing instead multi-auteurism, whereby all creative personnel concerned are regarded as one of the numerous authors of the film in question I, once more, aim at re-negotiating certain crucial aspects of auteur theory rendering it relevant for my proposed research. If one attempts to utilise this multi-auteur approach one may suggest that the subsequently conducted close textual analysis does not seek causal correlations: there is no central author responsible for any particular content of the film in question, rather all creative personnel are responsible for all of its contents and by pointing any aspect out one need not assign this to any of the films multiple authors. This may be seen as particularly relevant when taking into account certain assertions by meme theoreticians, which regard the human mind as an unconsciously governed complex hub of memes. Consequently, this proposition implies that not only is it irrelevant to point out what a particular personnel's input in a film is, it could also be seen as the result of an unconscious action, therefore it would be highly problematic to claim causality between any aspect of a film and any of its contributors.

In practice, thus, I aim at using the similar methods established by auteur-structuralism and by genre theory: textual analysis that searches for corresponding patterns, features or indeed memes among a given body of films in order to argue a point and to justify why it is relevant to analyse that particular set of films along that particular set of criteria. In my research, however, even though I attempt to utilise a methodology based on auteur-structuralist and genre methods, the points I argue and the justification for the films and the criteria in question are related to cultural transference rather than to auteurism or to genre. This methodology, therefore, seems to suggest a structuralist approach combined with meme theory, whereby the aim of close textual analysis is to establish any possible occurrences of cultural transference within a set body of films, pointing out memes that imply such transference, acknowledging the personnel working on those films without assigning any of the relevant memes to any one of the film's contributors.

2.8 *Meseautó* (1934) versus *Car of Dreams* (1935) – A Direct Juxtaposition

Even though in the first two chapters of this thesis there is argumentation presented to establish and justify why and how the four particular films were chosen as case studies, in the paragraphs below I am looking at two films that offer themselves for direct comparison and juxtaposition: the Hungarian *Meseautó* made in 1934, mentioned above in Chapter 1, and its direct British remake *Car of Dreams* made a year later. Whereas Hungarian comedies of the 1930s were regularly remade – or shot in multiple languages in the first place – in mainland Europe, especially prominently in Italy, where the Hungarian remakes dominated the White Telephone, or Telefoni Bianchi films; there is no data of other Hungarian films being directly remade in the UK than *Meseautó* as *Car of Dreams*. Therefore, in a research that aims at tracing cultural transference from Hungarian to British films, interrogating this direct remake and offering a brief content analysis of the two texts serves a dual purpose of tracking some of the changes – both differences and similarities – from one to the other, examining what modes of cultural transference are employed; and to showcase the methodological tools I am utilising in the chapters below on the four principal case studies of the thesis, complementing the textual analysis with screen shots where appropriate.

István Nemeskürthy calls *Meseautó* a film that broke box office records with its silly story, a story that at first glance seems to have been taken literally from the Hungarian version and translated as *Car of Dreams*'s narrative, although it mostly at this level, the level of narrative that the differences between the two films occur. Both films focus on an unlikely love story between Vera – Kovács in Hungarian and Hart in British – and her new employer – bank CEO János Szűcs in the Hungarian, and the son of music factory CEO Robert Miller in the British version. In both versions Vera is given a car by her love interest, but the gift is disguised as an act of chance; furthermore, there is a deliberate mix-up in trying to hide the real identity of the love interest from Vera: both Szűcs and Miller pose as chauffeurs to her, and ask a friend to pretend to be them. Szűcs/Miller then proceeds to take Vera to a short holiday, followed by the pretend-Szűcs and pretend-Miller; and it is at the holiday resort where the plot culminates and the mistaken identities are revealed. The differences examined below might seem quite subtle, but unpacking them in this brief analysis is telling in terms of the mechanisms of direct cultural transference. Before giving a detailed account of these subtle narrative differences, and

the meanings these differences might carry, I am looking at some of the similarities, mostly regarding visual aspects, specifically visual gags.

Firstly, the cinematography, mise-en-scene and the editing of the two films remain quite similar: both films use mainly medium or long shots, operate with rather static cinematography, and specifically the costumes, and to a lesser extent the set designs, remain quite similar. It is only on the level of lighting where the visual differences are somewhat more prominent, with the British *Car of Dreams* employing higher key lighting than *Meseautó*. These can partly be attributed to film making trends of the mid-1930s; more significantly, however, *Car of Dreams* directly takes some memes in the form of visual gags from *Meseautó*, such as the stamping scenes, and the showing of the radio key of the dream car. The transfer of these visual gags is significant because the narrative differences between the two versions would not necessarily motivate them, it can therefore be argued that these are memes, and it is purely for comedic effect that *Car of Dreams* takes them over from *Meseautó*. This is more apparent in case of the stamping scenes, as one of the main narrative differences, as mentioned above, is that in *Car of Dreams* the setting is a factory, a musical instrument factory, as opposed to a bank in *Meseautó*; and while musical instrument factories must surely also have administrative and/or finance departments where the use of stamps is appropriate, being hired at one of these departments would necessitate higher qualifications than they do in *Meseautó*. For in the Hungarian version Vera Kovács's job, her only job, is to stamp bonds issued by the bank, thus noting her lowly function within the establishment, emphasizing the distance between her and CEO Szűcs. I theorise that if the same effect had been desired by the makers of the British version, Vera Hart to enter the Miller factory as one of their lowliest employees, she would have been hired to work in the factory floor rather than in the offices.

Figure 2.2 *Meseautó* juxtaposed with *Car of Dreams*

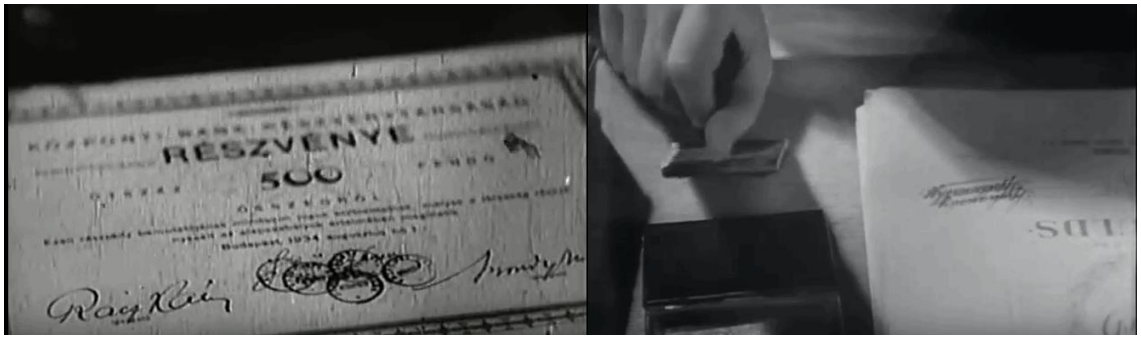

Figure 2.3 Vera distractedly stamping one above the other in *Meseautó* and in *Car of Dreams*

Another reason why it is important to note that these visual gags transfer to *Car of Dreams*, is that this contrasts with the fact that many of the verbal gags were left out of the British version. The most prominent of these is Gyula Kabos's distinctive stutter, and one of the most memorably comedic scenes from *Meseautó* is altogether missing from *Car of Dreams*, which is partly motivated by a narrative change in the British version. While both the Kabos character, Aladár Halmos in the Hungarian, Henry Butterworth in the British version, have a running aural gag, in Halmos's case it is the actor Gyula Kabos's trademark stutter, regarding Butterworth the gag is connected to the music factory setting: at various points during the film he is loudly testing different wind instruments manufactured at the factory, which functions as a running aural gag. Thus, whereas the Hungarian version is more verbally focused, the British version is more closely connected to comedy derived from music. In doing so, the two versions showcase some of the key differences between pesti kabaré and music hall modes of comedy, outlined in the Introduction and in more detail in Chapter 6. The dominance of verbal comedy in *Meseautó* is most significant in the aforementioned comedic scene, where Halmos is on the phone to Anna, the private secretary of bank CEO János Szűcs, trying to explain her the mix-up of the two Szűcs's, getting his tongue twisted in a Hungarian tongue twister, a pun on Szűcs's name[10]. As in *Car of Dreams* Anne, private secretary to Robert Miller, goes with Butterworth to the retreat, there is no reason for them to be on the phone with one another, thus narratively motivating why the scene of verbal comedy is left out of the British version.

As mentioned above, one of the significant differences between the Hungarian and British versions of this film is that whereas Szűcs is the CEO himself, and is considerably older

[10] Szűcs is a common Hungarian name, and it means furrier.

than Vera in *Meseautó*; Robert Miller is the CEO's son, and closer in age to the British Vera. Furthermore, as I argue above, Vera Hart's character is not only closer in age, but probably closer in status to her love interest than Vera Kovács, thus evoking more the setting of a P. G. Wodehouse novel, than a fairy tale, as in case of the Hungarian version; the fairy tale aspect of the Hungarian version also supported by the title that translates directly as 'Fairy Tale Car'. Perhaps as a result of this, the rivalry between the real and the pretend Robert Miller is also markedly stronger in *Car of Dreams* than the mild and benevolent attempts to raise Vera's attention by the pretend Szűcs in *Meseautó*; the latter mostly functioning in order to serve the purpose of ensuring Vera loves the real Szűcs for who he is, rather than for his title or status as CEO.

There is also a shift in the perception of Vera's character in the two films, with the British version placing more emphasis on portraying Vera as mischievous character; as opposed to a more innocent Vera in the Hungarian *Meseautó*. Vera Hart is called mischievous several times in the film, mostly by her mother and her best friend who also gets her the job at the factory; furthermore, only three minutes into *Car of Dreams* there is a sequence entirely missing from the Hungarian version, which depicts Vera in possibly less than favourable light. In both versions Vera simply walks into the car shop to look at a car, an action that requires some daring do, as she clearly does not have the financial means to buy a car displayed in the shop window, which is followed in both films to prompt her love interest to buy the car for her and pretend that she had won it by being the ten thousandth customer. The crucial difference between the two versions is that in the aforementioned sequence in *Car of Dreams* it is established that Vera Hart does this sort of thing habitually and for the thrill of it, as opposed to Vera Kovács, who is motivated to walk into the car shop by felling elated that she finally has a steady income. Vera Kovács, thus, is depicted in slightly different light than Vera Hart, with more emphasis on her innocence and purity, as opposed to the fun, mischievous, potentially more complex portrayal of Vera Hart. This shift in how the two Veras are perceived might, thus motivate a slight change in the films' final key scene: whereas in the Hungarian version Vera is shown sympathetically as the victim of the mistaken identities played on her by two Szűcs's – the real and the pretend one; in the British version Vera is blamed by the other characters for causing trouble and for trying to deceive everyone around her.

It is definitely up for debate, but one of the explanations for where this more critical perception might stem from is the more or less overt Jewishness of Vera Hart and her

father in *Car of Dreams*. The strongest clue to their Jewishness, which is left completely unexplained throughout the film, is their accent. There is no reference from any of the other characters, but both Vera Hart and her father speak with noticeable Yiddish accents, similar to Julian Rose's and the other Jewish characters' in *Money Talks*, although even in that overtly Jewish picture the young generation of Jewish characters (Rosie Pilstein and Kid Burke in particular) speak with British accents. Whereas Vera's mother speaks with an RP accent, and her appearance seems British rather than Jewish, both Vera's and her father's accent, as well as his appearance suggest Vera might be of Jewish ancestry. Furthermore, there is strong extra-textual evidence for Vera's Jewishness: the actress who plays her, Grete Mosheim, is of Jewish descent herself. This is particularly interesting to note, as the British Vera is markedly more Jewish than the Hungarian one: this is supported not only by Vera Kovács's neutral accent in *Meseautó*; by the significance of the name change: while Hart arguably has continental connotations, Kovács translates to Smith, a far more neutral name; but also by there being little evidence to suggest that Zita Perczel, the Hungarian actress playing Vera is of Jewish descent, the only clue being that according to her own account in the late 1930s she did not return to Hungary due to 'new legislation' (Perczel), which might refer to the Jewish Laws in Hungary, leaving the possibility of her Jewish origins open.

Finally, there is a subtle difference between the Hungarian and the British versions of Anna/Anne, the main male lead's private secretary, and her attitude towards both her employer and to her colleague Halmos/Butterworth. Anna in the Hungarian version is affectionate towards Szűcs, and likely has been for a number of years: they are both suggested to be in early middle age. Halmos, a similar age to the other two, in turn, is affectionate towards Anna, and a significant amount of the film's comedy derives from the interactions of Anna and Halmos, and when they realise that Szűcs is in love with Vera, Anna stops resisting Halmos's advances, and theirs is a comic-relief romance juxtaposed with the glamourous romance between Vera and Szűcs. Anne, contrarily, is seen to be the same age as Robert Miller, therefore her crush on him is both more motivated by the narrative and more fervent than Anna's feelings for Szűcs; furthermore, on the one hand because of the age difference, and on the other hand because of the strength of Anne's feelings for Miller, a romance between her and the much older Butterworth is rendered unlikely, thus depriving the British version of some of the most effective sources of comedy of the Hungarian original.

The similarities, and particularly the differences between the two versions of the Dream Car narrative, thus, showcase some of the ways in which cultural transference occurs in directly translated film texts. While *Car of Dreams* keeps most of the narrative structure and the characters of the original *Meseautó,* particularly the subtle differences concerning the types of comedy in the two versions; the nature of the romance between the main characters; and the overt/covert Jewishness of some of the characters are telling in terms of the cultural contexts of the two versions, and the negotiation of the narrative with these cultural contexts. In the chapters below I aim at similarly interrogating the four case studies chosen for this research, which are far from being direct translations; which, nevertheless, show traces of cultural transference on the level of narrative, visual aspects, humour, and performance.

Chapter 3 – Narrative Aspects

3.1 Aims, Methodology, Proppian Analyses

This chapter is concerned with the various aspects of narrative appearing in the four films chosen for analysis – with the similarities and differences of patterns emerging in the films, as well as characters that appear to show likeness, similarities. The overall aim of the thesis concerns providing an alternative reading to British comedies in the inter-war era, including discourse on émigré studies and émigré literature, specifically concerning aspects of Eastern European, Hungarian Jewish émigrés. The aim of this particular chapter is to find similarities, memes that indicate cultural transference in the narratives of the four films chosen in the Introduction chapter; furthermore, to also find differences within them and examine what those narrative similarities and differences may indicate in terms of a potential Jewish/Hungarian Jewish reading of the films in question.

As none of the four films are widely known to British audiences, although *The Ghost Goes West* and *Trouble Brewing* are available, nevertheless, introducing the narrative of these films may serve a dual purpose in this chapter. On the one hand it gives the reader the tools to familiarise him or herself with the plot and the characters of these films, making subsequent references to them easier to put into context; and on the other hand it makes the analysis of memes on a narrative level more lucid. To do so, I have looked at the four films

– *Hyppolit, the Butler*; *The Ghost Goes West*; *Trouble Brewing* and *Skirts and Trousers* from an angle, structuring the argumentation along Propp's narrative tropes. A brief outline of these analyses will be provided in the paragraphs below, in the first section of the Narrative chapter. The aim of the Proppian analyses is to indicate in what aspects and what manners the films contain similar memes, patterns and elements, as they seem to follow Propp's steps outlined in his work on Russian fairy tales (Propp), which were appropriated by film studies discourse as being a universal indicator of narratives. Secondly, after outlining these Proppian narrative structures, I will examine the (further) similarities and differences of the narrative aspects of these films from two angles: on the one hand the perspective of Jewish female and male archetypes; on the other hand from the perspective of class. These two aspects will provide the two subsequent sections of the Narrative chapter of the thesis.

In the following paragraphs, thus, a brief outline of the Proppian analyses of the four films in question shall be provided. The aim of conducting these analyses and of utilising its readings in the thesis is first of all to familiarise the reader with the films in question, and second of all to point out the similarities occurring in the films within a structuralist framework; which, in turn, will be contested in the sections to follow. All four films, thus, follow Propp's steps outlined in his study of Russian fairy tales and employ characters fulfilling roles assigned once again by Propp (Propp).

Bryan Burns in his volume on Hungarian cinema provides an extensive and exhaustive English language summary of *Hyppolit, the Butler*, which is quoted here at length before the Proppian analysis, as it outlines with appropriate lucidity and brevity the focal narrative points of the film, and offers the reader a suitable introduction to *Hyppolit, the Butler*:

> The film introduces us to Schneider, a plump, prosperous businessman with an aspiring wife and a beautiful daughter. Schneider is played by Kabos. Schneider's wife is angling for a grand marriage for her daughter, and bossily introduces a butler to give tone to the household. The butler, Hyppolit, formerly employed by a count and with decided views as to what will do and what will not, is ceremoniously played by Gyula Csortos. Hyppolit makes immediate and painful changes to the easy-going Schneider ménage: the furniture is upgraded, the servants are elaborately uniformed and formality is decreed; the master of the house is

> forced into evening dress; and, since both Schneiders are unfashionably overweight, he is presented with a grapefruit and she an apple, instead of the hearty meals to which they are accustomed. Rebellion is not long in coming. Schneider sneaks off to enjoy himself with his mistress, Mimi; his wife announces that she is going to the opera, but rushes instead to a restaurant, where she makes up for her earlier deprivations; their daughter, offered an affluent, grinning idiot of a suitor, opts instead for István, a handsome driver played by the *beau idéal* of the period, Pál Jávor. Matters come to a head at a would-be grand dinner given by the Schneiders. Almost everyone gets unsuitably drunk. Mimi intrudes and has to be dealt with by Hyppolit. István, promisingly revealed to be an engineer rather than a mechanic, drives with Schneider's daughter and returns as her fiancé. Hyppolit offers to leave but is persuaded to stay and to allow the elder Schneiders to indulge themselves as they wish. Happiness prevails. (Burns)

Hyppolit, the Butler is, thus, a comedy about the Schneider family and their attempts to buy themselves cultural capital with their newly come wealth, establishing a better social status, by installing the former butler of an aristocrat, despite their fundamentally petit bourgeois ways. In the first sequences the characters of Mátyás Schneider, the father; his wife Mrs Schneider; their daughter Terka; their employee and Terka's love interest, István Benedek; Terka's suitor and the nephew of a wealthy and influential civil servant, Makáts; and the title character, the former butler for 27 years of a count and newly employed butler at the Schneider household, Hyppolit are introduced. Hyppolit, thus, absented himself from the count's household, installs himself by the Schneiders' and proceeds to radically change not only the appearance of the Schneider villa by replacing the modern furniture for an old fashioned, 'respectable' interior, but also that of its inhabitants – imposing slimming diets and shaving moustaches off both servant and master. Furthermore, he introduces petit bourgeois Schneider to the world of the upper classes in the form of sending him to seedy nightclubs, and into the arms of the less than respectable nightclub singer, Mimi. Meanwhile, Mrs Schneider, by wishing that her daughter Terka married Makáts, drives their honest and hardworking employee, István Benedek away. Afterwards she proceeds to break her slimming diet by going to a restaurant and ordering an inordinate amount of food that ends up making her physically ill the next day, a condition she shares with her hung-over husband, who had been drinking at the nightclub the night before.

Terka and Benedek fight when Terka comes to give him his last wages, both of them too proud to confess their emotions to one another. Finally, all plotlines come together and all problems are resolved in the scene when the Schneiders give a ball where Makáts and his influential uncle are the guests of honour. Finally, both the nightclub singer Mimi and Benedek turn up – Mimi because she was stood up by Schneider on their date the same evening, determined to cause scandal and Benedek because in their desperation the Schneiders invite him, hoping he would sort matters out. In this scene Mrs Schneider finds out that Schneider and Makáts visited a nightclub together, thus deciding that he is after all an unsuitable suitor for her daughter; as well as the fact that Benedek is actually an engineer as opposed to mere chauffeur, he is therefore reinstated not only as an employee of Schneider's firm, but also as the rightful suitor for Terka.

In this reading the hero is Benedek, who in the end 'weds the princess', Terka, and gets a share of her father's 'kingdom', a more distinguished job at Schneider's firm. The villain here would be Mrs Schneider, who opposes the union of Benedek and Terka; whereas the false hero is Makáts, the intended suitor for Terka, who in fact is a regular visitor and enthusiastic patron of nightclubs and nightclub singers of dubious morale. Mrs Schneider is also the dispatcher, as she is the one admitting to Terka that Benedek has quit the firm. Hyppolit, in turn, is the helper and donor, as he is the one who reveals – though by accident – to Terka that Benedek in fact is a qualified engineer, thus legitimising their attraction.

The Ghost Goes West is a comedy with two distinct temporal settings, beginning in the 18th, then jumping to the 20th Century. In the first temporal setting we learn that Kevin Glourie, head of the Glourie clan in 18th Century Scotland, and his son Murdoch are the arch nemeses of the McLaggen clan. Murdoch, who is a chronic womaniser, much to the chagrin of his father, then absents himself when he goes to war against the English, clearly instructed by his father to avoid all women and all chances of romance. When he breaks his promise to his father and dies in an accident while wooing a local girl, the McLaggens do not miss the opportunity to humiliate Gavin Glourie and his whole clan; consequently, when Gavin Glourie dies of shame, he curses Murdoch to have to roam in the castle as a ghost until their shame is revenged on the McLaggen clan.

Murdoch, thus, appears in the castle every night at midnight for centuries, until the last successor of the Glourie clan, Donald, sells the castle to Joe Martin, a rich American chain store owner and the castle is transported to America. Murdoch accidentally reveals himself on the ship on the way to America, so when the castle is reassembled in America, the Martins give a glamorous fancy dress ball, expecting Murdoch to show up. He fails to do so on demand, therefore the business rival of Martin, Ed Bigelow ridicules both Donald and the castle before revealing that from his mother's side he is the last member of the respected McLaggen clan. When first Donald, then Murdoch understands that this is his chance to take his long awaited revenge on the McLaggens and finally rest in peace, he gives a dramatic entrance and takes his revenge, thanking his heir and successor, Donald, for enabling this and allowing him to leave his haunting ways and return to his father in heaven. The film ends with Donald and Peggy, the daughter of Joe Martin, confessing their love for one another.

According to a Proppian framework the character of the hero is Donald, whereas the princess character is Peggy, whose father, Joe buys Glourie Castle, thus becoming 'king'. The villain is the McLaggen clan – various members of it at different stages in the narrative. The dispatcher is Joe Martin, who buys the castle and transports it to America; while the helper and donor is Murdoch, as he is the one who first woos Peggy, who mistakes him for Donald, thus initiating their romance, furthermore, without him Peggy would not have insisted on recommending this castle for his father to buy.

Trouble Brewing, a George Formby vehicle that places Lancashire lad gormless George in a southern setting, does not begin with the introduction of a family, rather in the initial sequences the role of the family members is replaced by the staff at the press office where George, the main character works: within the Proppian framework it is this urban family that is presented as George's family context. It is indeed from this family that a member absents itself: the employee whose task is to write the weekly horoscope in the paper is off sick, which situation, in turn, allows the rest of the plot to develop. George, who is called to his boss, Brady's office because of a set of cat's footprints – which, as will be mentioned in detail below, is part of a detective skill George is developing – is present when Mary, Brady's secretary, is ordered to write the missing horoscope, and George offers to help.

George's friend, Bill, having read the horoscopes and thinking they were written by their usual author, sets off to the races, persuading George to go with him and to lend him the money to bet on a horse whose number is mentioned as lucky number in Bill's horoscope. Only after betting all his money does George realise that they are betting on the horse in question because of the horoscopes he wrote with Mary the night before. When their horse gallops out of the starting point last during the first few moments of the race they leave the grounds, throwing the seemingly losing ticket on the ground; while they are walking outside, however, the horse they bet on wins the race, so they rush back, search for the ticket, get trodden on in the process and have to fight the masses leaving the grounds, in the end finding the winning ticket and collecting the money. They go to a pub to celebrate, but the money they've just won is changed into counterfeit notes by a gang of slushers the paper has been writing about, and whom George is trying to catch utilising the detective skill he used on the cat earlier.

George and Bill follow the gang into a swimming pool, where instead of swimming George has to fight a wrestling match with a man twice his size, while the slusher gang escapes. George then returns to the press office, where Brady – unbeknownst to George – is trying unsuccessfully to seduce Mary, and then he kidnaps her. Meanwhile George, who realises that the only way to find the slushers is to follow up on the detective tool, a fingerprinting device he has invented, with the aid of which he took the fingerprints of an opera singer and a grumpy gentleman earlier in the narrative. He, thus, proceeds to collect the fingerprints of these two people, neither of whom proves to be connected to the gang, only perhaps the gentleman, who turns out to be Major Hopkins, the chief of police in charge of the real investigation and who George badly harasses, believing him to be the leader of the slushers. When George and Bill find out that Mary has been abducted, they follow her to a brewery, where she reveals the slushers' headquarters and Brady as the leader of the gang. George is, thus, reinstated; Bradley is taken away, handcuffed; and George wins Mary in the end.

Once again following Propp's terminology and framework concerning Russian folk tales, the hero in this narrative is George, who has to find and fight the villain, Brady, and win the heart of the princess, Mary. Brady in this narrative also has the function of false hero, not only because he is believed to be an honest, law-abiding citizen and rightfully higher in the social hierarchy than George, but also because he is George's rival for the affections of

Mary. The helper within this framework is Bill, who helps George in finding the slusher gang; meanwhile functioning as dispatcher as well, as it is he who finds out that their money has been changed to counterfeit. The donor, as well as the princess, is Mary, who enables George to write the horoscope with her, thus providing the 'magical agent', the win at the horse races.

The fourth film, *Skirts and Trousers* is a comedy set in the world of the theatre. The initial situation of this film introduces Péter Sóvári, a popular theatre actor in a musical scene of his currently running play, where he declares that he will never get married. In a Proppian terminology this is not only the absentation, but also the interdiction that will eventually – if only metaphorically – is violated when Sóvári asks one of the chorus girls, Ibolya, on a dinner date. Ibolya, despite being a mere chorus girl, is the recipient of the attentions of not only the leading man in the play, who within the narrative framework is also one of the most popular actors in town, but also of a secret admirer who sends her a bunch of roses each night. Ibolya finds out who this secret admirer is: a certain Count Ubul Bolsai and instead of having dinner with Sóvári as promised, she chooses to dine with the Count. During their dinner together he understands that Sóvári is his rival and dismisses him as a lousy actor to Ibolya.

As this dismissal gets back to Sóvári through the theatre gossip mill, he decides to not only teach Bolsai a lesson, but also to prove his acting abilities by impersonating a widowed Spanish heiress that Bolsai – as Sóvári finds out – is hoping to court and marry for her money. He takes a room at the same hotel where Bolsai is staying and dressed as Dulcinea, the Spanish heiress, he proceeds to seduce Bolsai. The latter, meanwhile, still goes on dates with Ibolya, while feigning interest for Sóvári as Dulcinea. In a scene involving the real and two fake Dulcineas – one of the counterfeits being Sóvári, the other Ibolya's dresser, Kamilla – Bolsai is revealed to be not only a womaniser in front of both his romantic interests, Ibolya and the real Dulcinea, but also a con-man who pretends to be a Count to seduce women and cheat them out of their money. In the same scene Sóvári reveals himself to Bolsai as having impersonated Dulcinea, ridiculing him for courting such a hideous creature as himself in drag, and at the same time proving to Bolsai that he is far from being a lousy actor. Sóvári, then, returns triumphantly to the theatre as himself, Sóvári Péter, admired and popular actor, and gets Ibolya in the end.

Looking at the characters within a Proppian framework it seems that Péter Sóvári is the hero who goes on a quest and wins the princess in the end. The princess, thus, is Ibolya; whereas the villain, as well as the false hero is Ubul Bolsai, who not only struggles against Sóvári, but also attempts to seduce – though without the intention of marrying – Ibolya. The role of dispatcher as well as helper is taken by Sóvári's friend and director at the theatre, Kálmán, who overhears in the restaurant that Bolsai calls Sóvári a lousy actor and discloses this to Sóvári; furthermore, it is he who helps Sóvári in teaching Bolsai a lesson and prove his acting abilities. The donor is Sóvári's dresser, Zsiga, who transforms Sóvári into Dulcinea.

A significant element found within these brief Proppian analyses, apart from the fact that all four films seem to adhere to a Proppian narrative structure, is the fact that all films operate, to a greater or lesser extent, with a supernatural layer, containing what Propp calls "magical agent" (Propp), particularly the two British films, *The Ghost Goes West* and *Trouble Brewing*. The reason this can be seen as significant from the perspective of cultural transference is because Jewish, specifically Yiddish theatre traditions are strongly associated with such supernatural elements[11]. Apart from the structural similarities, thus, there are similarities in terms of the narrative content of the films. By establishing that these films show such structural similarities, I can proceed to analyse them further, first from the point of view of a gender discourse, then from the angle of class conflicts. These two areas overlap at stages, though this will be mentioned and explained in a little detail.

3.2 Gender and Jewish Female Archetypes

The framework for this section of the chapter is based largely on gender stereotypes relating to Jewish female literary and theatrical characters, cultural archetypes, particularly the Jewish momma, otherwise called Yiddishe Mamme; and the Jewish princess with nouveau riche parents and a pampered, cushioned lifestyle; and to a lesser extent the nervous, unattractive Jewish girl looking for marriage. Most of the literature on these archetypes comes either from ethnic and immigrant theory; from feminist discourse; or from literature on television comedy, specifically on Jewish television comedy. In the passages below I am looking at the female characters in the four films from this

[11] Particularly dual roles and ghosts, as seen for instance the legend of the Dybbuk, most famously depicted in the play and then film *Der Dybbuk* (1937).

perspective, after a brief outline of the aforementioned Jewish archetypal female characters.[12]

Firstly, there is the character of the Jewish momma, the Yiddishe Mamme, whose overbearing and over caring nature makes her a dominant presence in her family's, specifically her children's lives. She is usually middle-aged, plump, and in Vincent Brook's description a 'cuddly, Yiddish-accented matriarch of an upwardly striving Jewish family' (Brook). In this, Brook's incarnation of the Yiddishe Mamme, she is not sexualised but represents a yearning for home, as expressed in the popular song from the 1920s, *My Yiddishe Mama*. By the 1920s this archetypal character is far from her version made popular by Sarah Bernhardt in the beginning of the 20th Century, whose 'fallen heroines combined romantic grandeur with overt and unapologetic sexuality' (Glenn). Furthermore, the Yiddishe Mamme, if she deems her family's, especially her children's happiness to be at stake, can display a ruthless streak and will fight for what she believes to be the right thing. As seen below, Mrs Schneider is a prime example of Yiddishe Mamme, though some of the Yiddishe Mamme's typical characteristics can also be found in other female characters of the four films.

The characters of the Jewish princess and the unattractive Jewish girl looking for marriage have their roots partly in the figure of the ghetto girl, a garishly made-up, lower, or lower-middle class woman, described as 'irresponsible with money, loud in public, and immodest' (Brook), a sexualised female character. The Jewish princess, within its traditional context, while being depicted as both careless with money and attractive, is non-sexualised and remains within her family's, specifically her father's control. Both Terka Schneider and Peggy Martin fit, to a great extent within this broad characterisation. The unattractive Jewish girl, conversely, is more associated with sexualised behaviour and loudness, as one of the supporting characters, Kamilla in *Skirts and Trousers* demonstrate, but as seen below, women in the entertainment business in the two Hungarian comedies also display some of the characteristics of the unattractive Jewish girl looking for marriage, particularly Ibolya and Mimi.

[12] Another Jewish archetypal character is the character of the schlemiel, a male Jewish character, whose particular characteristics I am not outlining in this chapter, but who will feature prominently in Chapter 6, on Aspects of Performance; see sections 6.2.3, 6.3.2 and 6.4 for the schlemiel.

Some of the similar elements within the framework of gender issues also include love affairs or attempted marriages between men of lower rank and/or financial status in the social hierarchy than the woman they are wooing – an element that shall be elaborated on in the following sub-chapter as well. Conversely, the men wooing the women above them in various hierarchies are usually rivalled by men in equal/higher status than these women. These latter men, in turn, are frequently preferred by the parents of the girl/woman.

In this instance, however, let us consider some of the differences occurring within similar aspects of the films. One such example could be the role of women in entertainment – in the Hungarian films these women are demonstrably of a lower social status and cultural value than those in the British films. This is so despite the fact that one of the British comedies, *Trouble Brewing* is classified as a working class comedy by David Sutton (Sutton). In this film one of the supporting characters is an opera singer – as opposed to chorus girl and aspiring actress Ibolya in *Skirts and Trousers*, as well as nightclub singer and 'girlfriend' of the rich and mighty, Mimi in *Hyppolit, the Butler*. In the Introduction Chapter, where the selection of films takes place, I pointed out the difficulties of using David Sutton's taxonomy for the Hungarian comedies, given the fluidity of class they display. Nevertheless, evidence both from these films, as well as from pesti kabaré traditions point to the fact that compared to *Trouble Brewing* and other comedies classified by Sutton as working class, the two Hungarian films analysed in this thesis, as well as *The Ghost Goes West*, have more marked middle-class classifiers. In connection with these comedies, thus, beside using the definition of situation comedies based on Sutton's taxonomy, I will use the term middle-class comedy in the passages below.

Regarding, therefore, the figures of women in the entertainment business, perhaps within both frameworks what is shown is an aspect of the female character that is believed to be alien, exotic. Within a middle class framework the starting actress and the nightclub singer stick out from their environment, where otherwise women are depicted either as matronly mothers, respectable widows or modest, well-behaved upper middle class debutantes, including not only both of the Hungarian comedies, but also *The Ghost Goes West*; whereas within the working class comedy *Trouble Brewing* the working girl, Mary, is presented as a positive character. It can, therefore, be argued that while the three middle class comedies depict passive female characters as positive figures, the working class

comedy highlights an active female character as positive. Placing these women within the framework of Jewish archetypal female characters, Mimi, Kamilla and Ibolya in the two Hungarian comedies have more in common with the Jewish ghetto girl; and their loud, often uncouth manners or their scheming ways to secure advantageous marriages or connections link them to the archetype of the unattractive Jewish girl looking for marriage. As seen above, however, Terka Schneider and Peggy Martin show characteristics of the Jewish princess: they are modest and non-sexualised, and heavily associated with their parents', specifically their fathers' professional life.

Linked to the above argument, another possible reading of these differences might involve a male perspective: what I mean here is that we could observe these female characters to see how they might propagate negative gender stereotypes and also how the texts they appear in may be read in a male chauvinistic framework. I'll start with *Skirts and Trousers*, for it appears that this film is the least female friendly of them all: not only does it involve a female character as romantic lead who is a cold hearted, double-crossing woman, toying with men's emotions, standing them up and using them to her own advancement, but there is also an outright tirade against women by the main character's friend, Kálmán, who is a fatherly friend to Sóvári and a director at the theatre where Sóvári is lead actor. In a sense Kálmán's monologue could be read as the main message, a sort of thesis statement of the film: it comes from a director who is not only an older friend of the hero and figure of authority in the theatrical framework the film is set in but could be regarded as a metaphorical extension of the film's director, moreover in Propp's terms he is the dispatcher as well as the helper figure, revealing the key struggle of the narrative to the hero and helping him solve it. The message reads as follows: "If women could not look men in the eyes while telling a lie they would need to walk around with their eyes fixed on the ground."; and "Women are like a game of patience, they stick with the man whose nerves can take them the longest. They regard the jealousy in your voice as a vice and become yet cheekier." Within this reading *Skirts and Trousers* becomes a very problematic film in terms of gender issues.

The other two middle class comedies, the Hungarian *Hyppolit, the Butler* and the British *The Ghost Goes West* are not as harsh in their opinion of women: the romantic lead in both films is a middle or upper middle class daddy's girl, whose fathers bought cultural capital for them with their newly established economic capital (Bourdieu). It is their parents – in

the case of Terka from *Hyppolit, the Butler* her mother; in *The Ghost Goes West* Peggy's father, Joe Martin who aspire for a more respectable social status, in a society where Terka and Peggy already move at ease. Their case is somewhat similar to that of second generation émigrés: while in the first generation, the parents often struggle with the language and culture of a host country, their children grow up having little or no difficulty fitting in – in this case it is not a transnational/cross-country cultural movement, but an upward move between social classes. This, I see as a significant point, as the greater question of this thesis concerns the former, transnational cultural movement, though not necessarily of people, but of snippets and fragments of cultural identities, identifiers, memes. Perhaps in these two films the cross-class movement is parallel to a potential cross-country movement.

The physical representations of Terka and Peggy are also similar: they are tall and slender young women, they wear similar clothes in crucial scenes of the films they appear in[13]. While it is not known from the film whether Peggy in *The Ghost Goes West* has a job, whether in her father's company or elsewhere, she is definitely helping him in his hunt for a suitable castle to bring back to the United States with him. She acts as his envoy and negotiator, she arranges for the meeting between Donald and her parents and then follows up the sale. It is unclear whether this is borne out of personal enthusiasm for the task, effusive love for her father or a sense of duty; she nevertheless does it with efficiency and enthusiasm. Similarly, Terka is shown in *Hyppolit, the Butler* as her father's right-hand-woman, though in this film it is clear – amongst others from her dealings with István Benedek – that she officially holds an important job at her father's firm. These female characters, thus, are depicted in a far less problematic fashion than Ibolya in Skirts and Trousers: their aspiration to participate in the dominantly male professional world is met with more approval than in case of Ibolya, perhaps because Peggy and Terka venture only as far as their fathers' affairs, as opposed to Ibolya, who is in the show business and is not seen on screen to have any relations. All of the above characteristics of Peggy and Terka point, once again, to cultural transference when reading the characters within the framework of Jewish female archetypes, specifically the Jewish princess.

The film *Hyppolit, the Butler* is, however, not free from problematic depictions of female characters: the aforementioned Mimi, the nightclub singer is shown in much the same

[13] As described in detail in Chapter 4 on Visual and Aural Aspects

unfavourable light as Ibolya. Mimi is shown to be an unscrupulous troublemaker who, when she learns that she is being stood up by Schneider because of the ball he is holding in his house, decides to go there with the precise purpose of causing a scandal and to take revenge for being abandoned on their rendezvous. This she achieves, as the ball was in honour of a respectable judge, Makáts senior, whose approval the Schneiders needed for a business investment, and whose nephew, Makáts junior was Terka's suitor favoured by her parents for their social and economic advancement. When it turns out that Schneider has been frequenting the infamous nightclub, frolicking about with the equally infamous Mimi, Makáts senior denies his consent to the business venture; furthermore, finding out that his nephew was with Schneider in the nightclub all along, he disowns him. These actions, in terms of the narrative, lead to the happy ending of the film: as Terka does not have to marry Makáts, she can be with Benedek. In terms of the depiction of Mimi's character, however, they may be seen as problematic: she is an ambitious demimonde woman who, as Ibolya, uses men for her own financial benefit.

Another aspect to consider in terms of the slight differences between female characters who seem similar at first glance concerns the mother figures appearing in these films. Even though generally speaking both Mrs Schneider in *Hyppolit, the Butler* and Mrs Martin in *The Ghost Goes West* can be described as doting mothers who are concerned with their daughters' well-being, as well as with their social role and status, linking these characters with the archetypal Yiddishe Mamme, their roles in their domestic environment are roughly the opposite. In the Schneider household Mrs Schneider appears to be in charge – it is her, not her husband, who aspires for a more respectable social status, thus arranging Hyppolit to enter into service in their house, she is the one who wants to better herself and go to the opera, who agrees to change the interior decoration of their house as well as their lifestyle and daily routine, not Mr Schneider. Conversely, in the Martin family it is Mr Martin who wants a castle from Europe to elevate their social status, he drags his family through Scotland, plans to transport Glourie Castle to Florida and organises the entire opening ceremony of the newly reassembled castle. Mrs Martin is shown as an easily frightened, rather passive woman, whose role is to support her husband's decisions, while trying to care for their daughter and try to achieve the most beneficial terms of marriage for her. In this latter respect she, as mentioned above, is similar to Mrs Schneider's character from Hyppolit, while taking different roles within their marriages.

Trouble Brewing, as seen above, may offer a less problematic take on female gender stereotypes than the other three films considered in this analysis, as it portrays as main female character a young woman who works as secretary at a press office, who is not only morally strong and sound, but also her intelligence and wit are shown as positive personality traits, as opposed to the negatively portrayed working girls, Ibolya and Mimi in the Hungarian comedies. She may be seen as morally above the other two girls, as even though her boss, Brady offers her a romantic attachment, which would most certainly mean some form of material benefit for her, Mary refuses Brady's advances – the sort of advances both Ibolya and Mimi wish to pursue with the financially and socially powerful men they meet. Mary's character in *Trouble Brewing*, thus, carries a less problematic message on working girls than either Ibolya in *Skirts and Trousers* or Mimi in *Hyppolit the Butler*.

The above statement regarding romantic female leads holding a position in the hierarchy above their male counterparts also offers more complex readings. It is in fact only in case of *Trouble Brewing* that this statement holds true: Mary is the secretary of George's boss, Brady, so while they share the same supervisor, Mary holds an administrative office job and speaks with an RP accent, George works on the factory floor and holds on to his regional accent, thus indicating their different status in the narrative hierarchy. Seemingly the same hierarchical difference is present in case of Terka Schneider and István Benedek in *Hyppolit, the Butler* as Terka is the CEO's daughter and herself holds a high function within the firm, whereas Benedek is merely their chauffeur. It is revealed half-way through the film, however, that Benedek has a degree in engineering, thus rendering their hierarchical gap obsolete. The character of a man of higher social position disguising himself as a chauffeur is actually a trope that comes up in several films of the era, including *Dream Car*, and, according to Stephen C. Shafer, *Taxi for Two* (1929), where 'the son of the aristocratic Lady Devenish [...] obtains a job as a chauffeur in order to win the heart of a girl' (Shafer 98); as well as in *Full Speed Ahead* (1936).

In *The Ghost Goes West* the social difference between Peggy and Donald is yet more complex, as Peggy is the daughter of a nouveau riche, who is trying to establish his – and his family's – social status by buying Donald's castle and thus his aristocratic heritage. Peggy, therefore, is above Donald only in terms of financial capital, it is in fact Donald who is hierarchically above Peggy in a traditional, feudal sense, as he is the aristocrat,

albeit an impoverished one. In the sub-chapter on class related aspects below the matter of feudal values and the character of the impoverished aristocrat appearing in these films will be addressed in detail. In *Skirts and Trousers* the statement in question is outright false, as the romantic female lead who the hero, Sóvári is interested in is Ibolya, an aspiring actress, who – though promising – is still just a chorus girl in the play where Sóvári plays the lead. She, however, knows the power she has over men and throughout the film acts as though she was hierarchically above Sóvári, manipulating him and suggesting that she has the upper hand. Of all the films, as mentioned above, this one has the most gender-stereotypical and misogynistic message.

Skirts and Trousers, as seen above, is rather problematic in terms of gender issues in other aspects as well. Not only is the main female character, the main male character's romantic interest, depicted as a cynical, man eating manipulative vamp; furthermore, the film expresses explicitly misogynistic ideas through an important supporting character; but also the supporting female roles enforce negative gender stereotypes and offer little in terms of characters depicted in unproblematic and complex manner. Firstly, there is Ibolya's dresser, Kamilla, who is herself aspiring to be an actress, albeit unsuccessfully, therefore she places Ibolya's interests in front of her own and gives her pieces of advice regarding how to shamelessly use the men that are after her. Her own lack of success as an actress, and her aspiration for an advantageous marriage by proxy all relate her character to the archetypal unattractive Jewish girl looking for marriage. It could be argued that she lives her ambitions through the more attractive and more successful Ibolya, and that their value systems are very similar and consist mainly of their personal advancement – or in case of Kamilla, Ibolya's advancement – regardless of the hearts they break and the men they ruin. Kamilla has her fifteen minutes of fame when at the end of the film she dresses up as the widow Dulcinea (whom Sóvári has also been impersonating) and claims that whoever Bolsai has been spending time with is in fact an impostor. Little does she know that the impostor is Bolsai's rival, Sóvári; and little does she know that the real Dulcinea is also in the room, waiting to reveal herself as the genuine widow from Madrid. All this, however, does not stop Kamilla from enjoying the rare opportunity to show her acting abilities and she seems to be having a ball playing Dulcinea.

Secondly, the real Dulcinea Juarez, the rich widow from Madrid should be mentioned as a supporting character. She is, from a gender perspective perhaps as problematic a character

as Ibolya: she is a fairly young wealthy widow who inherited her fortune from her late husband, going to Budapest – at least according to Bolsai's brother at the start of the film – with the explicit purpose of finding herself a suitable second husband. She, therefore, could be seen as a future version of Ibolya herself: having gained the wealth of a rich man she now looks for a new man in her own terms, for her own fun. Conversely, the Dulcinea Sóvári depicts is a rather puritanical, prudish middle-aged woman, who is old fashioned in romance: she – or rather Sóvári in drag – requires to be wooed by Bolsai. Sóvári, as it is pointed out by him in the film, does not play Dulcinea as an overly effeminate character, he does not alter his voice and applies very little makeup to alter his appearance. In this sense the Dulcinea he portrays is markedly different from the feminine beauty Ibolya represents, although in this disguise Sóvári is manipulating Bolsai much in the same vein as Ibolya does with men, taking turns in manipulating both him and Bolsai.

Supporting female characters in the other films, with the notable exception of Madame Berdi, the opera singer in *Trouble Brewing* and the aforementioned nightclub singer Mimi *in Hyppolit, the Butler*, include mostly various domestic servants. In *Hyppolit the Butler*, the film precisely about a domestic servant, albeit a male one, the supporting female character in domestic service is the family's – until the arrival of Hyppolit – only help, the housekeeper Julcsa. She is a simple, benevolent country woman, over the prime of her youth, she is loyal to the Schneiders and views the changes introduced by Hyppolit with great suspicion. Furthermore, as it is shown in a crucial scene of the film, she is willing to lie for her master, Mr Schneider in order to support his alibi that he went to the opera with young Makáts, when in fact they both were at a night club entertained by Mimi. Conversely, while Julcsa remains an old fashioned and loyal part of the Schneider household, another addition is a female physical education instructor, hired by Hyppolit in order to help Mrs Schneider with her slimming diet. She is, as good PE teachers should be, strict and humourless, and Mrs Schneider takes an instant dislike to her, doing her best to avoid any contact and any physical obligations with and towards her.

In *The Ghost Goes West* the housekeeper of Glourie Castle in the 20th Century setting is a Mrs MacNiff, in many respects similar to the Schneriders' Julcsa: a simple, kind hearted older woman with a strong regional accent, who is loyal to the household she is serving, in this case the single Donald Glourie. As in *Hyppolit, the Butler*, her loyalty and wit are crucial to the plot of the film, since if it were not for Mrs MacNiff who sets the clock back

with one hour on the evening the Martins come to dinner, they would certainly have run into Murdoch, the ghost, who would most probably have scared them off. As it happens, Murdoch only meets Peggy that night, who stays behind after her parents left, and who mistakes Murdoch for Donald and begins to fall for him/them. Another female supporting character in *The Ghost Goes West* is the insufferable snob Miss Shepperton who is one of the guests at the dinner at the opening of Glourie Castle in America. As opposed to the positive female characters of Peggy and Mrs MacNiff, Miss Shepperton is, or imagines herself to be upper class and is depicted as a tedious woman of no imagination[14].

Before a conclusion to this sub-chapter the issue of theatres, cross-dressing and dressing up should be mentioned. This is most apparent in *Skirts and Trousers*, where it is a central theme to the narrative, but elements of cross-dressing and fancy dress also appear in other ones of the four films in question[15]. These include the full Scottish military dress of Murdoch Glourie, the ghost in *The Ghost Goes West*, which seems anachronistic in the 20th Century setting of the film and suggests cross-dressing overtones with the kilt. The kilt also appears in the conclusive scene of the film: at the opening ball of Glourie Castle in the United States it is not only Donald, but also the host, Joe Martin who is wearing a kilt; as well as Ed Bigelow, one of the guests and Joe Martin's rival, wearing the tartan of his maternal ancestors, the McLaggens, furthermore, an entire Jamaican jazz band is dressed in Scottish national dress. In *Hyppolit, the Butler* the two gentlemen, Schneider and Makáts visit a night club, where Mimi is excessively made up but dressed in next to nothing; while in *Trouble Brewing* George in a swimming pool has to dress and act like the wrestler he is mistaken for.[16]

Even though at first glance it appears that the female romantic lead characters in these three films are above their male counterparts, in each of these films the male romantic leads are either revealed to be their equals after all, or are raised to or above their levels socially and/or economically. Similarly, as mentioned above, it is only the working class comedy that allows a working girl to be portrayed as a positive character: Mary in *Trouble Brewing* is clever, witty and proactive, in fact she is the one who solves the mystery of the counterfeit money and reveals who the criminals are, as opposed to the clumsy male

[14] See more on the sceptical Miss Shepperton in section 4.2.1 in the Visual and Aural Aspects Chapter.
[15] This issue, specifically in relation to concepts of traditional masculinity, is addressed in Chapter 4.
[16] See Chapter 4.2.1 for a more detailed analysis of this aspect of gender, cross-dressing and ideas of traditional masculinity.

characters, George and Bill, who falsely accuse multiple people before the real culprits are found. The middle class comedies, thus, only allow their female characters a certain degree of independence from the bounds of a patriarchal society, whereas the working class comedy seems to allow Mary financial and emotional independence. Incidentally, *Trouble Brewing* is the only film of the four where families play no role at all, although in *Skirts and Trousers* there is also hardly any mention of them, except for the brother of Ubul Bolsai, who alerts Ubul to the arrival of the widow Dulcinea Juarez. The least and the most misogynistic films, thus, mention families least, while the mildly patriarchal *Hyppolit, the Butler* and *The Ghost Goes West* are set within the framework of families. (Maybe this last bit should go somewhere else.)

3.3 Class

What I find rather curious here is that above I've written almost exclusively about the female characters of the four films, nevertheless, in most of the arguments mentioned above there is an element of class conflict. It can be said, then, that instead of clearing up negative gender stereotypes I might be propagating them in this chapter – when writing about gender issues I bring up similar arguments as when I will be writing about class issues, only in the gender section it concerns mainly the female characters appearing in the films in question, whereas in the so-called class section I deal with the male characters. Admittedly, the issues raised in the above section have significant gender implications and concern other matters than that of class, many of the issues raised in that section will be re-visited in this one, albeit from a male perspective, that is to say the male characters and their relations to class will be in the focus of this section.

First of all, then, I will provide a brief outline of those matters raised in the second section, on gender, which have validity in the section on class. The two such significant aspects concern, on the one hand, the romantic relationships between female characters of a higher social position than the male characters; on the other hand, the different perspectives regarding the situation of the working girl in the four films. As seen above, the hierarchical difference between the female and the male romantic lead is not as straightforward as the general statement would indicate – apart from *Trouble Brewing*, the only working class comedy of the four, where this situation seems to be quite straightforward, the three middle

class comedies one way or another raise the male lead to be the social equal of the female romantic lead. Furthermore, as mentioned above, it is once more *Trouble Brewing*, which is the most permissive in terms of female emancipation, allowing the female romantic lead character to be a career girl, portrayed in a positive light.

As it can be seen in the following chapters as well, this dichotomy is one of the core arguments throughout the thesis, perhaps the most significant or crucial point in this section is the dichotomy of and tension between old money and new money; that is to say between the aristocracy and the nouveau riche. This aspect appears in all four films, though in some of them more covertly then others, while two of the films analysed in this work elevate this conflict to the centre of the main narrative plotline. This dichotomy appears either in the form of an asset being hired or purchased from an aristocrat by a nouveau riche to ameliorate their social status, or by showing socially well-established characters exercising their power over those socially and/or economically below them. Apart from the four films analysed in this work this theme also appeared in numerous other films in the era in question.[17]

In *Hyppolit, the Butler* it is the title character, Hyppolit, who is being hired by the Schneider household to elevate their social capital, that is to say to assign status to their newly acquired wealth, as Hyppolit had been a butler in the house of a count for 27 years before being employed by the Schneiders. In other terms, the aristocracy's discarded asset is being picked up by the nouveau riche in order to mark him as part of the world of the old money. The same thing happens in *The Ghost Goes West*, when Joe Martin purchases Glourie Castle and transfers it literally from the 'old world' to the 'new world', from Europe to America with the explicit aim of buying into class and social status. In these two cases, thus, the aristocratic assets are seen as socially valuable and desirable for the nouveau riche, who wish to establish their own social status and high position in a class conscious hierarchy by acquiring these assets. Conversely, the aristocrats, or so-called gentries in Hungary, are often bearers only of their titles and have lost their wealth, they are, thus, forced to sell assets of their social capital in exchange for the economic capital of the nouveau riche. (Bourdieu)

[17] See for instance Borrowed Chateau or Villa for Sale

One of the differences from this aspect between the two films, *Hyppolit, the Butler* and *The Ghost Goes West* – as mentioned above – is the person who initiates these transfers: on the one hand, in *Hyppolit, the Butler* it is the lady of the household, Mrs Schneider who aspires for a higher social status and who, therefore, hires the count's old butler, Hyppolit, in the hope that this will lend class to their money. On the other hand, in *The Ghost Goes West* it is clearly under the initiation of Joe Martin that the purchase of Glourie Castle takes place. Furthermore, in this film the practice of buying a castle in Europe and transporting it to the US is presented as a common exercise among the rich, more precisely among the newly rich of America. Martin's business rival Ed Bigelow mentions on the ship transporting Glourie Castle to the US that he recently bought a castle from France's Loire Valley. It is interesting to note that this practice appears in literary works of the inter-war period as well: in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* it is mentioned that Gatsby's lavish mansion is a castle that was transported to the US in a manner similar to Joe Martin's and Ed Bigelow's actions in the film *The Ghost Goes West*.

One area of research worth exploring if this work is indeed overall about the cross cultural nature of humour: in the two societies, that is to say in Britain and in Hungary the figure of the impoverished aristocrat and new owners of an established estate of long standing tradition were not uncommon occurrences. What social, political and economic reasons were there for this phenomenon; moreover, could we establish that this was more generally the case in the one or in the other country? If yes, what does that indicate in terms of cultural transferability? Invariably, the reasons for this were probably different in the two countries: in Hungary the fairly recent collapse of the feudal society, as well as the Paris peace treaty of 1919 left numerous Hungarian aristocrats without an estate. The dzsentrifikáció ('gentryfication') as a phenomenon started after the 1867 treaty with the Habsburg Empire, after which many noblemen slowly started to lose their fortunes, while wishing to maintain their aristocratic lifestyle, which lead to the establishment of a social stratum comprised of noblemen-turned-intellectuals, civil servants or military men, slowly transforming their aristocratic social capital into economic capital. Meanwhile, in Britain the staggering death toll of the First World War caused many estates to lose their heirs, thus inviting newcomers to formerly aristocratic estates.

In *The Ghost Goes West*, however, Donald Glourie is well and alive, the lack of an heir to the estate is not the reason for Glourie Castle to be sold, it is rather the fact that the estate

no longer pays for itself and he is in considerable debt to most of the local merchants. In this respect, Donald Glourie resembles very much the typical Hungarian gentry (or should I write dzsentri to avoid confusion – this refers to the Hungarian class of impoverished aristocrats from the late 19th and of the early 20th Century), a figure appearing in many literary works in Hungary of the time, novels and short stories of Kálmán Mikszáth and Zsigmond Móricz. Donald Glourie from *The Ghost Goes West* shares many character traits with the dzsentri figures portrayed in the works of the two aforementioned Hungarian writers: he is something of a daydreamer, not malevolent but lacking the ability to act responsibly and effectively to save his inheritance. His figure shows the possible reading of cultural transference and further exploring the character of the dzsentri in Hungarian literature and films is needed here to support this argument and draw up parallels between the dzsentri and Donald Glourie's character.

In *Skirts and Trousers* the dichotomy between the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie is manifest mostly in the rivalry between Count Ubul Bolsai and the actor Péter Sóvári. Bolsai is supposed to be a gentry, an impoverished aristocrat, who wishes to restore his – or his family's – former wealth by marrying a rich widow, while at the same time courting the actress Ibolya, with absolutely no intention of marrying her. Conversely, Péter Sóvári, the actor, pretends that he is a scoundrel, though in reality he is in love with Ibolya, and even though she has no dowry or high social status, his aim is to marry her. In this respect this is a moral conflict, where the aristocracy, the old, established order that is associated with respectability in fact represents the morally corrupt side of society, whereas the new order, the entertainment business, which carries the connotations of sleaziness and demimonde immorality, represents moral fibre and respectable conduct in this film. A similar pattern is apparent in *Hyppolit, the Butler*, where it is the representative of the old world and old money, Hyppolit, who tempts Schneider into visiting a nightclub and as a result of a misunderstanding encourages him to patron Mimi, the singer. It is indicated by Hyppolit that the count he had been in the service of before he started working for the Schneiders had been a frequent visitor of the same nightclub and, as he puts it euphemistically, a patron of the arts and artists.

In *Trouble Brewing* this dichotomy is more subtly presented than in the case of the three other films analysed in this work. George, his friend Bill and Mary all clearly represent the working classes, whereas their boss, Brady is shown to be middle class, and it is the two

falsely accused victims of George and Bill – Madame Berdi and Major Hopkins – who may be seen as representing old values and/or old money, an assertion based, as seen in Chapter 4 below, largely on mise-en-scene, including the interior designs of their respective flats. Whereas in the end neither Madame Berdi nor Major Hopkins turn out to be the slushers George, Bill, Mary – and the police – are looking for, they are both suspects and are accordingly punished for their assumed transgressions: Madame Berdi by being unwittingly mildly sexually harassed by George, and Major Hopkins by being severely beaten up by George and Bill repeatedly. Finally, it is, as mentioned elsewhere in this chapter, respectable middle-class Mr Brady who is revealed as the slusher, the meme of moral corruption by someone on a higher rank in society perpetuated not only in the three other films, but in *Trouble Brewing* as well.

Consequently, all four of the films analysed in this chapter converge in raising issues in their narrative involving clashes between various social strata, most prominently between old money and new money. This is manifest in memes including the figures of the impoverished aristocrat and the social-climber nouveau riche; the morally questionable actions of figures from old money background; or romantic attachments between women from a higher rank of society than the men they choose. Furthermore, there has been a strongly gendered aspect to the narrative tropes in the four films, such as iron-willed older women, including Sóvári in drag as Dulcinea; working girls of varying degrees of independence, and questions regarding cross-dressing and ideals of traditional masculinity. Most of these crucial issues are revisited in the following chapter, and it is specifically the latter aspect, that of perceptions of traditional masculinity that will be expanded on below in more detail in Chapter 4, relying on evidence from cinematography, mise-en-scene, editing and sound in the films chosen for analysis.

Chapter 4 – Visual and Aural Aspects (or Textual Aspects) – Cinematography, Mise-en-scene, Editing, Sound

4.1 Introduction, Literature Review and Justification

In Chapter 3 above I have indicated that the narrative elements that show cultural transference most conclusively could be divided largely along the lines of gender and class

by referring to memes found in several of the four films analysed in this thesis, such as the notion of socially unequal romantic relations, or the emergence of petit bourgeois aspirations for grandeur. The aim of this chapter is on the one hand to elaborate these notions further, relying on evidence from visual and aural aspects of the four films; and on the other hand to understand whether the analysis of the various visual and aural elements proposes further conclusive evidence for the cultural transference of Jewish Hungarian comedy traditions.

This chapter below, thus, following on from the previous chapter on narrative aspects, also outlines an aspect of textual analysis with regard to the four films, *Hyppolit, the Butler*; *The Ghost Goes West*; *Trouble Brewing* and *Skirts and Trousers*, chosen for analysis. In this chapter my aim is to present the memes that might indicate cultural transference on the level of visual and aural aspects, and argue how and why this might be so. The aforementioned visual and aural aspects along which I have done comparative textual analysis on the four films include cinematography; mise-en-scene, within that costume and set design; editing, and sound. The debates explored in the chapter follow from the themes and memes I found when conducting the actual textual analyses of the four films, and are structured in a logical order, whereby the argument is built on the subject matters found in the course of the analyses, as well as incorporating some data from previous, preliminary analyses.

Some of the themes of this chapter have already been interrogated in the previous chapter on narrative aspects, and offer further support and additional aspects to explore to these arguments. These themes include the characters of the ladies' men in the films, most notably Murdoch Glourie in *The Ghost Goes West* and Péter Sóvári from *Skirts and Trousers*. In order to explore these two characters, and their womanising ways further, an analysis of the starting scenes of the two films is offered: a short sequence from the prologue of *The Ghost Goes West* and the opening scene from *Skirts and Trousers*, a close textual analysis of which will be presented below. Further themes that carry on from the narrative chapter are cross-dressing; aspects of costume and national identity; the dichotomy between old and new, upper and lower classes, mostly apparent in the mise-en-scene, and specifically the set designs of the interiors of living spaces in the four films in question. The other subjects I aim to explore in this chapter focus on the theatrical nature of the cinematography and the editing of the films and geometrical designs, which all link these films to Jewish theatrical, specifically to pesti kabaré theatre traditions.

As outlined in the Introduction of this thesis, there is a prevailing assumption in academic discourse on British comedy traditions that asserts the value of music hall as the influencing factor in the development of British comedy history. This notion is not contested in the literature used to construct the argumentation for this chapter, most prominently David Sutton's book on British film comedies, *A Chorus of Raspberries: British Film Comedy 1929-1939*, a volume used extensively in the previous as well in the subsequent chapters. Other works on British films, in some cases specifically comedies, like Richard Dacre's article in Robert Murphy's edited collection on British cinema, *The British Cinema Book*, *Traditions of British Comedy* and Mick Eaton's article *Laughter in the Dark*; in other cases on British films and cinema going culture of the era in question, as Jeffrey Richards's book *Age of the Dream Palace*, as well as Andy Medhurst's article *Music Hall and British Cinema* and Robert Murphy's *Coming of Sound to Cinema in Britain*, and relevant chapters from David Quinlan's book on British sound films, also offer no alternative reading. Furthermore, as it is addressed below, there is a consensus in the literature on the Hungarian comedies of the era that link the films to theatrical traditions and aesthetics, a feature also addressed in the academic discourse on British films of the 1930s, although in a markedly different context than what Sutton categorises as either working class or situation comedy in his taxonomy. Jeffrey Richards, for instance, writes about the 'awfulness' of British film within the context of theatricality and middle-class and upper-class appeal (Richards, The Age of the Dream Palace - Cinema and Sociey in Britain 1930-1939 30). Other aspects covered within the academic literature are, amongst others, cinematography, mise-en-scene and editing, which offers a nuanced perception of this era in British film history.

As mentioned in the paragraphs above, one of the most significant notion to explore in this chapter is the theatre-aesthetics of these films, apparent both on the level of cinematography and of mise-en-scene, which is addressed in detail in the literature on Hungarian film and comedy history. These works include journal articles on *Hyppolit the Butler*; a book by István Nemeskürthy on the aesthetics of Hungarian films between 1930 and 1948; and the sections specifically on Hungarian comedies in a comprehensive volume on the nature of the comic gag by Károly Szalay. All of these works, as well as another comprehensive volume, this one on Hungarian films of the 1930s, written by Gyöngyi Balogh and Jenő Király, as well as some contemporary reviews of these films found in the Hungarian Film Archives converge in the consensus that these films were either on a visual and/or an aural level overly theatrical. There is no consensus, though in whether they

condemn this theatricality or hail it as a positive trait, as it will be explored in the paragraphs below.

4.2.1 Mise-en-Scene – Costume: Gender and National Identities

As mentioned in section 3.2 in the Narrative chapter, cross-dressing and questioning the ideals of traditional masculinity are both significant aspects of the narrative constructs of at least two of the films I analyse in this thesis. The films in question are *Skirts and Trousers* and *The Ghost Goes West*, and in the paragraphs below I address specifically the character of the ladies' men who wear skirts in these films, raising questions both about gender identities and about national identities. Both of these topics, gender and national identities have been mentioned in the previous chapter on narrative, it is at this stage, however, supported by evidence from visual and aural elements of these films that I am able to link these memes to each other, as well as to the characters of the cross-dressing womanisers: Péter Sóvári and Murdoch Glourie. As the screen shots below also show, it is mostly the mise-en-scene, but to a certain extent also the cinematography and the editing of the two films that support this argumentation

In order to get a better understanding of these questions, I aim to rely on the findings of an analysis of the opening sequences of the two aforementioned films, with the focus on cinematography, editing and mise-en-scene. I hope to be able to demonstrate how these two films visually and aesthetically represent the two men, Murdoch Glourie and Péter Sóvári, both self-confessed ladies' men; and in what way these representations tap into the ambiguities surrounding gender and national identities. Some of the themes explored in this section include the manner in which visual aspects are used to confirm and at the same time doubt the masculinity of the two characters, and also provide an outlet to express, or mock, national identities through the perceived cross-dressing of Murdoch and Péter.


Figure 4.1


Figure 4.2


Figure 4.3

In spite of some striking differences between the two opening sequences, such as *The Ghost Goes West* using outdoor settings almost throughout the entire sequence, whereas *Skirts and Trousers* is set indoors the whole way through, various elements of the two support the idea that the two films challenge notions of traditional masculinity in very similar ways, suggesting the possibility of cultural transference. As the aim of this section is precisely to see how the representations of traditional masculinity are challenged in *The Ghost Goes West* and in *Skirts and Trousers*, I start by trying to establish in what way the masculinity of Murdoch Glourie's and Péter Sóvári's characters are doubted or challenged in their representations in the film. One of the significant notions in this argumentation is that although the visual representation of the two men is very similar (see figures 4.1 and 4.2), the social status and perception of their (similar, and similarly presented) behaviour is very different in the two films.

On the one hand, in 18th Century Scotland a man who is interested in a lot of women seems not to be taken seriously, he is perhaps even considered effeminate, as this means he is reluctant to fight in a war, which in that context, at least according to the film, measured the true extent of a man's masculinity. Murdoch's representation, though, is more complex than merely a weak man: during his first conversation with the shepherdess he is seen from a low-angle shot, from the point of view of the shepherdess, showing him in an upright position, suggesting perhaps stamina added to his gentle nature. On the other hand, in the mid-20th Century urban context of *Skirts and Trousers*, the same degree of womanising is seen is rather fulfilling and is approved by other men. In this context it is the female characters who voice their doubts: Kamilla, Ibolya's dresser and friend remarks 'Are you mad? Do you really want to go out with an actor? A man who smears make up on his face night after night?'[18] when Ibolya brings up Sóvári in conversation. There are, consequently, two possible readings to Murdoch Glourie's character changing in the 20th Century part of the film: it could be either the changing times that make Murdoch's perception change, that is to say, he is feared and awed because he has been hardened by having roamed Glourie Castle as a ghost for centuries; or as an alternative reading, possibly the characteristics of the ladies' man have been re-evaluated by a 20th Century society, and he is no longer considered effeminate, as he was in the 18th Century Scottish setting.

[18] 4.45 into the film; all translations, unless indicated, are by me.

Despite the fact that unlike Péter Sóvári, Murdoch Glourie is not deliberately dressed as a woman, he merely happens to be wearing the kilt he was wearing the day he died, the nature of his garments might be indicative of the ambiguities surrounding his role as the male heir to the Glourie clan. The fact that he is technically wearing a skirt, therefore, a notion so prominently featured in *Skirts and Trousers*, could be seen as a deliberate choice, and certainly a meme: whereas Murdoch sets out on his journey from Glourie Castle on horseback wearing tartan trousers, when we see him in the next shot near the battlefield, he is wearing a kilt. This, in itself is perhaps not considered special in the context of the battle and the army, where the soldiers wear the tartan of their clans, when juxtaposed with the 20th Century setting, it gains significance, endowing the wear with specific connotations evoking both a national identity, and a cross-dressing quality. It is perhaps my own cultural upbringing that evokes femininity and skirts in the context of Scottish national wear, specifically in case of kilts, even though I am aware that it is by no means a skirt. One indication of why this could be the case is that in Hungarian the term for kilt is 'Scottish skirt'. Therefore in the context of this analysis I argue that if a gun can be a phallic symbol, than so can a kilt be a cross-dressing symbol. Even Péter Sóvári, in mid-20th Century Hungary wears a tartan dressing gown (see figure 4.3), further linking the two men together visually.

Earlier I mentioned not only the gender connotations of cross-dressing, but also the – potentially problematic – ways in which they form or represent national identities. This is perhaps more straightforward in case of *The Ghost Goes West*, where several visual and aural clues allude to the representation of a perceived Scottish identity that ranges from the image of the ancient castle to the sheep, the figure of the elderly housekeeper with her grey hair in a bun and to the tartan kilts worn by the men. These are all memes that come up in stereotypical representations of Scotland, including, for instance, in a cartoon created for a popular Hungarian children's song (see figures 4.4, 4.5 and 4.6). This song, incidentally, sums up some of the ambiguities interrogated in this section of the chapter in its chorus: 'A real man is always stern, a real man wears a skirt'[19] But just as there are ambiguities surrounding Murdoch's 'real man'-ness, there are also ambiguities and problematic aspects in the representations of Scottish national identities. Whereas it perpetuates stereotypes both in terms of the aforementioned visual elements and in terms of narrative elements, such as the feuds between the various clans: when Murdoch goes into battle and says 'I

[19] A badly translated and terribly pronounced English version of the song can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s2u31glxeyc, about 12.20 minutes in.

thought I was supposed to fight the English', to which his father replies 'You're a Glourie, you must fight the McLaggen first.'; only relatively few of the characters speak with genuine-sounding Scottish accents. This is the case both in the 18th and in the 20th Century settings, and they do not include any of the Glouries seen on screen. In spite of the claims of Robert Donat's biographer, that 'His Scots accent passes muster' (Barrow), as far as my untrained ear can hear Kevin Glourie, as well as both Murdoch and Donald Glourie speak with RP English.


Figure 4.4


Figure 4.5


Figure 4.6

Perhaps even more problematic than the stereotypical representations of Scottish national identity in *The Ghost Goes West* are the representations of an over-simplified Spanish national identity in *Skirts and Trousers*. This is most prominent in Sóvári's cross-dressing characterisation of the Spanish widow Dulcinea Juarez as a cigar-smoking, dreary, masculine woman, who, as Sóvári says himself, he plays without changing his voice or his mannerisms, blaming these qualities repeatedly on the widow being of Spanish origin. In the final showdown, where Sóvári reveals himself to Bolsai, having proved his point, the source of the comedy comes from the Spanish national dress Sóvári is wearing. It is already seen as rather outrageous that he is wearing this elaborate costume by the other diners in the hotel's restaurant, but as the scene progresses, it is revealed that the real Dulcinea Juarez, her companion, as well as Ibolya's friend Kamilla are also all dressed in the same garments. This scene, then, quickly escalates into a slapstick-style chasing sequence through the hotel corridors. The fact that they are all wearing the same dress, which is a symbol of a national identity, and are then running around in them means the film uses this symbol for comedic purposes, problematizing these representations of national identity further (see figures 4.7 and 4.8).

Figure 4.7

Figure 4.8

There are also a number of similarities in the costume and make-up choices of the leading women in the films, mostly in *Hyppolit, the Butler* and *The Ghost Goes West*, specifically

in case of Terka, the daughter of the Schneiders and Peggy Martin respectively[20]. This, naturally, may partly be due to current fashion trends of the 1930s; both of them, however, seem less sexualised in their appearance – wearing less make-up and less revealing clothes – than other, contemporary female leads. They both wear nude shades of lipstick as opposed to flaming or dark tones and their eyes are shaded with simple eye-liners. Furthermore, in both films there are two key sequences when the romantic female leads wear light, frilly, short-sleeved dresses with ruffles around the neckline and the edges. Both the choice of these specific dresses and the scenes in which they are worn suggest that it might be isolated as a meme, and as such, it seems present in these two films.

In *Hyppolit, the Butler* the scenes in question are firstly, when Terka and her love interest István Benedek have their first dialogue scene together without the presence of her parents, she is wearing a short-sleeved dress made of light, frilly fabric that enters the dialogue when Benedek remarks on it and describes it as 'simple, nice and yet so feminine'; and secondly, in the final ball-scene she is wearing an all-white sleeveless, similarly light and frilly dress. In the latter scene one may argue that the whiteness of her garment is in contrast with the plain black dress worn by bar singer Mimi, offering the bluntly straightforward interpretation of virginal white as opposed to blemished black. In *The Ghost Goes West* a similar – and similarly direct – interpretation offers itself in, once again, the final scene of the film, when Peggy, who believes in and sympathises with the ghost, is wearing a delicate white dress, while sceptical Miss Shepperton (Elsa Lanchester) is wearing a simple black frock. The other scene in question when Peggy wears a similar garment, a night gown, takes place during the night she spends at Glourie Castle in Scotland, the first time she meets Murdoch, the ghost. In both films, thus, the garments are seen when the female lead meets her love interest the first time within the diegesis, or the first time by herself in *Hyppolit, the Butler*; and in scenes where her virtues are contrasted with other, morally or ethically questionable women.

The use of another particular item of clothing, more specifically an accessory that plays a small, but significant role in the two films mentioned above is isolated here as a meme. In both *Hyppolit, the Butler* and in *The Ghost Goes West* characters who express disagreeable

[20] See section 3.2 in the Narrative Chapter for more detailed argumentation on this.

sophistication: Hyppolit himself in *Hyppolit, the Butler* and Ed Bigelow in *The Ghost Goes West* wear monocles. They are both figures of authority who, either with their sophisticated taste or with their sophisticated scepticism, are a source of disapproval and unpleasantness for the main characters. Furthermore, in *Hyppolit, the Butler* and *The Ghost Goes West* similar low-angle shots are used to indicate the threatening presence of Hyppolit on the one hand and, this time rather than Bigelow, Kevin Glourie and Murdoch on the other.

4.2.2 Mise-en-Scene – Set Design: The Dichotomy of Old vs New

Another aspect that has been mentioned in the previous chapter is the way class conflicts are linked to, simplified as, and presented in the form of a dichotomy between old and new, the aristocracy versus the bourgeoisie. By looking at the mise-en-scene, and specifically the set designs, the interiors of the flats, hotel rooms, houses and offices, it seems that all four films share, to a certain degree, this particular aspect. Getting the proof and confirmation of this argument, presented in the previous chapter, from the visual aspects of the films leads me in the section below to compare the set designs of the four films, while also examining the possible differences. As seen in the section below, the mise-en-scene of the interiors of these flats, houses and other spaces offer both narrative and comedic value.

The interior of the Schneiders' villa resembles Glourie Castle both regarding the large spaces, the at first old-fashioned, rural and somewhat dilapidated furniture before Hyppolit's makeover and the transportation and renovation of Glourie Castle; and the subsequent, newly acquired antique furniture in both houses after their refurbishment or renovation. In their new states, both houses display similar, baroque style paintings on the walls, and even the large, heavy curtains are alike in pattern and in style. There are also similarities between the two later films, *Trouble Brewing* and *Skirts and Trousers*, both in terms of the interiors of flats and in terms of the layout of more official and impersonal spaces, like the hotel lobby in *Skirts and Trousers* and the reception area of the newspaper where George and the other characters work in *Trouble Brewing*.

Madame Berdi, the opera singer who George and Bill suspect of being part of the gang of slushers in *Trouble Brewing*, organises a party in one of the scenes of the film. In this sequence George and Bill pretend they are waiters to gain access to her home and walk around the rooms in search of evidence. This gives a chance for the camera to explore the flat, the interior design of which is presented as a feminine and upscale place: both the structure of the flat, with the servants' quarters, the kitchen and Madame Berdi's large bedroom, and the props suggest wealth, and the colour scheme, as far as it can be told from a black and white picture, as well as the flowery patterns emphasize the owner's feminine style, especially in case of Madame Berdi's bedroom or boudoir, which is cluttered with these tokens of a woman's wealth, creating an almost overly feminine style, bordering on kitsch. The same can be told of Ibolya's flat in *Skirts and Trousers*: the neo-baroque style furniture, the large drapes and the several bunches of flowers also allude to a bourgeois, feminine home (see figure 4.9).


Figure 4.9

Similarly, the interior of Major Hopkins's flat, whom George and Bill also suspect of being in the slusher gang, and whose flat they outright break into, is a bourgeois, though somewhat more modest home than Madame Berdi's. The furniture is dark and old-fashioned, and the armchairs and large bureau suggest they are used rather for practical than for presentable purposes. Even though Sóvári is an actor and as the many mirrors in both his dressing room and his home suggest appearances matter to him, a scene in his flat with his valet, Zsiga, show that the props used in the interior of his place are similar to the interior of Major Hopkins's flat in the dark, old fashioned and practical quality of the furniture (see figures 4.10, 4.11 for *Trouble Brewing* and 4.12 for *Skirts and Trousers*).


Figure 4.10


Figure 4.11

The interior of the flat of the engineer/chauffeur character from *Hyppolit, the Butler*, István Benedek, however, resembles both the feminine qualities seen in Madame Berdi's and Ibolya's flats, with its frilly curtains, and Major Hopkins's and Péter Sóvári's flats with its dark, antique looking furniture and large, practical bureau (see figure 4.13.). Furthermore, it is the office space of the Schneiders' company, rather than their home, which resembles the interiors of the above mentioned flats: the shades and shapes of the furniture, the scattered papers and binders all suggest that the office, while old fashioned and not extravagantly furnished, is used well and practically (see figure 4.14.).


Figure 4.12


Figure 4.13


Figure 4.14

As mentioned both elsewhere in this chapter and in the previous chapter on narrative, one of the important memes of this thesis is the contrast between old and new, between old

money and new money. This is a parallel that runs through *Hyppolit the Butler* and *The Ghost Goes West* most prominently, and has been examined from other aspects, but in this instance I will compare the mise-en-scene, more specifically the props and sets used in the two films. The aforementioned duality showing the differences and discrepancies between old and new, between what is perceived as valuable and what as trite, as well as within the issues of class, expanded on in Chapter 3, is represented on a visual level in the mise-en-scene of both *Hyppolit, the Butler*, and in *The Ghost Goes West*.

In *Hyppolit, the Butler* this feature is most prominent in the change of the interior design of the Schneider villa: after Hyppolit's arrival, and with his expert help, Mrs Schneider re-decorates the interior, which is not only shown on a visual level, but is also alluded to by Mátyás Schneider, when he bitterly remarks that they threw out what he refers to as 'his antique furniture'. The difference is shown both in terms of the set design, with new, grander, lighter furniture replacing the old-fashioned, dark ones; and in terms of the lighting of the subsequent scenes: whereas before the re-decoration (figure 4.15) the lighting was more high key and the spaces are seen evenly lit, afterwards (figure 4.16), perhaps as a result of the new chandeliers, it shows more contrast, more shadows.


Figure 4.15


Figure 4.16

The same effect can be seen in the pre-decoration and post-decoration meal time scenes of the film. Before Hyppolit's arrival and before his changing the interior design of the villa the Schneiders are seen eating dinner in their ordinary clothes, sitting beside a simply laid table, eating – as the dialogue informs us – goose leg, with thickly sliced bread as well as some water and a bottle of beer visible on the table, and Schneider somewhat scruffy in his napkin tucked in his collar and his jacket slung on the back of the chair (see figure 4.17). Contrastingly, in the subsequent scenes depicting meal times, including the dinner just after Schneider arrives home to find it re-decorated, they are wearing formal clothes, with various props arranged aesthetically, rather than practically on the table. As Gyöngyi Balogh and Király Jenő put it, Schneider is 'wandering around like a stranger in his own home, which is swarmed with uncomfortable decorative furniture and pictures that nobody looks at.' They claim that comfort, in this context, is subordinated to 'an arsenal of uselessness' (Balogh and Király 133). This idea is also seen in the costume choices: in the same speech where Schneider laments the loss of his beloved furniture, he expresses outrage at the idea of wearing an evening dress in honour of his beef goulash. The scene then cuts to Schneider in his room, who is seen struggling with putting on his evening dress. This visual gag not only establishes the power relations between the Hyppolit – Mrs Schneider versus Mr Schneider fronts, but also serves as a motivation for showing further sequences of breakfasts (see figure 4.18) and dinners with a formally-clothed but uncomfortable Mr Schneider.


Figure 4.17


Figure 4.18

Similarly to *Hyppolit, the Butler*, The *Ghost Goes West* also shows the dichotomy between old and new in the mise-en-scene both on the level of set design as well as on the level of costumes. Glourie Castle goes through three distinct stages of set design changes throughout the film, and if possible, even more spectacular ones than the mere one transformation of the Schneider villa in *Hyppolit, the Butler*. During the film's prologue, Glourie Castle is depicted as a grand Scottish castle with a lavish fireplace, sturdy stairs, solid furniture, chandeliers and crossbeams (see figure 4.19). Far from being an expert in 18th Century Scottish architecture, based on my knowledge and the stereotypes of both the era and the place in question, however, it seems accurately the grand castle one may imagine. When the scene dissolves into the 20th Century setting, the entire exterior of the set, down to the bridge leading to the castle, is seen to have transformed into a dilapidated, disintegrating place: the sides of the bridge show incomplete, bent, rusty handrails, after

which there is a close up of a torn, sloping 'for sale' sign; laundry is hanging from washing lines outside the gates; and various domestic animals and poultry are seen in the moat and around the castle in one of the long, establishing shots. Laundry on washing lines is also visible in the interior of the castle, as the camera, along with Peggy, discovers the place (see figure 4.20). As opposed to the rather empty space in the 18th Century setting, this set is cluttered with props, which look more like knick-knacks found at a junkshop than the furniture of a grand, aristocratic castle. Donald Glourie even points out in the dialogue that some of the furniture and architecture of the castle is 'falling to pieces and are in need of repair'.

The first shot of Glourie Castle, rebuilt stone by stone and panel by panel, in Florida is a very similarly framed long, establishing shot to the ones showing it in their 18th and 20th Century settings. Again, the difference is shown in the details, such as the palm trees of all sizes surrounding the castle and the Caribbean- style rendition of 'O Sole Mio' in the soundtrack, as well, this time, as the tone of the lighting: while in both Scottish settings the establishing shots of Glourie Castle were more low key, the establishing shot in its Florida setting is high key and shows the castle in bright light. The brightness of the castle itself is referenced in a later scene, when a bright, white cake-replica of the castle is wheeled in on a trolley (figure 4.21). The rest of the interior, again, corresponds with the establishing shot of the castle's exterior, with well-polished knights' armours that have radios in them and various tropical plants and bunches of flowers all over the castle.

While the first, 18th Century set was depicted drawing on stereotypical images of a Scottish castle, almost to the extent that it could have been lifted from the illustrations of a children's book, the second, 20th Century setting uses the mise-en-scene both for comedic purposes, as well as to provide narrative motivation on the one hand for the selling of Glourie Castle, on the other hand for its refurbishment. The third setting, in Florida, similarly to the discrepancies between Hyppolit's aristocratic mannerisms and Schneider's petty bourgeois habits, could be seen to serve as criticism of the vulgarity of the nouveau riche. The aforementioned soundtrack of the Caribbean version of 'O Sole Mio' during the establishing long shot of Glourie Castle rebuilt in Florida is the first instance of what will serve as a number of running gags: firstly, Mr Martin mixing up various European

traditions and cultures, exclaiming that bringing a gondola to the castle served the purpose of adding a 'European touch'; secondly, the theme of the Caribbean musicians, who will be seen later playing 'traditional Scotch music' in kilts; and thirdly, the addition of modern implements to antique artefacts. The implication that Joe Martin, the nouveau riche, is an ignorant man is subtle in the film, as no characters pass direct judgement on him or on these activities; nevertheless, the incredulity in Peggy's voice as she asks about the gondolas, as well as Donald's hesitation, and later his confession – albeit to a Peggy who cannot hear him – of his dislike of the renovated castle, imply a critical approach.

Again, as it was the case in *Hyppolit, the Butler*, it is not only the mise-en-scene, but also the costumes that highlight the discrepancies between the aristocracy and the petty bourgeoisie in *The Ghost Goes West*. Furthermore, in case of the latter film, it is not only this discrepancy, but also issues of national identity that are in the focus of the argument; connected, to a certain extent, to the arguments presented above on gender and national identity. Both Mr Martin and the aforementioned Caribbean musicians, who can be seen coming down the stairs playing Caribbean music, wear kilts and traditional Scottish clothes. The mixing up of various traditions in such a way, especially after Mr Martin's introduction of the music as Scottish, as well as the above mentioned running gags and Mr Martin's perfect confidence in these transgressions, suggests that he, as a nouveau riche, is uncultured and unrefined, as opposed to Donald, who is poor, or a 'pauper' as he calls himself elsewhere in the film, but does not care for Mr Martin's vulgar ways of modernisation and would have preferred to leave matters undisturbed.


Figure 4.19


Figure 4.20


Figure 4.21

4.3.1 Theatricality in Mise-en-Scene

The aforementioned scene where a white miniature replica-cake of Glourie Castle is wheeled in at the opening ceremony does not only reference the bright, perhaps vulgar quality of the renovated castle, but also offers an opportunity to use this whiteness to contrast with the dark costumes, and more prominently with the dark drapes seen in the foreground of the picture. As seen in the screen shot above (figure 4.21), *The Ghost Goes West*, as well as to a certain extent all the other three of the four films, uses either props or parts of the set to create artificial framing for some of the scenes. This, as well as a tendency to use geometrical designs and patterns in the mise-en-scene, suggest a varying

degree of theatrical quality to the films. Whereas many of the Hungarian critics and scholars of this era (including the majority of the authors whose works are used in the writing of this chapter, such as István Nemeskürthy and Károly Szalay) dismiss notions of theatrical qualities to a film as bad practice, I desire to pass no judgement, but merely to make observations of this feature where it may be linked to cultural transference of any kind.

Three of the four films, namely *Hyppolit, the Butler*, *The Ghost Goes West* and *Skirts and Trousers* frequently use this device of utilising the mise-en-scene, specifically certain aspects of the interior designs of the sets to provide framing to the scenes, but, as figure 4.22 shows, it is also not absent from *Trouble Brewing*. Regardless of whether the films use more or less dynamic camera movements, it seems a common feature that could be isolated as a meme. In this section of the chapter I will point to some evidence found in the films, relying heavily on the screen shots to support my argumentation. The argument itself is a fairly basic one: evidence suggests that this is a meme and it can be pointed out in all of the films in question, furthermore, I argue that it is a meme that links the films to theatrical traditions and practices, mainly because of the visual clues of providing an extra frame within the picture frame to various scenes. The reason for the text – screen shot ratio in this section tipping so heavily in favour of screen shots, leaving little explanatory sections of text is that the images selected from the films are self-explanatory in this sense. So what I aim do is provide sort of captions for these images, expanding on the theatrical nature of the four films in more detail in the section below.


Figure 4.22


Figure 4.23

In figures 4.22 and 4.23, from *Trouble Brewing* and *The Ghost Goes West*, respectively, it is window frames and door frames that provide the frame-within-the-frame. The stone structures, as well as the multiple horizontal and vertical lines, the small balcony and the window frame in *Trouble Brewing*, and the steps in *The Ghost Goes West* create an even more geometrically explicit design in both films. Another similarity is that they both show the characters in medium long shot with their backs to the audience, composed in the middle of the frame, though in *Trouble Brewing* George's figure is composed somewhat to the left in the frame. Two variations of the same theme, or indeed the same meme, are seen in two scenes, shown here in the screen shots, from *Hyppolit, the Butler* (figures 4.24 and 4.25). In figure 4.24, a screen shot grabbed from the scene when Schneider goes to the nightclub to see Mimi, rather than being framed with concrete or stone panels, Schneider is framed by the metal poles of the booth he is sitting in. He is seen in medium shot, but rather than facing away, he is facing towards the camera. In another scene, when he is seen returning to his house that had been refurbished in his absence (figure 4.25), he is seen in a medium long shot with his back to the camera, similar to the scenes seen above in *Trouble Brewing* and *The Ghost Goes West*, only Schneider, as opposed to George Gullip and Murdoch Glourie, who are framed with the structures of the buildings they are in (or out of), he is framed by a lamp and a house plant in the foreground in the picture.


Figure 4.24


Figure 4.25

In *Skirts and Trousers* there are also numerous scenes where either parts of the set or certain props serve as framing devices, and in one sequence in particular it is a combination of the set and one of the characters that frame the scene. The reason I chose this particular sequence is on the one hand because it combines elements from the aforementioned framing devices seen in the other films, rendering it not just a representative example of this feature, but also a meme that, on the other hand takes the usage of this tool further by using both the foreground, the frame, and the background, the scene that is framed, on a narrative level, effectively replicating this meme. The scene in question takes place in the hotel where both Bolsai and Sóvári as Dulcinea are staying, specifically in the lobby, and shows Ibolya and Bolsai's reconciliation. The character who provides the right side of the frame around them is Kálmán, Sóvári's friend and director at the theatre, who is in a phone booth according to the narrative, spying on the couple and reporting to Sóvári through the phone. His figure in the foreground, out of focus, with telephone receiver in hand, and what is presumably the door of the phone booth, also out of

focus, serve, thus, to frame the scene in the lobby, which is in the background but in focus. Both of these layers of the image, thus, have narrative function, in which case the framing of the scene is not merely an aesthetic feature that might be seen as theatrical in its nature, evoking the image of curtains on each side of the stage, but a narrative device as well.


Figure 4.26

Framing, however, is not the only visual aspect that evokes theatricality in the mise-en-scene of the films. As the below images show, geometrical shapes are part of the set designs of some of the films: round in case of the two Hungarian films (figures 4.27 and 4.28), and straight, angular in case of *The Ghost Goes West* (figure 4.29) and *Trouble Brewing* (seen above in figure 4.22). These features could also be seen to evoke aesthetic connotations of German expressionist cinema, suggesting further cultural transference; whereas the stage itself, the artificial nature of theatre sets and, once again, the presence of the curtains all connect this notion to the geometrical nature of theatrical set designs. In case of *Hyppolit, the Butler* and *Skirts and Trousers*, the round shapes are the dance floors and resemble the stage, especially in historical theatre (ancient Greek and Roman theatre, Shakespearean theatre), where the theatre itself was round in shape, while some set design choices in *The Ghost Goes West* evoke both the artificial nature of theatrical sets and the shape of the modern theatre stage.


Figure 4.27


Figure 4.28


Figure 4.29

4.3.2 Theatricality in Editing and Cinematography

In the below section I shall be isolating and pointing out memes relating to cinematography and editing, including lighting, shot lengths and camera movements, which may be indicative of cultural transference. The most notable common feature of the films, as mentioned above, is that to a varying degree they all reflect theatrical traditions, especially with regard to the editing of dialogues, as well as a tendency for framing scenes with natural or artificial objects, as seen above, such as plants, architectural structures or curtains. The use of only a limited number of shots, ranging from medium shot to medium long shot, with the exception of occasional long shots, may be indicative of the aforementioned theatrical influence; this technique might, however, be due to the general cinematographic tendencies and technological limitations of the era, similarly to the mainly monochromic lighting technique and the extensive – though not exclusive – use of continuity editing. In an argument that sums up some of these aspects Gyöngyi Balogh and Jenő Király quote Károly Szalay and his term "static set-style" (Szalay 249 in Balogh and Király 66), which refers to the same theatrical-style of film making in these comedies that are also reflected in my analysis of these films: where the characters walk in and out of the sets with relatively little camera movement or editing involved.

One of the reasons why it seems highly likely that this aspect, that is to say the overall theatrical nature of the cinematography and the editing of the films is not just a 'default' or that it should not be accounted for because the fact that these are old films and therefore probably cinematography and editing were not even that well-developed yet, is because actually both of the Hungarian films in question follow this tradition. To clarify: *Hyppolit, the Butler* was made and released in the early 1930s, whereas *Skirts and Trousers* in the mid-1940s. There is more than a decade between the making of these two films, during which time films like *Citizen Kane* and other films featuring scenes in deep focus were released, and even when we look at Hungarian comedies made during that decade, the tendency to use this kind of theatrical style is not as homogenous as to explain its use more than ten years later. *Borrowed Chateau* from the late 1930s, for instance, is more dynamic both in terms of camera movements and in terms of editing than *Skirts and Trousers*, released half a decade later. Therefore the fact that *Hyppolit, the Butler* and *Skirts and Trousers* show significant similarities in terms of the static set-style and the static nature of

the shots, the way people walk in and out of the frame, the way dialogues are framed, with both or all parties in the frame, instead of shot – reverse shot sequences, may indicate that this can be isolated as a meme.

This seems, thus, decidedly as a result of stylistic choices, therefore, as mentioned above it is possible that this device can be isolated as a meme, and as a meme it is also present in *The Ghost Goes West*, most notably in the dialogue sequences between Murdoch Glourie and Peggy Martin. This is especially significant, as the dialogue sequences between Donald and Peggy are edited into shot –reverse shot sequences. This is most notable in a scene where Donald and Peggy are traveling on the ship to America, which also transports parts of Glourie Castle on it, including the ghost of Murdoch. In one sequence when Donald and Peggy are on the deck, sitting on deckchairs on the deck of the ship in the evening of the fancy dress ball, talking, the sequence is cut up into establishing long shot, medium close up shot – reverse shot sequences. A few moments later, while Peggy is standing alone at a different part of the deck, Murdoch comes and stands beside her, and after a brief original establishing medium close up shot and a break in the 180 rule, they remain in another medium close up shot throughout the short conversation (see figures 4.30 and 4.31).

Apart from indicating the presence of this meme, the sequence raises another question: why is the 180 degree rule broken? In *Skirts and Trousers* this editing quirk is used only once for comic purpose at the end of the film, during the climatic chase sequence with the three Spanish widows. In *The Ghost Goes West*, however, a break in the 180 degree rule mostly occurs during dialogue sequences between Peggy and Murdoch, and on one occasion between Peggy and Donald, while Donald is dressed as Murdoch and Peggy actually believes him to be Murdoch. In this film, therefore, it is not used for comic relief as in *Skirts and Trousers*, but, as it only happens in the presence, or perceived presence of the ghost, it functions as an alienating or distancing tool, breaking the fabric of continuity editing, connecting this decidedly cinematic feature to theatre traditions, specifically to Brechtian Epic theatre. (Brecht)


Figure 4.30


Figure 4.31

Certain sequences in *Trouble Brewing* also reveal the presence of the previous meme, the one regarding the theatrical nature of the editing. This might be seen as significant, as *Trouble Brewing* is, in a way, the odd one out of the four films, both in terms of cinematography and in terms of editing. While the other three films, *Hyppolit, the Butler*, *The Ghost Goes West* and *Skirts and Trousers* all have similarities regarding some of the visual aspects, such as the low key lighting, with occasional chiaroscuro effect; the varying degree of static or stationary use of the camera; and also shot lengths, which are the longest in the two Hungarian films, with few cuts, but also relatively long in *The Ghost Goes West*. As opposed to these, *Trouble Brewing* operates with high key lighting, very dynamic camera movements and fast-paced continuity editing. In this context it is understandable that the fact that most interactions between George and Mary in *Trouble Brewing* are shot in medium shots, with both characters framed in the picture, not edited into shot-reaction shot sequences but left uncut, can be seen as the same meme as that in the three other films, and therefore indicates cultural transference.

This meme does not have to indicate a connection, it might also be the case that filming prospective lovers had a tradition or convention of being framed together in an unedited medium shot sequence, rather than being cut as a shot-reaction shot piece. The fact that there is no reference to this tendency in the literature concerning the films of this era might indicate, however, that these concerns regarding the theatrical nature of the cinematography and editing of films, are lacking specifically from British film history discourse concerning comedies. Therefore, the fact that this is consistently the case in all four films selected for analysis is an indicator or some form of cultural transference, and/or the manifestation of the static set-style and theatrical nature of certain types of film comedy. Why, then, is *Trouble Brewing* so much more dynamic in terms of cinematography and editing than the three other films? So un-theatrical in this sense, so much more 'filmic', to use humour-historian Károly Szalay's term (Szalay)? Especially since George Formby, as David Sutton argues (Sutton 120), comes straight from the music hall and brings his act, his stage-persona with him from the halls to the screen. There seems to be, thus, a discrepancy here between the director – and claimed directorial style – of René Clair, who directed *The Ghost Goes West*, with its theatrical cinematography and editing, and *Trouble Brewing*, the alleged vehicle for the music hall star, displaying a more dynamic, 'filmic' visual style. Is this style, however, something to be measured? If yes, how, and how is it relevant?

Károly Szalay argues that after 1938 Hungarian films 'attempted to free themselves from being bound by the limitations of theatricality' (Szalay 254). If we extended this to European cinema, this, however, could imply that somehow it was time, the development of technologies and apparatus, or changes in styles of filming that could be responsible for the emergence of more dynamic visual styles in the late 1930s and early 1940s. I disagree with this notion, because whereas it would be true in case of *Trouble Brewing*, marking it out as different, more dynamic visually, it would not explain why *Skirts and Trousers*, made four years later, still displays the same theatrical visual style as *Hyppolit the Butler* more than a decade before. It seems more plausible that this visual theatricality is a deliberate style, perpetuated by the Hungarian film comedies of the 1930s and early 1940s, rather than a universal visual style of an era that is followed by the next.

Furthermore, rather than providing a definition of what this theatrical visual style consists of, and how it differs from a more dynamic, 'filmic' style, Szalay merely enlists where the action in the films he examines takes place. This list in itself, however, is no indicator of theatricality. The crucial difference between *Trouble Brewing* and the three other films lie, rather, in the comedic style of the films, which, in turn, influences the visual styles. *Trouble Brewing* is an action-packed almost slapstick style comedy, whereas the other three are more placid in their tempo, as well as being more static in their visual styles.

Hyppolit, the Butler and *Skirts and Trousers* are so static, in fact, that in most scenes the camera is placed in one position, encompassing most of the set from either a front-facing or a slight angle, with one or more of the characters already in position. When another character enters the set, he or she is usually not followed by the camera but walks straight into his or her assigned position. Most dialogues and group-scenes are filmed in one single medium long shot, and even when they are edited they display no more than three angles: an establishing medium long shot and a medium shot – reverse shot sequence. *The Ghost Goes West* is also filmed mainly in medium and medium long shots; most of these shots, however, are more dynamic than those in *Hyppolit, the Butler*. In the majority of dialogues and especially the group scenes in *The Ghost Goes West* when a character enters the frame he or she is invariably followed by the camera, and, as opposed to *Hyppolit, the Butler* and *Skirts and Trousers*, these scenes are not static: when the characters are shown in a medium long shot, they move within the frame and their motions are, once more, followed by camera movements.

The shots in *Hyppolit, the Butler* invariably range from medium shot to medium long shot with no long shots and with only three close-ups, all of which indicate visual gags and/or have narrative function. The opening shot is a relatively long take of cars stuck in traffic, the camera taking only the lowest parts and the wheels for comic effect: it is the main character, Schneider's horse-drawn cart that is blocking the road for modern automobiles, as the horses refuse to move. Later, when Hyppolit, the butler has comfortably settled in the Schneider-villa, he takes upon himself the task to administer Mrs Schneider's slimming diet. The second close-up is of her and her trainer doing exercises (see figure 4.32), only

showing the bare legs of the two women wearing training shorts. A similar shot of Peggy playing table-tennis can be seen in *The Ghost Goes West.* The close-up, once more, leads to a visual gag showing a small dog that is running around Peggy's legs underneath the ping-pong table, eventually causing Peggy to trip and fall (see figure 4.33) The third close-up in the film is towards the end of the film, when Benedek offers to give a lift to Mimi, the bar singer and it is Terka who gets into his car instead, disguised in a large fur coat. The close-up is of her shoes, indicating both to the audience and to Benedek, whose subjective angle the close-up is shot from, that it is not Mimi but Terka who sits in the car.


Figure 4.32


Figure 4.33

The most dynamic sequence of *Hyppolit, the Butler* is the bar scene with Mimi, the above mentioned cabaret singer. She is first shown from a high-angle medium shot, which gradually widens throughout the song into the only long shot of the film (see figure 4.27),

shown from the subjective angle of Schneider. When the shot is reversed, he is shown from a medium shot, framed by the metal poles of booth he is sitting in (see figure 4.24). The extensive use of medium, American and medium long shots, as well as the static nature of the camera, as well as the use of external, geometrical figures to frame the characters as seen in section 4.3.1, thus, indicate a strong theatrical influence, which – albeit certain ones somewhat less manifest – are apparent in the other films of this analysis.

Gyöngyi Balogh and Jenő Király mention this aspect of Hungarian comedies of the era in question in their volume on the genre and stylistic history of Hungarian films between 1929 and 1936 (Balogh and Király 66), and appropriate it to prudishness or a sense of false modesty. Balogh and Király specifically refer to the manner in which Hungarian comedies in the time period in question use static, contained shots. They refer to István Nemeskürthy (I. I.-1. Nemeskürthy) in their argument, according to whom the audience only wish to look at the stars of the films and understand the narrative, therefore showing relatively short sequences performed in front of a stationary camera are in the benefit of the viewers. In his 1937 theoretical work on the psychology of film, film theorist Béla Balogh (B. Balogh) argues that "the movement of the picture is not created by the director panning, tilting and dollying after the action all over the place." Moreover, he identifies film montage as the only source of psychological action. Gyöngyi Balogh and Jenő Király further both Nemeskürthy's argument that the audience's only aim is to revel in the stars' image and Béla Balogh's view on montage when they link close ups, or rather the lack of them, to the prudishness or assumed modesty of the audience. They claim that close up shots are neither dramatic nor conflicting in their purpose, but serve to bring the actors' faces closer to the audience; which, however, should remain a privilege, akin to the privilege of nudity.

The use of close up shots in *Skirts and Trousers* could be seen to support this argument: the only close up shot to appear in the film is the closing image of Sóvári and Ibolya embracing, their faces side by side, smiling at the camera. The way they embrace, however, seems neither intimate nor for their own benefit: their faces are side by side, they do not look or smile at each other, but rather at where a fictional audience might be. Kenneth Barrow perpetuates this idea that close up shots are a way to offer intimacy to the

audience when he argues while writing about *Perfect Strangers* (1945; known as *Vacation from Marriage* in the US) in his biography of Robert Donat that Donat purposefully asked for close up shots to finish his films with. He says that

> It was the star's prerogative to have the final close-up and Robert understood the power of such a moment, always wanting to leave his audience with a tender memory of him. (Barrow 143)


Figure 4.34

4.4 Conclusion

To conclude, the visual aspects of the four films: *Hyppolit, the Butler*, *The Ghost Goes West*, *Trouble Brewing* and *Skirts and Trousers* raise various questions, ranging from issues mentioned in previous chapters, such as the divide and dichotomy between old and new, to issues regarding gender and nationality, to subjects that will be raised in subsequent chapters, such as the pace of humour in the films. Perhaps the most frequently used memes on a visual level, however, are the ones alluding to or evoking theatricality in the films in question. This is connected to the aforementioned notion of static set-style; and as seen above, there are several examples of this feature in both the Hungarian and, to a lesser extent, in the British films analysed in this thesis. One noteworthy aspect, though, is that according to Szalay, the mise-en-scene, more specifically the set and the props have very little comedic value, and little to do with the humour of these films (Szalay 253).

Whereas I agree with Szalay's observation regarding the static nature of the scenes and sequences, I would argue that the props and sets not only possess narrative relevance, but also comedic value, particularly in case of the interiors of the characters' living spaces. Both in the Hungarian and in the British films in question, as already mentioned in the narrative chapter of this thesis as well as in the mise-en-scene section above, a clash or dichotomy between old and new are present on a narrative level, but also in a visual level, on the level of mise-en-scene.

In *Hyppolit, the Butler* the entire interior of the Schneider villa is modernised under the supervision of Mrs Schneider and Hyppolit; in *The Ghost Goes West* the whole of Glourie Castle is transported through the Atlantic to Florida, only to be modernised with radios inserted in old knights' armours; in *Trouble Brewing* the interior of the office, the interior of the police chief's flat; and in *Skirts and Trousers* both the living and the acting spaces. In this latter film, there are several juxtapositions of these spaces: on one level there is the theatre, functional and self-reflexive as it is with multiple mirrors hanging from walls and dividing spaces, in dichotomy with living spaces, with varying degrees of warmth and personality. On another level when we juxtapose the different living spaces of the main characters, these could be seen to reflect the personalities of these characters: Sóvári's home shows his narcissism through the several mirrors placed in the flat, but also his warmth, as the furniture and interior design of the place have an old-fashioned charm and character about them. Bolsai's hotel room, however, with its sparse, generic furniture lacks a personal touch, even though we learn from the dialogue that he has been living there on a permanent basis. Then there is Ibolya, whose flat is full of flowers, always shown in bright light, is an overly feminine space, evoking kitsch rather than genuine beauty.

As seen above, thus, the mise-en-scene in these four films is very far from serving merely narrative functions, providing comedic value as well. The same can be said of other visual aspects linked to the theatrical nature of the films, or the lack thereof, such as cinematography and editing. As seen above in section 4.3.2, *Trouble Brewing* seems different from the other films in both the dynamic style of camera movements, as well as in the fast pace of the editing. As mentioned above, one of the reasons for this, I argue, is that the comedic style of this film is different in various aspects from the other three. In the

next chapter on Humour, this aspect of *Trouble Brewing*, specifically, and the other three films as well, will be expanded on in greater detail.

Chapter 5 – Aspects of Humour

One of the main questions this thesis sets out to find some answers to is how (why?) and to what extent humour is a culturally coded, potentially culturally transferable phenomenon. This notion has practical implications particularly in this chapter, the chapter on humour. As the methodology of this research/ as the methodology I have devised to be able to successfully undertake this research involves/ requires textual analysis rather than audience research, I am to rely, apart from the support of secondary literature on the subject, on my own, culturally coded sense of humour when thinking about and when writing this chapter – what I find funny, what are the particular jokes in the films, and based on what criteria I consider them this or that or the other. Simon Critchley's point in the introduction of his taxonomy of humour theory *On Humour* (Critchley 2) supports my somewhat daring step of making myself the sole authority on how this aspect of the methodology of the chapter works: 'When it comes to what amuses us, we are all authorities, experts in the field. We *know* what we find funny.' This point, as well as other cultural implications of humour will be mentioned in greater detail below, when I attempt to define what a joke is within the framework of the chapter and the thesis.

Following on from the previous chapter, the chapter on visual and aural aspects, one of the aims of this chapter is to try and find an answer to the question: why one of the films, *Trouble Brewing*, is visually so different from the other three, *Hyppolit, the Butler*, *The Ghost Goes West* and *Skirts and Trousers*. As suggested in the previous chapter, this might be due to the different kind/ type/ style of comedy apparent in *Trouble Brewing*, which is more of a visual, slapstick kind of comedy than the more verbal and slow paced other three films. This is a suggestion or allegation I make in the previous chapter, having focused on the different practices of editing and cinematography, among others, of the film, without analysing it from the perspective of humour. What I will try to do in this chapter is to devise a system based on secondary literature, mainly on David Sutton's and Károly Szalay's books, as well as on various volumes and collected editions on humour theory in

general, whereby I will be able to classify the jokes based on a set of criteria. This will partly be a quantitative study, and using this tool the purpose is to find conclusive answers to the smaller question of the chapter and the bigger question of the thesis: why is *Trouble Brewing* different from the other three films and does that tell us anything about the possibility of cultural transference in comedy?

5.1 Aims of the Chapter, Justification and Literature Review

As indicated above, the crucial question concerning this chapter of the thesis is why and how is *Trouble Brewing* the odd one out of these four analysed films? Why and how is it different from the other three? The previous chapters show complex and ambiguous results: in terms of narrative and patterns within narrative it seems no different, or not significantly different than *Hyppolit, the Butler*, *The Ghost Goes West* or *Skirts and Trousers*. In terms of visual aspects, however, the results of the analyses written up in the chapter reveal a greater schism between this film and the rest. Whereas this issue was touched upon in the previous chapter, on Visual and Aural Aspects, it was also indicated that the reason for this schism might lie in the style of humour the films operate with. As mentioned above, this has led me to think about humour and in what way this chapter could find some answers to this question still on my mind: how and why is *Trouble Brewing* different? Trying to find these answers, or rather the best ways to try and find the answers, in turn, seems to be turning this chapter the odd one out in the thesis, in a similar fashion as *Trouble Brewing* is the odd one out of the four films. What I am referring to at this point is using quantitative analysis combined with qualitative analysis to look for these answers on the one hand, and, having drawn conclusions from those answers to look for possible instances of cultural transference on the other hand.

I set out doing this with a number of preconceptions or hypotheses based on my previous analyses, but as I was getting deeper in researching humour theory in general, it seemed even more relevant to use some form of quantitative analysis as a tool to complement the previous qualitative analyses. As the analytical process in this chapter is a different one than the more 'traditional' qualitative analyses used in the previous two chapters, this is marking the present chapter the odd one out, nevertheless this approach is serving the same

underlying purpose, which is to look for cultural transference using the example of the four films chosen for analysis, only at this instance doing so in a slightly different manner. Another way that this chapter differs from the previous ones is the extent to which the methodological processes are reflected within the body of the text: whereas in the previous two analytical chapters the methods used were taken more or less for granted following on from the Methodology chapter, in this present chapter there is a greater emphasis on describing and reflecting on the analytical and writing processes used to present my arguments.

I have mentioned above hypotheses and preconceptions, which all stem from the intriguing mystery that is the odd one out-ness of *Trouble Brewing*, found in the previous chapter on Visual aspects, and which all have to do with how to best check if this otherness is indeed the case, and if yes – or if not – how to put these into words in the most relevant manner. The Visual and Aural Aspects chapter has given me a lead, which was the pace of the editing of *Trouble Brewing*, as well as the dynamic style of cinematography: rapid cuts combined with swift and varied camera movements; all of these at a contrast to the other four films, which all use slower paced editing and to a greater or lesser extent static set-styles of cinematography. As indicated in the Visual and Aural Aspects chapter itself, at first glance it seems that this had to do with the style of humour rather than other aspects, and in the paragraphs below I aim at examining whether this is the case, and if yes, or indeed if not, what conclusions I might be able to draw from all this concerning the culturally coded and culturally transferable aspects of humour.

The literature used to try and find definitions of what units and what categories to use in a potential coding sheet, mentioned above only in general terms, has consisted of collected editions on the history of humour; more or less personal accounts of what humour is and how to define it; linguistic approaches to humour; works on the boundaries of the joke and how different sensibilities register humour. These volumes include Sharon Lockyer and Michael Pickering's collected edition *Beyond the Joke* (Lockyer and Pickering), and specifically their introductory chapter, *Introduction: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Humour and Comedy*; Victor Raskin's *Semantic Mechanisms of Humour* (Raskin); *A Cultural*

History of Humour, edited by Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg (Bremmer and Roodenburg); and Simon Critchley's *On Humour* (Critchley).

Although all of these volumes have been relevant in the research of this chapter, perhaps the books specifically concerning the era and/or the countries or cultures in question, which I have used in previous chapter(s) in this thesis have been in a sense the most helpful in the process of starting out with devising a coding sheet. Helpful is a vague term, but what I mean in this instance is that as opposed to the multitude of subjective thoughts and ideas disguised as objective truths on humour, which for me were on various occasions both misleading and to a certain extent irrelevant, specifically David Sutton in his book offered a simple, yet relevant way of sorting one of the categories. Based on the findings of the previous chapter the one category I knew for sure I would need to include in the coding sheet was the form of humour the films used. It was in this aspect that Sutton's book presented a relevant way of categorising: in chapter two of his book *A Chorus of Raspberries*, entitled *Theorising British Comedy* he talks about slapstick, verbal wit, musical numbers and chases (Sutton) when defining forms of humour. In the coding sheet that I ended up using I merged the category of chase into slapstick, as in my definition a chase is itself slapstick style comedy (much the same manner as apple is fruit). I do not by any means claim that Sutton's approach is more or less objective than the other pieces of literature that I used, merely that it offered something that I thought could serve as the basis of my coding sheet categorising jokes.

The other concern, apart from how to categorise them, was to define what the measured unit would actually be that would, in turn, undergo the process of categorisation in the course of the quantitative analysis. As the study, and the chapter, are on humour, one of the possibilities that arose was that the relevant unit would be a joke. In this matter, in turn, the aforementioned literature was a great source for my purposes, as there seemed to be a consensus on the one hand that the basic unit of humour is a joke, on the other hand that a joke is something that is perceived and coded as such by a number of cultural determiners and contexts. When Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg discuss various terminologies used to describe comedy in the introductory chapter of their edited collection, *A Cultural History of Humour* (Bremmer and Roodenburg), they assert that instances of the 'short

joke' have been apparent since the 17th Century, preceding as a phenomenon two words that have been used to describe them: *Witz* in German from the 18th, and *mop* in Dutch from the 19th Century. In another chapter of the same collected edition, one on humour in the Middle Ages, (Le Goff) the author Jacques Le Goff quotes Freud's work on humour and the lack of the analysis of actual jokes in the material, also taking the joke as the primary unit of analysing humour.

As mentioned above, both Simon Critchley and other authors engage in the debates surrounding definitions of humour and its cultural contexts, which at this stage I will use to try to construct an applicable description of what I classify as a joke, the basic unit of the devised coding sheet. Critchley does not dwell on explaining why he refers to jokes as the signifiers of humour, but does provide a link between the joke and its environmental framework quoting incongruity as its source, though he identifies the environment as a social rather than a cultural construct. He claims that '… in order for the incongruity of the joke to be seen as such, there has to be a congruence between joke structure and social structure – no social congruity, no comic incongruity.' (Critchley 4) The editors of the collected edition *Beyond a Joke – The Limits of Humour* (Lockyer and Pickering) and the authors of its introductory chapter: *Introduction: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Humour and Comedy,* Michael Pickering and Sharon Lockyer also argue along similar lines. They state that '… what is accepted as a joke, and so funny on that account, has first to be negotiated as a joke.' In their argument they also assert that the meaning of a joke has to be accepted as well as evaluated as comic. (Lockyer and Pickering) Bremmer and Roodenburg broaden this notion when they claim that while both '… humour and laughter are transcultural and ahistorical' (Bremmer és Roodenburg), they are also culturally coded phenomena.

The coding sheet would, thus, take a joke as its basic unit of measurement and would categorise them according to what I am researching in this chapter and in the thesis. For the purposes of this study, thus, I consider a joke as a visual or verbal element in the four films I analyse that makes me laugh, or where I recognise that the intention of the film was to make me laugh. I have talked above about the category of form, which at this point would mean what the form of the joke would be, and as I mentioned it was the first category I knew I had to include based on the preliminary findings in the previous

chapters. Based on the literature on aspects of humour, the further categories include the content of the joke; who the joke concerns, which can be either the speaker or the 'butt' of the joke – more on this subject below; and when the joke occurs in the film itself. The most obvious category in the coding sheet, apart from the one the idea of doing quantitative analysis originally came from, is which film the joke is actually in.

This coding sheet is a revised one: I have originally devised a coding sheet that included what function the joke might have, as many of the volumes and articles read for this chapter concern themselves with the purpose of humour and what different functions it may have, specifically when quoting Freud's theories of the joke and John Moreall's interpretations of these (Le Goff 46-47) (Critchley 2-3) therefore it seemed it might be relevant in the argumentation of this chapter. To test the first draft of the coding sheet I ran it through a film I had used before for preliminary analyses, the Hungarian inter-war era comedy *Borrowed Chateau*. After the preliminary analysis, however, I found that on the one hand it was difficult to define the function of the joke, as there was no clear indication of whether this function of the joke would be discussed within the diegetic framework of the film or its function extra-diegetically, that is to say how it affects the one member audience, which was myself; on the other hand it seemed inconclusive in the course of the research and the argument I aim at presenting. In this preliminary analysis I had no category, however, for timeline, whereas very soon into the preliminary analysis of the film I realised that by indicating when the joke happened during the film, I would potentially be able to see relevant data on the pace and timing of the comic elements in the four films analysed in the thesis.

Therefore, after testing the first coding sheet draft on an apocryphal film, I used a revised coding sheet on the quantitative analysis of the four films: *Hyppolit, the Butler*, *The Ghost Goes West*, *Trouble Brewing* and *Skirts and Trousers*. In this second, revised coding sheet the 'function' category was missing, but the 'when does the joke occur' category was added, giving the final five categories as follows: Which film? What form? What content? Who does the joke concern? and When does the joke occur?.

5.2.1 Quantitative Analysis – Form of the Joke

In the section below I will expand on the results of this quantitative analysis and in what way it is or, in some cases is less obviously relevant for the research I am undertaking in this chapter and in the thesis in general. That is to say I will now see whether I was right in hypothesising about the difference between the humour in *Trouble Brewing* and the other three films, and if yes how; and also if there are any possible traces of cultural transference that I can detect in these four films from the perspective of humour. In the first part of this section I am outlining the primary data of this quantitative analysis, providing the relevant charts when appropriate, following this with an analysis of this data, and finally indicating what implications this has for the overall question of the thesis, and particularly this chapter, the cultural transferability of humour.

When devising the coding sheet, the most relevant of all its categories seemed to be the category of the form of the joke, because this was the one that originally initiated my search for a way to come up with supporting evidence for the preliminary argument I asserted in the previous chapter regarding the humour in the films I chose for analysis. Therefore firstly, I start by looking at the question of form, the form of the joke in the four films. This aforementioned preliminary argument was that the fast-paced editing and dynamic camera movements in *Trouble Brewing* were a result of a larger number of slapstick-style jokes in this film than in the other three. As Table 5.1 below shows, on first glance at the percentages of the quantitative analysis, the form of the jokes confirm my strongest hypothesis of *Trouble Brewin*g containing more jokes categorised as slapstick than any other category, as well as more slapstick jokes than any of the other films analysed in the course of this research. More than half of the jokes, precisely 60% of them are categorised as slapstick in *Trouble Brewing*, compared to the 33% of verbal wit in the same film; and compared to 27% of slapstick jokes in *Skirts and Trousers*, the runner up in this category.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1		**What form?**					
2	**What film?**	musical number	slapstick	slapstick/chase	verbal wit	visual gag	Grand Total
3	Egy szoknya	5	27	6	70	14	122
4	Ghost	1	9		42	11	63
5	Hyppolit	5	3		84	20	112
6	Trouble Brewing	3	101		56	8	168
7	Grand Total	14	140	6	252	53	465
8							
9							
10		**What form?**					
11	**What film?**	musical number	slapstick	slapstick/chase	verbal wit	visual gag	Grand Total
12	Egy szoknya	4%	22%	5%	57%	11%	100%
13	Ghost	2%	14%	0%	67%	17%	100%
14	Hyppolit	4%	3%	0%	75%	18%	100%
15	Trouble Brewing	2%	60%	0%	33%	5%	100%
16	Grand Total	14	140	6	252	53	465

Table 5.1

This, in itself, does partly confirm my initial hypothesis, although the fact that in *Trouble Brewing* 33% of jokes are categorised as verbal wit, making this category its second most frequently used form of joke is significant, especially when juxtaposed with the mere 2% that are jokes categorised as musical numbers and 5% for visual gags. Whereas regarding the percentages *Trouble Brewing* is nowhere as abundant with verbal wit jokes as the three other films, all of which have over 50% of the jokes categorised as verbal wit, it is still its second most frequent category; and when looking at the actual number of jokes, *Trouble Brewing* in fact surpasses *The Ghost Goes West* and is not too far from the two Hungarian films either. In *The Ghost Goes West* 42 jokes categorised as verbal wit, which was enough to mark 67%, whereas *Trouble Brewing* with 56 verbal wit jokes has 33%; *Skirts and Trousers* with 70 verbal wit jokes has 57%; and *Hyppolit, the Butler* with 84 verbal wit jokes has 75%. As seen below, the significance of these numbers lies in the fact that they might indicate cultural transference.

Both literature on George Formby specifically (Richards, The Age of the Dream Palace - Cinema and Sociey in Britain 1930-1939) (Sutton), and on British comedy traditions in the 1930s, which assert that these traditions are heavily influenced by the music hall (Medhurst) (Sutton) suggest that these films, especially George Formby's star vehicles would be abundant in musical numbers, more precisely in jokes embedded in a musical context. As seen in table 5.1, *Trouble Brewing* is in fact not full of musical number-jokes, this form only accounting for 2% of the jokes, a total of 3 of 168 jokes. The only film with fewer musical number-jokes is *The Ghost Goes West* with one joke in this form, this one joke making up a similarly 2% of *The Ghost Goes West*'s total joke count. The two

Hungarian films, on the other hand, each have 5 jokes in the form of musical numbers, double the percentage of the two British comedies, 4% of their total joke counts.

As mentioned above, thus, the musical numbers in *Trouble Brewing* and the other three films also raise some questions regarding the previous readings of the films, the performers and/ or the genre, as well as regarding my own preconceptions of them. Preliminary arguments suggested that the results of the quantitative analysis would confirm my assumption that there is an abundance of musical numbers in *Trouble Brewing*, at least enough to make it the first in that category, similarly to slapstick jokes. And whereas in case of slapstick jokes *Trouble Brewing* did take the lead, in case of musical numbers, as seen above, it only had a total of 3 out of the 168, making it just 2% of the total jokes in the film. Even *The Ghost Goes West*, where I expected no jokes in the form of musical numbers had one, which was also enough to make 2% of its total joke count. In this sense the two British films came behind the two Hungarian ones, which had 5 musical numbers each, taking up 4% of the total joke count in both cases. The reason this is relevant to point out is because music hall as a form of entertainment put greater emphasis on critical, satirical or humorous content being expressed in musical form than pesti kabaré traditions. This difference between the two entertainment forms is addressed both in the Introduction Chapter of this thesis, and in more detail in Chapter 6 on Performance. Therefore, as based on my previous findings, which indicated that historically the music hall was more focused on music and musical numbers than the more verbal pesti kabaré, I expected the films to reflect that tendency. The fact that the numbers both in the musical number and in the verbal wit category reflect otherwise, that is to say the jokes *Trouble Brewing* shifting significantly from musical to verbal comedy, strongly indicates the possibility of cultural transference on the level of humour.

In terms of visual gags, *Trouble Brewing* has the smallest number both in terms of the actual number of jokes and percentages: 8 jokes in total, amounting to 5% as opposed to 11, 14 and 20 jokes in *The Ghost Goes West*, *Skirts and Trousers* and *Hyppolit, the Butler* respectively (17% in *The Ghost Goes West*, 11% in *Skirts and Trousers* and 18% in *Hyppolit, the Butler*). These numbers, when taking into consideration the findings of the previous chapter, specifically the visually dynamic style of *Trouble Brewing* as opposed to

the static set-style (Szalay) of the three other films, especially the two Hungarian ones, once again indicates the possible reading of cultural transference on the level of humour. Visual dynamism does not warrant jokes on a visual level, and similarly, static editing and cinematography do not exclude the possibility of visual gags. Furthermore, the fact that in *The Ghost Goes West* and in *Hyppolit, the Butler* the percentages of the first and second category of the form of the joke are very close (verbal wit 67% vs 75%; visual gag 17% vs 18%) suggests that between these two films the cultural transference is not only strongly present from perspectives of narrative and visual aspects, but also from the perspective of humour.

5.2.2 Quantitative Analysis – Content of the Joke

As seen above, thus, one of the strongest hypotheses I set out to do this analysis with was the bigger frequency of slapstick style comedy in *Trouble Brewing*, and to a lesser extent the bigger frequency of musical numbers in this film than the other three, at least concerning the category of what form the joke takes in the films. Some of the data from the Visual Aspects Chapter suggested, therefore, for *Trouble Brewing* to actually have the slapstick form outweigh all others, with visual gags as a second most frequent form of joke, due to the fast-paced editing and cinematography in the film, this latter aspect refuted by the evidence from the quantitative analysis. Complementing this argument was my hypothesis that the other three films, *Hyppolit, the Butler*, *The Ghost Goes West* and *Skirts and Trousers* would have more jokes in the form of verbal wit than both *Trouble Brewing* and any other form within that category; with some of these hypotheses confirmed, others contested in the paragraphs above. In terms of content, literature on music hall and on Formby, as outlined below, suggests that *Trouble Brewing* might have more instances of sexual double-entendre than the three other films. Whereas my idea of the frequency of slapstick humour comes from the analyses in the previous chapters, this latter hypothesis of sexual double-entendre, as well as that of the larger percentage of musical numbers come from my view of George Formby's stage persona and style, which was, in turn, formed by his films that I have seen, the literature concerning him (Richards, The Age of the Dream Palace - Cinema and Sociey in Britain 1930-1939) (Randall and Seaton) (Sutton) and the image of George Formby with his ukulele singing saucy songs that lives as a concept in popular culture. Jeffrey Richards's assessment of the George Formby characters'

ambiguous attitude to sexuality seems particularly relevant in this argument, as he claims that '[i]f George's innocence was childlike, his attitude to sex can only be described as juvenile', pointing out the combination of 'adolescent sexuality' and 'youthful romanticism' (Richards, The Age of the Dream Palace - Cinema and Sociey in Britain 1930-1939 192). This is also complemented by David Sutton's description of the discrepancy between George's on screen persona and what he calls his 'performing extra-diegetic "self"', pointing out the contrast on a sexual level: shy and inexperienced versus 'sexually knowing, tipping frequent winks' (Sutton 42)

3	Count of What topic?	What film?					
4	What topic?	Egy szoknya	Ghost	Hyppolit	Trouble Brewing	(blank)	Grand Total
13	clumsiness	2			21		23
14	cooking		1				1
15	cross-dressing	11					11
36	ghosts		19				19
42	hypocrisy			6			6
43	ignorance		4	16			20
44	ignorance, ethnic humour		2				2
45	ignorance, marriage			1			1
67	romance	35	7	13	1		56
68	romance, cross-dressing	10					10
69	romance, illness	2					2
70	romance, marriage	4					4
71	romance, poverty		1				1
72	romance, sexual double-entendre	1		1	1		3
73	romance, stupidity	1					1
74	running away				7		7
75	self deprecation	1					1
76	sexual double-entendre	5		9	20		34

Table 5.2

Furthermore, once again based on the secondary literature on music hall and on George Formby, as well as his pop culture image, I expected this multitude of musical numbers to all be concerned with sexual double-entendre. As noted before, the public persona, the popular image of George Formby was /is that of an innocent man-child, who becomes sexually aware only when singing and playing his ukulele. Instead of this, out of the meagre three musical numbers only one, the song entitled *Fanlight Fanny* had sexual double-entendre as its topic, while the other two were concerned with less risqué subjects. As seen in section 5.2.1 and in Table 5.2 above, not only did both of the Hungarian

comedies contain more musical numbers than *Trouble Brewing*, one of these was also a 'saucy' song. So not only did *Trouble Brewing* contain far less of the risqué musical numbers than I expected based on literature on Formby, one of the Hungarian comedies also contained one, which also contradicts some of the relevant academic literature and points to cultural transference.

While reading Károly Szalay's book on comedy, I noted down one of his assertions concerning multiple meanings and misunderstandings with the remark: 'as opposed to George's songs'. In this assertion Szalay writes that double-entendre is a tool frequently used in Hungarian comedies of the era I am concerned with, though he claims that double-entendre is not 'saucy' in these films (Szalay 337). Assuming that Szalay's claim is justified and proven right by my analysis, this would mean that there is a discrepancy here between the Hungarian and the British comedies. The fact that these discrepancies were not reflected in the quantitative analysis, putting *Trouble Brewing* and *Hyppolit, the Butler* on equal footing concerning sexual double-entendre delivered in a musical format, however, suggests not only that the relevance of Szalay's claim is doubted, but also the presence of cultural transference. Moreover, the song in *Hyppolit, the Butler* is not only just as concerned with sexual double-entendre as one of George Formby's songs in *Trouble Brewing*, both of these songs reflect and /or refer to the variety stage: *Fanlight Fanny* in *Trouble Brewing* is a song about a music hall performer of dubious character and reputation; and the song *Pá, kis aranyom* in *Hyppolit, the Butler* is performed on the cabaret stage by the performer of dubious character and reputation, Mimi. The meme of sexual double-entendre delivered musically, as well as the meme of self-reflexivity to the music hall/cabaret stage all suggest cultural transference.

Although the number of musical numbers with sexual double-entendre as their topic in *Trouble Brewing* is less prominent than some of the aforementioned literature suggests, there are still a number of jokes in other forms with sexual double-entendre as their topic, 21 in total, including 1 joke categorised as romance/sexual double-entendre (see Table 5.2). Based on some of the ideas presented in the previous chapter on Visual Aspects, as well as in the Narrative chapter, in which I established that both in *Skirts and Trousers*, as well as in *The Ghost Goes West* cross-dressing and re-defining traditional masculinity and sexual roles are apparent on the narrative and visual levels, the evidence pointed to the fact that these two films might reflect this feature on the level of jokes. While in *Skirts and*

Trousers over 20% of the jokes are indeed about cross-dressing, only 5 jokes, making up 5% are categorised as sexual double-entendre, and none of the jokes in *The Ghost Goes West* are categorised as either. It is in fact in *Hyppolit, the Butler* where jokes on sexual double-entendre are rather more abundant: with 10 jokes, one including romance/sexual double-entendre, that is twice as many as in *Skirts and Trousers*, and about half as many as in *Trouble Brewing*. I mentioned above Károly Szalay's comment on whether double-entendre is risqué in the Hungarian films of the era, and once again, the results of the quantitative analysis show that this assertion is perhaps not as generally applicable as Szalay suggests; meaning also that the quantitative analysis is in this instance provides supporting evidence for possible cultural transference.

Having just established above that both cross-dressing and sexual double-entendre are absent from the joke count of *The Ghost Goes West*, whereas both of these issues were apparent on the visual and the narrative levels of the film, the question thus arose: what are the jokes in *The Ghost Goes West* about? When going through the column I found that around one third of the jokes were about ghosts, 19 jokes in total. This is followed by the topics of romance, ignorance and the poverty or dilapidation of the Glouries and Glourie castle with 7, 6 and 5 jokes respectively (see table 5.2). With 30% of the jokes on ghosts, thus, this is the most frequent topic of jokes in the film, with romance as the second highest subject with only 10% of the jokes; ignorance with 8%, then animosity, dilapidation, alcohol or drunkenness with 5 jokes, 7% each. Within ignorance I differentiate 'regular' ignorance and ignorance combined with ethnic humour, and although this category is relatively high on the list of topics in *The Ghost Goes West*, once again my research into other aspects, in this case specifically the narrative aspects of the film, led me to assume this category would be better represented. In the Narrative chapter I describe the character of Joe Martin and I compare him to Mátyás Schneider in *Hyppolit, the Butler*, both of whom I read as representatives of 'new' money as opposed to the inherent aristocratic nature of Donald Glourie and Hyppolit. In the same argument I point out that these two men, Martin and Schneider, are both represented as ignorant people who are unaware of cultural artefacts and /or notions around them, which, within the frameworks of these films, are represented as desirable. I see this argumentation as one of the central themes of this thesis, one of the strongest points that suggests the existence of cultural transference, therefore I would have anticipated a larger representation of this feature in the theme

section of the joke count of *The Ghost Goes West* than the less than 10% the results of the quantitative analysis brought. In *Hyppolit, the Butler* this number is above 15% with 17 jokes categorised either as ignorance or ignorance and marriage.

Romance being the subject of 7 jokes in *The Ghost Goes West* and the second highest category in the theme section led me to examine this category in the other films, and once again, what seemed rather surprising to me from other aspects of the thesis that had been examined before is that this quantitative study shows that the largest category of joke topics in *Skirts and Trousers* is romance. This I would have expected easier from any of the other films, and the reason for this is that I perceive *Skirts and Trousers* as a text that is particularly problematic in its perpetuation of negative gender stereotypes, as it is examined in detail in the Narrative chapter. Although thinking about *Skirts and Trousers* in this context is the reason why it indeed should not have surprised me: if a film is so problematic regarding gender issues, it would be normal, natural for it to centre its jokes about romance and tensions and oppositions between the sexes. Therefore the relatively few sexual double-entendre jokes are more than compensated by the large amount (35 jokes, which is about 27% percent) of jokes at the expense of romance. If we add the other romance related categories to this number it becomes even more striking: 10 jokes about romance and cross-dressing; 4 about romance and marriage, 2 about romance and illness; and one each on romance and sexual double-entendre, and on romance and stupidity, making up nearly half of the total joke count of *Skirts and Trousers*. The implications of this within the context of my argumentation relate on the one hand to the ways in which visual aspects have pointed to cultural transference between *The Ghost Goes West* and *Skirts and Trousers*, particularly in terms of questioning ideals of traditional masculinity, and between *The Ghost Goes West* and *Hyppolit, the Butler* in terms of inter-class romantic plotlines; on the other hand to evidence pointing to the lack of homogeneity within the Hungarian comedy traditions of the inter-war era, as argued below.

In *Hyppolit, the Butler*, where one of the plotlines examined in detail in the Narrative chapter involves a romance that reaches beyond class boundaries, a feature indicative of cultural transference, the number of jokes that are about romance is far less than in *Skirts and Trousers*: 13 compared to over 50 (53 with all the categories that involve romance in

some way), whereas as it is stated before, the two films have a very similar joke count and a practically identical running time. In this sense, this particular category, the theme of romance, confirms some of my initial ideas of where I might find indicators of cultural transference in the level of humour. I say this particularly as *Hyppolit, the Butler* and *The Ghost Goes West* both have around 10% of the jokes categorised as having romance as their subject, which correlates with the theme of romance and the actual romantic couples in the two films. Both in *Hyppolit, the Butler*, and in *The Ghost Goes West* there are couples who are overcoming cultural and class divides, and various aspects of their characters, including for example their appearance and their social positions show similarities. This is, therefore, one area where the quantitative study brought results that corresponded both with preliminary analyses and with evidence found in other aspects, as detailed in the other chapters of this thesis, and which indicate that there is cultural transference in this subject not only on the level of narrative and visual aspects, but also on the level of humour.

As mentioned above, based both on ideas asserted in previous chapters, as well as on preliminary analyses, it seemed more likely that *The Ghost Goes West* would show more similarities with the two Hungarian films; furthermore, that the two Hungarian films would show significant similarities with one another. On the one hand, *The Ghost Goes West* is indeed similar to the two Hungarian films in various points: both in terms of jokes categorised as verbal wit (57% for *Skirts and Trousers*; 67% for *The Ghost Goes West* and 75% for *Hyppolit, the Butler*) as well as slapstick (3% for *Hyppolit, the Butler*; 14% for *The Ghost Goes West* and 27% for *Skirts and Trousers*) it is between the two Hungarian films in percentage, and especially in terms of visual humour the three films are very close both in numbers and in percentages. On the other hand, however, what these percentages tell me is not necessarily only that *The Ghost Goes West* shows similarities with the two Hungarian films, but rather that the two Hungarian films do not show as many similarities with each other as evidence from the other chapters would suggest.

This lack of homogeneity in the two Hungarian films is most apparent perhaps on the level of jokes categorised as slapstick humour: whereas in *Hyppolit, the Butler* the number of these jokes is only 3, taking up 3% of the total joke count of the film, in *Skirts and*

Trousers the figure is almost ten times higher: 27 jokes, taking up 27% percent, as mentioned above. While the comprehensive volumes on Hungarian film history or Hungarian comedies written before 1990, the change of the regime in Hungary, fail to mention *Skirts and Trousers* at all, contemporary press releases and subsequent articles and reviews of the film unanimously categorise it as 'burleszk', the Hungarian equivalent of slapstick comedy. In the review of the film that appeared in the journal Magyar film (Hungarian Film) in 1943 (Ananymous) upon its release, the anonymous author's first claim is that 'The Hungarian "burleszk" was born with this film'. Other press material from 1983, when the film was re-released in cinemas in Hungary also note that *Skirts and Trousers* is a 'burleszk', regardless of the kind of publication the reviews appear in. The author of a review in Postás Dolgozó (Postal Worker) (Ábel), under the pseudonym Ábel, also calls it 'burleszk'; so does Éva Szakály, the author of another review in the film magazine Filmjegyzet (Notes on Film) (Szakály); as well as the well-published film critic Péter Molnár Gál in his article on the film in Filmvilág (Film World, a journal I would classify as the Hungarian equivalent of Sight and Sound in the UK or Cahiers de Cinema in France) (Molnár Gál, Egy szoknya, egy nadrág).

5.2.3 Quantitative Analysis – Who the Joke Concerns

Another category this quantitative study was looking at is who the joke concerns in the films: as mentioned briefly above, this is an amalgamation of two notions, namely who tells the joke, and who the butt of the joke is. In the category I put the emphasis on the latter aspect, and only when there was no obvious butt to the joke did I consider which character told the joke in the film in question. Whereas throughout the research for this chapter, including the process of devising the coding sheet and counting all the jokes in the film I considered form, and to a slightly lesser extent the content of the joke to be the most conclusive categories, I found that this category of who the joke concerns offered data worth considering in the argumentation of the chapter, as well as leading me to a train of thought that raises questions about some fundamental features of the thesis, namely the films and their relation to genre. The category is also significant because it gives a more nuanced picture of the overall themes of the films, supporting some of the evidence suggested by preliminary analyses, and can also be seen relevant in pointing towards occurrences of cultural transference.

Count of Who does the joke concern?	What film?				
Who does the joke concern?	Egy szoknya	Ghc	Hyppo	Trouble Brewi	Grand Total
a waiter	1				1
Benedek main character			3		3
Bigelow		7			7
Bigelow, Joe Martin		2			2
Bill				12	12
Bill, George				28	28
Bill, George, slushers				7	7
Bill, George, slushers, Mary				1	1
Borsai main character	11				11
Borsai, Ibolya, Kamilla	1				1
Brady, George				1	1
Brady, Lord Redhill				1	1
Brady, Mary				2	2
chorus girls	1				1
cook, maid				1	1
Donald		1			1
Donald main character		4			4
Donald, Peggy		9			9
Donald's creditors		3			3
Dulcinea supporting character	4				4
Dulcinea, Detective	3				3
George				60	60
Hyppolit main character			9		9
Hyppolit, Schneider			1		1
Ibolya main character	7				7
Joe Martin		11			11
Julcsa supporting character			1		1
Kálmán, supporting character	9				9
Kamilla supporting character	10				10
Lord Redhill				5	5
Lord Redhill, George				4	4
Lord Redhill, Madam Berdi				1	1
Lord Redhill, Major Hopkins				1	1
Madam Berdi				2	2
Madam Berdi, George				11	11
Makáts			1		1
Makáts main character			6		6
Makáts sr			1		1
Makáts, Makáts sr			1		1
Makáts, Mimi			2		2
Makáts, Schneider, Mrs Schneider			1		1
Makáts, Terka			1		1
Mary, George				8	8
Mrs Schneider main character			14		14
Murdoch main character		8			8
Murdoch, Peggy		1			1
Napoleon			1		1
news editors				1	1
old man in factory				1	1
Peggy main character		5			5
politicians		1			1
print office workers, George				3	3
Schneider			2		2
Schneider and friends			2		2
Schneider main character			21		21
Schneider, Makáts			2		2
Schneider, Mrs Schneider			4		4
Schneider, Tóbiás			1		1
Schneider's friends, supporting characters			5		5
slushers				2	2
Sóvári main character	34				34
Sóvári, Borsai	20				20

Table 5.3

Looking at *The Ghost Goes West*, where in the previous section it was asserted that the bulk of jokes, 19 to be precise, were about ghosts, though we see Murdoch Glourie, the actual ghost as the character the joke concerns only on 8 occasions, plus one that concerns both Murdoch and Peggy, together making 14% of the films total joke count. The most jokes, 17% in the film concern Joe Martin; 14% Donald and Peggy together; 10% concern Ed Bigelow, Joe Martin's rival; 7% Donald on his own; and another 7% Peggy on her own (see table 5.3). Again, mentioned above is the fact that the topic of ignorance is rather less represented in this film than it was suggested by evidence from the Narrative and Visual Aspects chapters, yet the character who most jokes concern is Joe Martin, who I perceived as the nouveau-rich character whose frequent faux-pas mark him as ignorant in the previous chapters of this thesis. In this respect this category provides further supportive evidence to the presence of cultural transference, especially when comparing it to the same category in *Hyppolit, the Butler* below. Furthermore, the fact that Donald and Peggy on their own and together make up nearly one third of the category of who the joke concerns in *The Ghost Goes West*, considering that romance was the second most frequent category in terms of the jokes' content, has implications regarding both cultural transference and genre connotations.

There is, however, a general tendency in all four films, to varying degree, to take the main characters as the person the joke concerns, as the butt of the joke. This is most striking in *Trouble Brewing*, where an extraordinary 128 jokes of 168 involve George in some way or another, out of which 60 on his own, and the rest in combination with practically all the other characters, including Bill, Mary, Mr Brady, Madam Berdi, Lord Redhill and even Tiger, the wrestler in 8 jokes. The fact that George is so prominent in this category supports the preliminary argumentation first mentioned in the Visual Aspects chapter regarding *Trouble Brewing* concerning its slapstick-style comedy, where George is indeed literally falling on his bum to make the audience laugh. The same counts for *Skirts and Trousers*, where also over half of the jokes concern Sóvári, or Sóvári and another character: 64 out of 122, 34 of them concerning Sóvári on his own. When looking at these two films, the who the joke concerns category is once more indicative both of cultural transference and implications regarding genre or sub-genre than the category of the joke's form: this aspect confirms that both *Trouble Brewing* and *Skirts and Trousers* can be seen as slapstick style comedies, and that it is specifically the main characters who are being laughed at in the majority of the jokes.

In *The Ghost Goes West*, as mentioned above, and in *Hyppolit the Butler* the jokes are less focused on one particular character than in the other two films, with both *The Ghost Goes West* and *Hyppolit, the Butler* having the most jokes about the ignorant nouveau riche, though also having larger numbers of jokes by or about other characters as well. This includes the romantic couples, specifically in case of *The Ghost Goes West*, where indeed Joe Martin is in the centre of 11 jokes, whereas Donald or Peggy are at a mere 5 each, if we count them as a couple, however, they share almost one third of the total joke count in the film, with 19 jokes for the two of them together (see Table 5.3). In both of these films the notion of the main character is also more fluid than in *Trouble Brewing* or *Skirts and Trousers*: in *Hyppolit, the Butler* one could argue that the character of the nouveau riche coincides with the main character, Schneider, but it could also be argued that in that film the title character is the main character, or indeed the romantic lead, István Benedek is the main character, similarly to *The Ghost Goes West*, where Joe Martin, Donald Glourie and Murdoch Glourie can all be argued to be the main male characters. In any case, both in *The Ghost Goes West* and in *Hyppolit, the Butler* the romantic leads are frequently the characters in the centre of jokes, more so in *The Ghost Goes West*, with nearly a third of the total joke count, that is 19 jokes about Donald and/ or Peggy and Donald; and 11 involving Benedek and/ or Terka in some combination, making around 10% of the jokes in *Hyppolit, the Butler*.

The data from the category of who the jokes concern, therefore, may provide further supportive evidence for the possibility of cultural transference, and also a better insight into the reasons why the preliminary argumentation pointed towards the use of quantitative analysis as a method to look at the humour of these four films. Furthermore, although the category of the form of the joke brought somewhat more complex and less plain, though still conclusive results than expected, the category of who the joke concerns provides straightforward evidence for the possibility of cultural transference, as evidence from this category again put *Skirts and Trousers* in parallel with *Trouble Brewing* and *Hyppolit, the Butler* with *The Ghost Goes West*. These questions, however point not only towards cultural transference and the kind of humour found in these films, but also to issues and debates regarding genre in general and the genre of comedy specifically. While these issues are somewhat beyond the scope of this thesis, it is interesting to note that it was not

in the category of form that these were raised the most effectively, but in the category of the character or person in the centre of the joke.

5.3 Questions and Doubts Regarding Genre

None of the four films that I analyse in the course of this research runs longer than 90 minutes, with the two Hungarian films around 75 minutes of length and the two British ones between 80 and 85 minutes. The reason this is worth mentioning is that although they are reasonably close to one another in terms of length, the overall number of jokes in the four films varies to a far greater degree. The two Hungarian films are the closest in this respect: while their length is almost the same at 74 and 75 minutes (*Hyppolit, the Butler* and *Skirts and Trousers*, respectively), in *Skirts and Trousers* I counted 122 jokes, to only 112 in *Hyppolit, the Butler*. The difference is rather more striking when looking at the two British films, however: with only around 5 minutes of difference in running time, there is more than a 100-joke difference between *Trouble Brewing* and *The Ghost Goes West*, with 168 jokes in the 85-minute long *Trouble Brewing*, compared to the mere 63 jokes in the 80-minute long *The Ghost Goes West*. While it is relevant to point this out, as the percentages presented above were all calculated from these numbers, it is specifically regarding genre connotations that this issue is mentioned here.

It should perhaps have come up earlier, when counting the jokes in the first place, that there is such a striking difference between the joke counts of the two British films, though at that point I simply took that as a given. It has taken me this long, when looking at the category of who the joke concerns to start thinking about the implications of this difference to questions surrounding genre, and whether something that has so 'few' jokes, at least compared to the joke counts in the other films, can be categorised as a comedy at all. It makes me re-think the entire process, described in the Introduction Chapter, of how I chose these particular films and why. In all the preliminary research I conducted before starting to write the thesis I came across *The Ghost Goes West* as a comedy: it was written about in such terms in the biographies of some of the personnel working on the film, including Alexander Korda, René Clair or Robert Donat; it was advertised as such in the press material I found in the BFI archives, and even various film webpages (imdb, rotten tomatoes, port.hu) treat the film as such. I never questioned this.

Is it perhaps in this chapter, just as I did in the previous chapter concerning *Trouble Brewing*, that I find something radically different about one of the films compared to the other three? In most of the analyses so far *The Ghost Goes West* has shown similarities to *Hyppolit, the Butler*, mostly in terms of memes on a narrative level, but also in the previous chapter, on Visual Aspects, there were various memes that pointed to cases of possible cultural transference. Similarly, several different memes found in previous analyses point to similarities between *Trouble Brewing* and *Skirts and Trousers*. Yet, if we look at the actual joke counts in the four films, we find that the two Hungarian ones, despite their differences mentioned both earlier in this chapter and in arguments in previous chapters, and their similarities to one (or both, in case of *Skirts and Trousers*, *The Ghost Goes West* and issues regarding cross-dressing, gender and implications of traditional masculinity) of the British films, are very close in numbers. Why are, then, *Trouble Brewing* and *The Ghost Goes West* so far from each other in joke count, and what are the implications of this in terms of genre? Is *Trouble Brewing* a 'real' comedy with its 168 jokes and *The Ghost Goes West* with a mere 63 jokes of a different genre, or a genre hybrid? If yes, what other genre? Despite there being a romantic couple in the centre of the storyline and the jokes – as the 'who the joke concerns' category shows – this is not a screwball comedy, as it lacks precisely the screwball aspect. Could, or should it be categorised as romantic comedy because of the aforementioned 'who the joke concerns' aspect? Or rather a ghost story – slash – comedy, because of the number of jokes having ghosts as their theme?

Either way, another, perhaps even bigger question arises from this argumentation: is this feature, are these questions regarding genre relevant to the thesis? If they are, what are the implications? Does this mean that the scope of the thesis and the framework it operates within have to be amended accordingly? Is the research rightfully considering itself with inter-war comedies, if one of the films it uses as a case study turns out to have questionable comedic value? Despite the fact that this research professes not to engage directly with debates surrounding genre, I use numerous features of genre theory in the qualitative analyses in chapters 3, 4 and 6. Therefore this is not a question I aim to leave without mentioning. Even if for the purposes of this thesis the question of the ambiguities within a

genre connotation of *The Ghost Goes West* specifically are left unanswered, not addressing these would be to ignore a potentially problematic aspect of the thesis.

As mentioned above, thus, I propose not to try to solve the generic problems proposed by the relatively low joke count of *The Ghost Goes West*, as it is not within the aims of this thesis to categorise the films it uses as case studies, although as the term slapstick has often been used in this chapter in connection with both *Trouble Brewing* and *Skirts and Trousers*, it could be a possibility to attach the term 'romantic comedy' to *The Ghost Goes West*, even if it is somewhat anachronistic. The question regarding this option, however, remains whether there is a point in doing this or not. Because in case of *Trouble Brewing* and *Skirts and Trousers*, the terms slapstick or slapstick humour were used specifically to point out potential cases of cultural transference, whereas it seems to me that attaching a different generic category to *The Ghost Goes West* would be unproductive in terms of finding possible instances of cultural transference. In spite of over 40% of the total joke count of *Skirts and Trousers* having romance or romance and something else as their content, I cannot consider it romantic comedy. Similarly, despite *Hyppolit, the Butler* showing similarities to *The Ghost Goes West* on a narrative level regarding the romantic couples in the lead, I would find it highly problematic to categorise *Hyppolit, the Butler* a romantic comedy. Therefore I shall just leave *The Ghost Goes West* as it is, though as I mention above, not to have addressed this issue could have left the argumentation of the chapter – of potentially the entire project – flawed.

5.4 Conclusion

Based on the data collected through the quantitative analysis, processed and analysed in the paragraphs above, it appears that the lack of significant amounts of musical numbers and the objectively large number of jokes categorised as verbal wit point me in the direction of making the assumption that there is a possibility of cultural transference occurring at the place where I least expected it: in the visually different, seemingly music hall inspired, George Formby vehicle *Trouble Brewing*. As mentioned above, my hypotheses regarding *Trouble Brewing* and my understanding of George Formby's films and public persona led me to think that in terms of humour, I had better look for cultural transference in the

seemingly more obviously similar *The Ghost Goes West*, because there was little sign to indicate any cultural transference on the level of humour between the three other films and *Trouble Brewing* on the surface. Rather surprisingly, however, looking at these numbers makes me revise my original assumption and assert that the reading of *Trouble Brewing* is more ambiguous than suggested at first glance and may be interpreted as showing traces of cultural transference.

Although much of the argumentation presented in the sections above is rather self-reflexive in style and post-structuralist in nature, the overall themes of the thesis and the chapter have been the focus of the arguments, and have been addressed in a constructive manner. I set out writing this chapter with a question that arose in the previous, Visual Aspects chapter of the thesis, namely why *Trouble Brewing* is radically different in terms of cinematography and editing from the other three films used as case studies in the thesis, whether the answer to this question lies in the style of humour of that film, and how all this is connected to the overarching subject of the thesis: cultural transference. Trying to find an answer to this issue has made me question whether the methodological framework devised for the thesis, which has effectively been used in the previous chapters would prove applicable in this case as well, and came to the conclusion that a different methodology was perhaps needed to address the matter of humour in the thesis. Therefore, I created a coding sheet for a potential quantitative study, where the basic unit was the joke, and where the categories that were examined were the form of the joke, the content of the joke, the character in the centre of the joke and when in the film the joke occurs.

In the paragraphs above I have examined in detail all of these categories, except the last one: when the joke occurs in the film. Even though during the preliminary case study done in order to create an applicable coding sheet it seemed relevant to note when the joke occurs in the film, the category seems more relevant as a tool for me to keep count, rather than as a tool for finding instances of cultural transference. The other categories, however, have not only brought significant and occasionally surprising results in terms of cultural transference, but have also led me to form questions and verbalise doubts concerning the framework of the thesis and the case studies in particular regarding genre. Whereas I expected form to be the most conclusive category of the coding sheet, confirming the

assumptions I had when I started the quantitative analysis, it was in fact the category that brought the most complex results, particularly in terms of instances of verbal wit and the relative absence of musical numbers within *Trouble Brewing*, and the implications this might have for cultural transference. The huge difference that exists between *Trouble Brewing* and *The Ghost Goes West* in terms of the number of jokes has, in turn, made me aware of certain issues regarding genre, which are not within the scope of this project and will therefore remain unaddressed in the thesis. The points this question have raised are more of a genre theory concern, therefore it is not within the scope of this research to resolve them; nevertheless, as the argumentation has led me to these doubts, they had to be addressed, albeit in such a somewhat superficial level.

Chapter 6 – Aspects of Performance

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter on aspects of acting and performance I aim at looking at the various ways in which the actors' performance in the four films chosen for analysis may be indicative of cultural transference. Just as before, I will rely on traditions of music hall and of Jewish theatre, in this instance specifically on Yiddish theatrical traditions, as well as on the characteristics of the so-called pesti kabaré; as well as on scholarship on stardom. Throughout the chapter I will look at the performance of the actors playing the main and supporting characters in the films, and the inter-textual and extra-textual meanings of these performances, and having picked out specific scenes that showcase the similarities and differences between these dichotomous – though at the same time paralleled developing theatrical traditions.

The chapter will be divided into sections firstly in order to outline the aforementioned theatrical traditions in detail, and their relevance to the argumentation I aim at presenting, one such section presenting the relevant aspects of British music hall traditions, and the other contextualising Yiddish theatrical traditions, together with urban Jewish Hungarian-speaking pesti kabaré. Secondly, after addressing discourse on stardom, I will be examining the actors appearing in the four films who play main or supporting characters, and devote a section to each of them, looking at their other roles, as well as their off-screen

personae, thus providing a relevant context for them, in which the possibility of cultural transference may be interpreted.

The questions I seek to answer relate principally to the performance of the actors in the films I analyse throughout the thesis, and specifically whether these performances can be linked in any way to any of the theatrical traditions used as reference points in the indication of cultural transference. Furthermore, I aim at examining the complicated relationship between acting and stardom from the perspective of the aforementioned theatrical traditions – how did the British music hall, the Yiddish theatre and the pesti kabaré conceptualise the status of their actors and their stars? What was the contemporary discourse in these theatrical forms of their most famous thespians, and how were they written about in the press? What were the sought after qualities of the star personae and how were the stars' on and off stage personae connected? In order to find some answers to these questions I will re-examine some of the key concepts of these theatrical traditions, drawing on contemporary accounts, primary and secondary sources, biographies and auto-biographies of some of the actors/performers themselves, as well as on debates surrounding stardom. I will try to find out who the prominent personalities of the late 19th and early 20th centuries were in these three theatrical traditions – the reason why I limit my research of this aspect to this particular era is because evidence suggests that it was particularly during these decades that all three theatrical forms were active at the same time. The English speaking music hall stages in Britain, the Yiddish speaking theatres in Hungary and in other Eastern European regions, as well as the Hungarian speaking pesti kabaré in Budapest were active and at the height of their popularity.

With the completion of this chapter my intervention in the field of comedy studies, Jewish studies and transnational film history will be completed: by interrogating these issues, in particular the aspects concerning the complex relationship of performers, star image, the stage and the screen, negotiating these within the context of the three theatrical traditions I examine in this chapter, I aim at synthesizing some of the core issues and significant findings of the previous chapters. A number of the memes found in connection with performance have been mentioned and interrogated in more or less detail in the previous chapters, but by focusing on the individual performers in the four films in question, not only will I re-examine these issues from a different perspective, but also I will negotiate this latter aspect with the previous viewpoints and the argumentations presented in the earlier chapters of this thesis.

The chapter will be structured into two larger sections: firstly I will examine the aforementioned three theatrical traditions in detail, particularly concerning acting and performing within these traditions. As I have examined the transition of these traditions from stage to silent film to talkies in the introductory chapter of the thesis, I will only quote the relevant parts of this transition in this chapter on performance, as the argumentation presented in that chapter is still relevant within the context of performance. Thus what this practically entails is that I will skip from British music hall, Yiddish theatre and pesti kabaré straight to the films I analyse, without addressing the transition of these theatrical forms into film in general in any detail.

Within this section I will firstly look at in particular who the dominant personalities were of the music hall stages in Britain in this period, from the late 19th to the early 20th Centuries, what their acting styles were, what was written about them in the contemporary press, whether there was tabloid coverage on these stars, and how their star image was related to their on- and off-stage personae. Secondly, I aim at interrogating Yiddish theatre traditions in Eastern Europe in particular from a similar perspective, examining who the prominent performers of this tradition were, what kind of characters they tended to play both on and off stage, and whether there was any press coverage of Yiddish speaking theatre in the period I am examining. Thirdly, I am looking at the pesti kabaré stages from a similar angle, trying to define who the key performers were, how their star personae were connected to the roles they played on stage and off. Another issue I aim at interrogating is whether in any of the three theatrical traditions the performers transitioned from the stage to films, silent or talking.

In the second large section I will look at the individual performers who play in the four films that I analyse throughout the thesis. One of the important issues to address in this section is how I propose to make a selection regarding the performers I wish to single out for analysis. One of the approaches is to interrogate the extra-textual promotional material of the films in question, including posters, contemporary press releases and articles if available, and examine which actors or actresses are used to promote the films, that is to say who the main commodities were and whose star status was exploited in the promotion of the pictures. Another aspect to take into account when selecting the performers I intend to include in the second large section of the chapter is to see if they are instrumental within the genre connotations of the films, that is to say if they feature prominently in the previous chapter of this work, the chapter on humour. To measure this I will use data

obtained from the coding sheet devised for the previous chapter, and select those performers who are seen to be a source of comedy, or whose comedy is highly represented and crucial to the particular film they appear in.

Within this section therefore I also need to address the question of these performers' oeuvres in order to negotiate the roles they play in the films analysed in this thesis and their extra-textual connotations, including star personae and commodification. As this research is predominantly interested in historical discourse on humour, when interrogating – particularly the subsequent – careers of these performers I aim at looking no further than the end of the Second World War. The reason for this cut-off is that within this work I aim at analysing these films and their contexts from a historical standpoint, rather than using hindsight to assess them and their potential relevance from a contemporary viewpoint. Marking the cut-off specifically in May 1945 is because of the social and political changes, as well as the changes within industry practices that shifted significantly after the Second World War.

As the films I analyse have all been made in the decade before or during the Second World War, I extend the research of these performers from the early stages of their careers, in many cases linked to the theatrical traditions explored in the first section of the chapter, to wherever their careers were during the Second World War. The reason I provide such a precise outline for this cut-off is because I have chosen at least one other film to look at that those performers appeared in who were selected to be included in the second section of the chapter, and choosing a relevant film may depend to a large extent on when that particular film was made, that is to say at what point these performers were in their careers and within their oeuvres. The selection will be explored in more detail in the section itself.

6.2.1 British Music Hall

It seems apt to begin this section of the chapter by the following short quote from *British Music Hall – A Story in Pictures*, as it sums up in a few words one of the principal issues that will be interrogated throughout the section, namely the complex relationship between music hall stars and their audiences:

> It is often said that it was the stars who made the halls. This is only true in as much as it was the public who gradually became the arbiters of the fortunes of their favourites and made them stars. (Mander and Mitchenson)

As indicated in the introductory chapter of this thesis, a number of themes relating to music hall and pesti kabaré traditions, including some similarities and differences of these, specifically with regard to performers and their on and off-stage personae will be addressed in this chapter in further detail. Literature used both in this and the introductory chapters seem to converge in suggesting, as indicated elsewhere in this thesis[21], that there was a strong correlation between the roles that the music hall performers played on stage, and the off-stage personalities they have created for themselves. This means that the on and off-stage personae of the music hall performers were closer than those of the performers of the pesti kabaré scene.

Another important notion to address throughout the chapter, including all three theatrical traditions but perhaps most prominently within this section is gender. I will expand on this below in greater detail, but there is various evidence I would like to mention here that makes the inclusion of this aspect crucial: the evolution of the music halls from a compulsorily all-male form of entertainment; the perceived coarseness of the music halls where 'proper ladies' were seldom taken; and the numerous cross-dressers, both male and female, all indicate that this issue is to be addressed in this particular section of the chapter.

As mentioned above, in the Introduction chapter of this thesis I write in detail about both the music hall and the pesti kabaré traditions, including their respective transitions from stage to silent film to talkies. When discussing some of the similarities and differences of these two theatrical modes, I emphasize on the one hand the aim of both of these traditions to criticize their respective societies, with more stress on verbal delivery in the pesti kabaré, and more musical delivery in music hall traditions. On the other hand, I interrogate the notion of music hall performers creating comic personae for their on- and off-stage characters, as opposed to pesti kabaré performers, who functioned more as present day stand-up comedians. All of these themes are addressed in the sections below.

This distinction outlined above between music hall and pesti kabaré performers, where the latter performers function more as the actors in 'straight' British theatre of the late 19th early 20th Century, mostly performing in – usually comic – plays written by playwrights as

[21] see specifically section 1.2, pp 9-10 in the Introduction Chapter

opposed to the former, who create an on-stage character is supported by literature on music hall. Specifically in the Foreword to *British Music Hall – A Story in Pictures* John Betjeman reinforces the dichotomy between music hall and 'straight' theatre when he writes

> Variety artists are their own world, because the conditions in which they work are different from those of other theatrical performers. If an actor or a singer feels he is not a success there are others on whom he can put the blame: the author of the play, or the producer, or whoever chose him for the part. A variety artist is his or her own producer.[22]

Extrapolating from Betjeman's reading of the music hall performers, or as he calls them the variety artists mediate between ordinary people and 'straight' theatre, and subsequently so do film actors and actresses in the sense that they assert their own agency. Furthermore, according to this reading the music hall, or variety, acts offered the audience far stronger involvement in the performances, in the success or failure of the performers, thus in the lives and livelihoods of the music hall artistes.

According to the historical accounts of early music hall stages, the evolution of this form of entertainment corresponds both with the notion that music hall performers are unique in asserting their own agency, rather than relying on supporting agents such as playwrights, managers or impresarios; and with the complex, interconnected nature of the relationship between music hall performer and audience. The 'exclusively male Song and Supper Rooms' – and the exclusively male aspect of this notion will be addressed later in the section – may provide the origin of these aforementioned aspects. In these Song and Supper Rooms, with the exception of a few professional singers, the entertainment was provided by the patrons themselves. In these proto-music halls there was already a Chairman, 'taking charge of proceedings, calling on customers to contribute to the concert, augmenting what was provided' (Mander and Mitchenson 10) Mander and Mitchenson proceed by outlining that a considerable number of the patrons were found to be so talented that they became regular, professional performers in these establishments, and the programmes were built around them, with a few professional theatrical performers to supplement their numbers when needed, rather than the other way around, with a few 'amateurs' from the audience to add to the numerous professionals.

[22] Foreword by John Betjeman in (Mander and Mitchenson).

This nature of the earliest incarnation of the music hall may be seen as key in the later development of the music hall performers, and specifically regarding the music hall stars, whose direct relationship with the audience often shaped their star status and professional discourse. As seen in the introductory paragraph of the section, as well as argued by T.S. Eliot's in his *London Letters* essay on music hall and specifically the star image of Marie Lloyd, the success of music hall performers hinges on their relationship with their audiences, and the relatability of their performance. Eliot asserts that

> In the music-hall comedians [the lower classes] find the artistic expression and dignity of their own lives […]. The working-man who went to the music-hall and saw Marie Lloyd and joined in the chorus was himself performing part of the work of acting… (Eliot)[23]

Both Eliot's essay as well as the short biographies in George LeRoy's *Music Hall Stars of the Nineties* support the notion that music hall stars were seen as 'one of us', whose rags to riches (then often back to rags) stories were largely influential in their perception, their star status and commodification, and mediated the relationship between their on and off-stage personae. Furthermore, LeRoy's work emphasizes particularly the rags to riches aspects of the performers he classifies as the stars of the Halcyon days of music hall. Whereas the short biographies in his book are indeed quite concise and contain little information other than enlisting some biographical details of the performers and the most popular items on their repertoire – mostly songs but sometimes comedic skits – some of the recurring themes in these brief introductions to a performer's life and work include praise for musical and comic talents above all, and the ability for artists to combine comedy and pathos. More importantly to the argument concerning the aspects of the gender of music hall performers, the selflessness of specifically female performers is measured, and valued, by the generosity with which they gave their fortunes away and then were forced to live their last days in modest circumstances or outright poverty (LeRoy 12, 14, 22, 26).

He talks about Marie Lloyd, and quotes her rival, Bessie Bellwood as female music hall performers whose admirable quality was generosity, manifested in their acts of financial help to those in the profession in need. Particularly the gendered aspect is significant here, in the sense that such a trait is not mentioned regarding any of the male performers, even though a number of them have ended their lives in poverty, yet the notion of generosity as

[23] http://world.std.com/~raparker/exploring/tseliot/works/london-letters/london-letter-1922-12.html accessed on 20/06/2016

a valuable characteristic is not cited regarding any of them. It is rather the contrary, when generosity is quoted as a lamentable quality in men, as it is the case of Dan Leno for instance. In order to demonstrate the difference between the terminology and language used when talking about female or male performers, I quote LeRoy in his descriptions of Marie Lloyd and Bessie Bellwood as opposed to Dan Leno, George Mozart and Tom Costello.

Although T. S. Eliot in *London Letter* names Marie Lloyd the greatest and most popular music hall artist in England, asserting that she could express that soul of the people (Eliot), and, just like LeRoy, measures this success partly by noting the number of both professional colleagues and audience members coming to her funeral, this aspect of her generosity is missing from his assessment of Lloyd. George LeRoy, however, when describing Marie Lloyd's funeral, adds that

> She passed away a grand soul whose unbounded generosity to the innumerable „pensioners" she adopted and indeed to all who had a tale of woe to tell, left little in her purse as a consequence. (LeRoy 12)

This statement adds a gendered dimension to LeRoy's argument; one which is elaborated when LeRoy writes about Bessie Bellwood, comparing her to Marie Lloyd, asserting that they were rivals and that although Bessie Bellwood had 'much of the talent of dear Marie Lloyd', she lacked Lloyd's 'polish and sheer acting ability'. He continues, however by claiming that

> In many ways she was the counterpart of Marie, with the same sense of pity and benevolence to the less fortunate. She literally gave away her earnings and frequently performed the most menial of tasks, even to scrubbing the floors when visiting some of her sick *protégées*. (LeRoy 42)

As opposed to the vocabulary used in case of these female music hall stars, where the tone suggests implicit or explicit praise, the male performers, especially Dan Leno, are written about in far more derogatory terms regarding their generosity – or rather gullibility.

> Dan was generous to a foolish degree where a story of hard luck was told to him and perhaps because he had „suffered the slings and arrows of outrageous misfortune" himself, became easy prey. (LeRoy 14)

LeRoy is not quite this harsh on other male performers whose fortunes turned, however, the warm and praising tone apparent when talking about Marie Lloyd or Bessie Bellwood is missing when he writes about George Mozart or Tom Costello. LeRoy recounts that in a later part in his career George Mozart owned a small hotel he asserts that 'it must be feared that his boundless generosity to many hangers-on affected any profits made' (LeRoy 22); whereas in case of Tom Costello, having success with a song called 'Joey, the clown', about a music hall has-been, LeRoy laments that

> In his later years the slump in Variety had left him among the unwanted, and his circumstances were such that his „Joey, the clown" song proved to be very true in his case.

This gendered perception of these music hall performers is telling in their assessment – both in terms of their on stage and their off-stage personae. While, as mentioned above, the notion of the actors and actresses being 'one of us', thus on the one hand legitimising the halls, which were then seen as at best 'bohemian', and more often simply vulgar (Mander and Mitchenson 26), on the other hand carrying on the tradition of the Song and Supper Rooms where the talented members of the audience, and the community were elevated into performer-status; there is a gendered aspect to all of these features of music hall traditions that need to be addressed. Firstly, the fact that the tradition of the Song and Supper Rooms is a specifically male one limited not only the audience, therefore the consumers of this type of entertainment, but also those who then became the performers, and subsequently the stars, the commodities of music hall. In this sense there had been a gender-based binary in the music halls, both in terms of audience and in terms of performers.

When writing about Charles Morton's work in the establishment of music hall traditions in the mid-19th Century, Mander and Mitchenson discuss how in the newly built Canterbury Hall in 1852 'ladies [were] admitted to all performances instead of only to the special „Ladies' Nights"' (Mander and Mitchenson 14). Whereas Charles Morton's abolishment of such a strict gender-based divide marks a shift towards the inclusion of women within the music hall entertainment, Mander and Mitchenson also emphasize that even as late as the 1880s the halls were considered risqué, specifically mentioning middle class family values in this context. Yet by asserting that

> It must always be remembered that the halls of every type were still taboo to all unless they wished to be classed as bohemians or 'fast', and respectable middle

> class family audiences could only see the stars of music hall at Christmas time in pantomime

Mander and Mitchenson remain ambiguous in their assessment of music hall and specifically of music hall stars, as this quote implies that even though the music halls were of dubious reputation, the 'respectable middle class family' members still knew who these stars were and endeavoured to see them live.

It is perhaps for this reason that George LeRoy, when writing about the off-stage personae of Marie Lloyd and Bessie Bellwood, arguably two of the most prominent female music hall performers (the vocabulary and contextualisation used both in academic and in popular assessments of the music halls suggests so), he insists on mentioning in their brief and concise biographies their generosity, using terminology that would indicate this is a feminine, even maternal trait, contrasted with the negative assessment of the same trait in some of the male performers of the same era. It is as though LeRoy aims at softening, rounding their off-stage characters, implying that in order to succeed in such a masculine environment they necessarily had to have masculine traits that need, in turn, to be balanced by adding feminine characteristics to their off-stage personae.

When in this context performers choose to do cross-dressing acts, and both LeRoy, Mander and Mitchenson and Newton mention a significant number of male and female impersonators including Vesta Tilley, Arthur Lucan as Old Mother Riley, Miss Fanny Robina, Wilkie Bard, etc., the gender implication of the assessment of these performers and the way they mediate between their on and off-stage personae becomes even more complex. Furthermore, there is the question of Victorian morals, not addressed in detail in this research, but relevant to mention, where the popular concept often claimed that actresses were as morally and ethically corrupt and unacceptable for the 'respectable' Victorian societies as prostitutes.

By the 1890s, the era George LeRoy chose as the subject of his book on music hall performers, indicating that this was some way or another the most significant period in terms of particularly music hall artistes, if not music hall as a form of entertainment in general, these performers have arguably achieved star status. The fact the LeRoy should give the title *Music Hall Stars of the Nineties* to his book is already rather telling; there was, however another factor in the development of the star status and the commodification of these performers in the 1890s, namely the notion that by this time performers wore

clearly identifiable costumes, which, in turn, gave them unique status. Mander and Mitchenson indicate that it was specifically a trait of the comic performers when they describe that

> By the 'nineties comedians were developing an individual costume and make-up in which they sang most of their numbers. These clothes, mainly eccentric, became their trade mark and were at once recognizable to their public. (Mander and Mitchenson 93)

The fact that on the photographs both in *Music Hall Stars of the Nineties* and in *British Music Hall – A Story in Pictures* these performers are shown in their specific, trade-mark costumes seems to strongly support this notion, and it is mostly this latter aspect, the fact that these performers became instantly recognizable to their audiences that marks a shift in the commodification of music hall performers during this period. With their characteristic costume choices these performers created their respective on-stage personae, which had to, in turn, correspond with their emerging public image.

This commodification in the 1890s corresponded with another aspect that needs to be taken into account in the complex assessment of the legitimacy of music halls and music hall stars, namely that of classification, specifically the Royal endorsement. The fact that both George LeRoy in *Music Hall Stars of the Nineties* and Mander and Mitchenson in *British Music Hall – A Story in Pictures* measure a star's status by their connection to the Royal family, most often by his or her inclusion in the Royal Command or Royal Variety Performances – furthermore, in case of LeRoy by the size of the crowd turning up for a particular music hall star's funeral – indicates that the increasing commodification of music hall stars and the Royal family's acceptance of this form of entertainment might not have been merely parallel occurrences, but the two notions mutually impacted each other. Mander and Mitchenson give a list of all the Royal Command and Royal Variety Performances with dates and full lists of all the performers from 1912 to 1964 (the year of the book's publication), and there is a chapter entirely on the first, 1912 Royal Command Performance with quotes from the programme and from reports of the evening by the trade paper *Era*. The Royal endorsement of music hall features prominently in LeRoy's biographies as well, he uses the terminology 'King of Comics and Comic of the King' or 'King of friends and friend of kings' when describing Dan Leno and Arthur Roberts respectively (LeRoy 13, 27), referring to their privileged status of entertaining Royalty. Moreover, in Harry Tate's short biography he emphasizes the performer's extraordinary

status of being endorsed by the Royal family and alludes to their familiarity with the terminology he uses when describing the reactions to Tate's performance:

> He could also claim the unique honour of having appeared in no less than four Royal Command Performances and received several private invitations to appear before Royalty. At the former their Majesties were obviously overcome by laughter at his antics.

The Royal endorsement of music hall entertainment and music hall performers problematizes somewhat the already complex assessment of how the music hall audiences related to the performers. The gendered and class aspects of music hall can be seen to interplay in this matter: the stars, as the quote at the start of the section proclaims, made the halls, and inversely, the halls made the stars, who were 'one of us', as the familiarity of their address also shows, for instance George LeRoy pointing out that Marie Lloyd 'was affectionately known to the public and „pro" alike [as] „Our Marie"'. The performers were seen as an extension of the audience, those members of the community whose talents resonated with the rest of that community, and as connotations of class became more complex, culminating in a Royal approval of music hall, it was possibly this interconnectedness between the audiences and the performers that became perturbed. Therefore it was, according to Mander and Mitchenson, precisely at the moment of, perhaps partly because of, the Royal endorsement that music hall started to decline in popularity. There have, of course been other factors, such as the emergence of cinema, revue programmes, then of radio and much later of television, nevertheless Mander and Mitchenson make an explicit link between the year of the official Royal endorsement of music hall and its decline when they write in their fictitious eulogy that

> It is as if, at the moment of triumph, the gods, jealous of those whom they are said to love, decided that the music hall itself was to die young. From the first named Music Hall of 1848 to 1912 is only a short span of sixty-four years and by the end of the next fifty years there would not be a working Music Hall as such left in London. (Mander and Mitchenson 34)

To sum up, thus, a key factor in the understanding of music hall performers, their star status, commodification and the complexities of the performers' on and off-stage personae lies in the traditions of music hall entertainers emerging from the ranks of the audiences, of their acting as the agents of their own careers and popularity, and the implications of

gender and class within this complex relationship between performers and audiences. While music hall performers were no doubt considered professionals, one of the factors they needed to take into account was the precarious balance between 'one of us'-ness and professional status. Their popularity would hinge on maintaining this balance both in their acts and in their off-stage image, veering between rigidly classed determiners suggesting a relatable dimension and perceived respectability.

6.2.2 Pesti Kabaré

As mentioned above, the pesti kabaré had less ambiguously classed audience and performer circles, and the very British dichotomy between 'straight' or 'serious' theatre and music halls was missing from the stages of Budapest, which was a rather less divided sphere in this respect. The reasons for this, once again, lie in the origins of this theatrical tradition and more broadly the decidedly distinct history of the development of theatre in Hungary – or more accurately in the Hungarian territories of the Habsburg Empire. In the first part of this section I will describe briefly the evolution of Hungarian language theatrical traditions drawing on György Székely and Ferenc Kerényi's (eds.) (Székely, György; Kerényi, Ferenc) work on Hungarian theatre history, linking this evolution and the nature of this tradition to the development of the pesti kabaré, drawing largely, throughout the section, on Péter Molnár Gál's comprehensive study of the cabaret sphere of Budapest in the 19th and 20th Centuries (Molnár Gál, A pesti mulatók).

Whereas in Britain English language theatre had had a centuries-long tradition by the time the first Song and Supper Rooms sprang up, in Hungary the first Hungarian theatrical performances preceded the hey-day of the orpheums and cabarets by no longer than half a century. In the last years of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th Century on the inspiration, mostly, of Hungarian aristocrats and literary gentlemen the first Hungarian language theatre performances took place, in a predominantly German-speaking cultural environment. In the years following these first performances, the consensus is that they took place in 1790 – this is the year the Hungarian theatre historians mark as year zero of Hungarian theatre – the first decades were mostly about gaining an institutional foothold in the competitive theatrical world. Whereas German language theatres had buildings where the actors and actresses could perform, the first Hungarian language theatre, the Pesti

Magyar Színház (Hungarian Theatre of Pest) would only open in 1837, nearly half a century later.

In the intervening years, and in fact for several more decades to come, theatre companies were in a state of permanent touring. This era, the era of the wandering actors or 'buskers' is well-embedded in Hungarian popular culture and has grown to have an almost mythical element: the Hungarian poet, Sándor Petőfi, who features most prominently in the studies of every Hungarian school child and who is the emblematic figure of the ill-fated 1848 Revolution and War of Freedom (see Introduction), started his career as a wandering actor and has written a number of his poems about and/or during these years of wandering the country. Furthermore, playwright Ede Szigligeti's comic play *Liliomfi* from 1849 and the film version made a little over a century later have captured this world of theatrical tradition for the generations to come.

The significance of the wandering theatrical troupes is that they were, and remain to be, seen through a romantic lens and are assessed both as legitimate 'high culture' theatre akin to the 'proper' West End stages of London in Britain; whereas it was the same performers who subsequently appeared in a number of the orpheum or cabaret stages I will write about in detail below in this section. So the serious actors and actresses who helped maintain the traditions of Hungarian language theatre, doing so in difficult, non-institutionalised circumstances for nearly half a century, respected and celebrated performers, were on the one hand fighting this fight for Hungarian cultural independence, on the other hand they were doing so in financial and logistic insecurity during most of the early and mid-19th Century. After the more wide-spread establishment of Hungarian language theatres and orpheums (more of this later, and also on the semantics of the latter), the same performers who had wandered the country for the preceding decades, now appeared occasionally or on a regular basis in the more risqué orpheums of Pest, lending them an air of respectability.

It was due to this two-way movement between 'serious' theatres and the orpheum or cabaret stages that the aforementioned dichotomy so characteristic of British theatrical traditions in the 19th Century was far less marked. The orpheum was presentable: according to Molnár Gál several of the 19th Century's most celebrated serious tragic actresses, Déryné, Lujza Blaha and Mari Jászai all played in the orpheums of Pest. This has both gender connotations, once again, and put the predecessor of the pesti kabaré, the orpheum in a peculiar cultural context. Molnár Gál quotes Déryné's memoirs in his book when he describes that she performed at the Beleznay kert, one of the outdoor

entertainment complexes of the early and mid-19th Century (Molnár Gál, A pesti mulatók 62)[24]. Elsewhere he describes Lujza Blaha requesting permission from the authorities of the capital, Budapest, to organise a Hungarian language theatre in what was then a remote district of the city. Her plan was to put on a variety of acts, amongst others folk plays in order to promote what she calls in the request 'to fight for the spreading of Hungarian culture'. (Molnár Gál, A pesti mulatók 83) Yet elsewhere in his book Molnár Gál asserts that in the Fővárosi Orfeum (Capital Orpheum) the programme was of a respectable kind, that in this particular establishment of Pest the whole family was welcome to join the fun, the specifically respectable fun, devoid of coarse elements and sexuality. (Molnár Gál, A pesti mulatók 86)

It was particularly this type of humour, infused with sexual innuendo and considered below par that would give rise from the 'orfeum's and 'mulató's to that particularly Pest style comedy, the pesti kabaré. By the second half of the 19th Century numerous theatres were in established existence in Pest that had Hungarian language plays and programmes on the repertoire, these were, however, mostly considered serious or 'highbrow' theatre. Whereas, according to Székely and Kerényi 'the orpheums, the songeries of dubious quality, the variety stages and the Bacchus-cellars of various names entertained their audience in German' (Székely, György; Kerényi, Ferenc 656), and claim that it was widely believed that the Hungarian language was simply too bland to express the various harsh comic elements, so obviously funny in German. (Székely and Kerényi) In the pesti kabaré chapter of their Hungarian theatre history they stress the difficult beginnings of the cabaret as genre in Budapest, and emphasize the origins of the first incarnation of the pesti kabaré as an amalgamation of German and French imports, called at first variety rather than cabaret, but inspired by the cabaret programmes of Munich and Paris. (Székely and Kerényi 659) Molnar Gal contests this view and claims that whereas traditionally the pesti kabaré is seen as a derivation from the experiences of its makers in Paris, or to a lesser extent from the Überbrettl of Bavaria, the origins of the pesti kabaré are to be found in the Király utca, in the 'amoral, rough, dirty, base' German language variety programmes. (Molnár Gál, A pesti mulatók 346)

Before moving on to the history of the pesti kabaré, I would like to briefly address the issue of the term orpheum, translated by me from the Hungarian word orfeum. Péter Molnár Gál in his books and articles uses the terms 'mulató' and 'orfeum' in an

[24] quoting (Déryné)

interchangeable fashion, it is, however, a challenging task to try and give an accurate translation of these – 'mulató' is translated in the dictionary as 'halls' or 'nightclub', whereas in English Orpheum is usually the name of a particular establishment. In the context of this research I will continue to use the term orpheum to refer to late 19th and early 20th Century 'clubs' or 'halls', which were the predecessors of the pesti kabaré; as using the term 'halls' could be confusing in light of the argumentation relating to music halls, whereas a 'nightclub' has modern day connotations that have little connection with the establishments I am describing in this thesis.

After the first, unsuccessful attempts to establish cabaret style entertainment in Pest in Hungarian in the first few years of the 20th Century (1901-1905), the opening of the Cabaret Bonbonnière in early 1907 on Teréz körút marks the beginning of the first era of the pesti kabaré. The pesti kabaré quickly gained popularity and became determined by the figure of the compere, on whose ability to engage the audience with witty and topical banter hinged the entire enterprise. According to Székely and Kerényi the first era, which they call the golden age, was characterised by the compere-ing activities of the journalist Endre Nagy. They describe an incident whereby on his very first night as compere Nagy was relying on his notes to provide suitably entertaining linking material between the acts, the audience, however, was disengaged and disinterested. To avoid being boo-ed off stage and to avoid potentially provoking a scandal, he started improvising a story, which quickly turned the mood of his audience, and Nagy became a standard figure of the pesti kabaré stages. (Székely and Kerényi 660-661)

His compere-ing duties were well beyond simply introducing the next act, Endre Nagy created, improvised monologues around these introductions, relating to topical issues important to his Budapest audience, which, according to Székely and Kerényi, became the talk of the city in the following days. Apart from lending the pesti kabaré its compere-heavy style, Nagy also influenced the types of acts that would characterise this kind of entertainment, changing the more theatrical plays to short, comic sketches and topical, politically charged comic songs. Székely and Kerényi call this literary cabaret, which is also supported by the way in which Molnár Gál writes about the transition between orpheum and cabaret, comparing the two and deeming the latter more 'sophisticated'. He asserts that 'poetry, literature, art nouveau fine- and applied arts, and new music have all found their way to the stage.' (Molnár Gál, A pesti mulatók 277)

As in the orpheums and clubs before, the pesti kabaré stages were also welcome destinations of the 'straight' actors and actresses, who performed there as guest artists on a regular basis. Or in case of Vilma Medgyaszay, a young primadonna of the serious stage, gaining fame in the early 20th Century in a revival of Sándor Petőfi's János vitéz (John the Valiant), as the female lead opposite one of the era's most popular actress, Sári Fedák as John the Valiant in drag, joining the cabaret on a permanent basis. Medgyaszay left the world of three-act plays and joined the Modern Theatre cabaret company, eventually taking charge of the cabaret theatre a few years later during the first years of the First World War.

As asserted before, thus, the pesti kabaré was a strange amalgamation of the sophisticated and the base, the foreign and the domestic/local, the German and the Hungarian, and 'serious' and light entertainment. Whereas, as seen above, Molnár Gál refers to the pesti kabaré as respectable family entertainment, on the same page he writes about a famous comic actress and performer, Cäcilie Carola (or Carola Cäcilie, it is actually unclear from Molnár Gál's account which was the surname and which the first name), who he praises – much in the vein of George LeRoy and his account of particularly female music hall stars – for her ability to combine comedy with pathos. He even quotes Vilmos Tarján who describes Cäcilie Carola as 'an English soubrette with the elegance of a French dame and the pleasantness and temperament of a Hungarian woman, is a true acting talent.' (Molnár Gál, A pesti mulatók 86)[25] Nevertheless, on the next page he describes an incident where Cäcilie Carola beat up another soubrette on stage because she had insulted Carola's fiancé, an ape-man, pointing out that an ape-man and a gorilla are actually nearly the same thing. (Molnár Gál, A pesti mulatók 87) Female performers physically insulting one another on stage, however, no matter how sophisticated the orpheums and cabarets were becoming, does not warrant family entertainment.

This incident, apart from shedding light on the liminal nature of this form of entertainment, also highlights the popularity and commodification of the comic actress, Cäcilie Carola, who Molnár Gál calls the 'first international star of the orpheum', and whose earlier description by Tarján leaves the question of her national identity ambiguous. Her very name, as seen from my comment on the question of her first name or surname; her marriage to the ape-man John Cray; her year-long engagement as guest star of Alexander Segall's Alcazar Theatre in St Petersburg, and Molnár Gál's description of her as

[25] quoting (Vilmos)

international all point to the conscious creation of Cäcilie Carola's image as internationally marketable star with an at least ambiguous national identity. Subsequently this practice would become standard in Hollywood, and this particular description would fit a number of the young performers, especially actresses who were on contract at Alexander Korda's London Films studio, in particular Estelle Thompson who would later become exotic Merle Oberon; though according to Robert Donat's biographers, even his star persona underwent a short period when exotic pasts were invented for him (Barrow) (Trewin).

Apart from the soubrettes of the orpheum, like Cäcilie Carola, and Vilma Medgyaszay, who could establish herself as singer of chansons and later as cabaret theatre director, the big names of the pesti kabaré, both to the contemporary audiences, at least according to Székely and Kerényi, and Molnár Gál, as well as to posterity – those pesti kabaré stars that I grew up aware of in Hungary – were men. As the pesti kabaré got its distinct voice of topical, verbal, acerbic criticism of life in Budapest, catering for the middle classes (Molnár Gál, A pesti mulatók 277), it produced its own layer of star performers, and with few exceptions, such as Lili Berki, the wife of Gyula Gózon of later moderate fame, this was a mainly masculine world. Whereas in the orpheum and revue stages there was a more dominant female presence: women in drag in the play *Asszonyhadsereg* (Women's Army) (Molnár Gál, A pesti mulatók 93); the Barrison girls, whose stardom and commodification in late 19th Century Hungary was on the scale of mid-20th Century Hollywood stars – hats, dresses, hair styles, knick-knacks with their picture, and their signed photos were in all the shops in Budapest, and according to Molnár Gál they, or their management, had talent for making them sought after commodities (Molnár Gál, A pesti mulatók 96). The pesti kabaré, perhaps because of its ambiguous, liminal status between the sophisticated, the literary and the most improper kind of comic entertainment, was a rather masculine space. Both theatre histories used in this section mention this aspect, especially Molnár Gál quite heavily, using terminology to do so that isn't afraid to reflect on the nature of this type of scatological, base humour.

> Parodies often chose end products as their comic target. The source of the humour burst out from fluids. Childlike and naughty, they often chose to talk about the fluids of sexual activities and the comedy of digestion and defecation, not necessarily in a clever or tasteful way, but always consciously breaking the rules of propriety, targeting hypocrisy and uncouthly ripping apart the veils of false modesty. (Molnár Gál, A pesti mulatók 169)

One of the hugely successful one-act plays of the orpheum stages in the last decade of the 19th Century was a play called *Kalabriász-parti* (A Round of Calabrias – Calabrias was a popular card game at the time), which Molnár Gál compares to *The Beggar's Opera* by John Gay and J. C. Pepusch, and to Charles Lecocq's *La Fille de Madame Angot*, likely based on its popularity rather than on its sophisticated merits, as he then writes that

> The high point of the performance was when the people around the table started to smell each other increasingly suspiciously, wondering who the unpleasant smell was coming from. The orpheum often used below-the-belt humour. They didn't only use saucy sexual humour, but took childlike pleasure in naughtily talking about the digestive system, which was frequent subject on the orpheum stages. This may be seen as a rebellion against Victorian decorum. (Molnár Gál, A pesti mulatók 204)

It was the updated version of this very play, under the new name *Vonósnégyes* (String Quartet) that launched the career of one of the most prominent performers of the pesti kabaré, Szőke Szakáll, known later in his career as S. Z. Sakall. The evolution of Sakall's stage name is in itself telling of his stage, and subsequently of his screen persona, and he is considered one of the crucial figures of the pesti kabaré entertainment, featuring heavily in both Molnár Gál and in Székely and Kerényi's works on theatre and cabaret history, as well as Károly Szalay's volume on film comedy. The Jewish man who wrote *Vonósnégyes* and several other one-act plays for the cabaret stages was born, according to some sources Jenő Grünwald, according to other sources Sándor Gärtner, later changing his name to the more Hungarian sounding Jenő Gerő, only using this name, however, as playwright, as a performer he used the nickname Szőke Szakáll, and later in Hollywood S. Z. 'Cuddles' Sakall.

In the second decade of the 20th Century he was the director of the so-called Sörkabaré (Beer Cabaret), operating on the upper floor of the Royal Orpheum in Budapest, and quickly became 'one of the city's most well-known features', whose very appearance 'personified one of the types of the Pest everyman' (Székely, György; Kerényi, Ferenc 673), which added to his stage persona, creating a relatable star image. Szalay claims that he was, together with Gyula Kabos, one of those few actors of the inter-war years who, both on stage and on screen, could

> represent a particular type of Hungarian middle-class everyman, the small tradesman, the small artisan, the small clerk, who will remain honest, true and exemplary both in his professional and in his private affairs in all circumstances. (Szalay 265)

His first nickname, used on the pesti kabaré stages literally means 'Blond Beard' and his second, American nickname, Cuddles is even less threatening, supporting Molnár Gál's theory of Szőke Szakáll's perpetual niceness, which he attributes to Szőke Szakáll's manner of self-preservation.

> Unfailingly sweet, flattering, accepting everything, endlessly patient, good-natured and nice, nice, nice. Nice as a defence. Sweet out of being alarmed. All jokes, all cheeky teasing. What a charming comedian. He knows that if he stops being nice even for one moment, the audience will leave and go to another orpheum. (Molnár Gál, A pesti mulatók 250)

He was a prolific author and according to Molnár Gál a great number of his plays and sketches were rather macabre in their humour, pointing out, however, that using such macabre humour served the purpose of trying to survive in sombre situations using comedy to lighten up the load, rather than l'art pour l'art cynicism. Molnár Gál quotes three exchanges from Szőke Szakáll's various plays, all displaying this cheerful gallows humour, and looking at the names of the characters, all featuring Jewish characters. From *A lövészárokban* (In the Trenches) he quotes the following exchange between two soldiers:

> Weisz: I haven't changed out of these clothes for two months, though at home I was used to changing my underwear at least once a month.
>
> Schwarcz: If one of us happens to die, I will inform your family.

In *Kelemen Palika* (Paulie Kelemen), a one-act play from 1923 he puts the macabre joke in the mouths of children, no doubt referring to a liminal state between life and death:

> Grau: What are you eating?
>
> Rózsa: Bread and butter.
>
> Grau: What's on it?
>
> Rózsa: Margarine.

Grau: Won't you share with me?

Rózsa: Indeed I won't! I have enough trouble as it is with all these maggots without having to feed you as well.

In another exchange from the same play Rózsa, the little girl is talking to the title character, young Paulie Kelemen:

Rózsa: Where is your brother then?

Kelemen: In the pulmonary hospital.

Rózsa: What's he doing there?

Kelemen: Coughing. (Molnár Gál, A pesti mulatók 252-253)

Apart from Szőke Szakáll, Székely and Kerényi, as well as Szalay also mention Károly Huszár as one of the prominent performers of the pesti kabaré stages. Szalay starts his section on overweight comedians with Pufi Huszár, as Károly Huszár was known, and claims that 'He was one of the most prominent comedians of the silent film era.' (Szalay 292) As mentioned above, it was not only on film that Huszár was a popular and prolific actor, as Székely and Kerényi also describe how it was specifically on the pesti kabaré stages that Huszár lost his first name, which was replaced by the nickname Pufi (Székely and Kerényi 664), meaning 'chubby'. It was, as in case of Szőke Szakáll, under a modification of this nickname that he achieved fame in Germany, then in Hollywood, known as Karl or Charles Puffy. Péter Molnár Gál describes the process of this name change thus

In his act called Suburban Cabaret he was telling ancient jokes with a red handkerchief tucked into his shirt, and after every bad joke he would shake fist at the audience, prompting them to laugh. This is where Károly Huszár becomes Pufi Huszár. A favourite with the audiences. Celebrated comedian.

Molnár Gál continues his description by pointing out that it was precisely at this point that the character actor Huszár became a mere agent in perpetuating his own personality. (Molnár Gál, Egy kövér ember meséi) The fact that Molnár Gál chooses to use the term 'personality' in this argument is telling because in doing so Molnár Gál mixes together the on and off-stage personae of Huszár, ignoring the aspects of commodification and simplifies the process whereby a performer's public image changes as a result of a role

they take on. The argument is also significant as it supports the notion that pesti kabaré performers were closer in style to modern day stand-up comedians than to contemporary music hall comedians who, as described before, had their distinctive on-stage characters, complete with make-up and costume. The fact that Molnár Gál mentions Huszár's personality in particular, as well as the list of sketches by Huszár provided in Molnár Gál's article (including titles such as *Pufi Tries some Shoes on* (1914); *Pufi at the Barber* (1914); *Pufi and the Melon* (1914); *Pufi in the Steam Room* (1914)), which all seem to place Huszár in very trivial, everyday situations, all indicate that Pufi Huszár's off-stage persona was strongly used as a basis for his on-stage character.

Another name that I know from my own childhood as one of the legendary pesti kabaré comedians, someone who has never achieved film stardom like Gyula Kabos or Kálmán Latabár – more of whom later – but who remained a pesti kabaré star is Béla Salamon. Molnár Gál describes him as the ultimate schlemiel, and emphasizes that he used to appear without any make-up, wigs or costume on stage, looking unashamedly petit bourgeois and unashamedly Jewish. (Molnár Gál, A pesti mulatók 312) He had no witty nickname like Pufi Huszár or Szőke Szakáll, although he had also changed his name, Béla Saly to the more Hungarian sounding Salamon. Although Béla Salamon never became a household name as a film star, his catchphrases are still alive today and anecdotal evidence supports his status as one of the prominent pesti kabaré figures. For instance, I remember as a child that my parents' friends who were theatrical people talked often about him as the personification of the pesti kabaré style. Molnár Gál supports this idea when he writes about Salamon that his ultimate wisdom was the Pest joke, and quotes some of his catchphrases. Székely and Kerényi also write about Salamon is similar terms, calling him a legendary performer of the pesti kabaré (Székely and Kerényi 673), and describing his on-stage characters as the schlemiel Molnár Gál also likens him to.

Salamon's career didn't take off easily: for several years he had worked as assistant tailor during the day and would appear in several different cabarets at night. It was only in the early 1920s when he could leave his day job and make a living as comedian on the pesti kabaré stages, when Szőke Szakáll gave him his aforementioned play, *Vonósnégyes* (The Quartet). Salamon made a success of the play, and before Szőke Szakáll left Hungary for the first time to go to Vienna, then to Berlin, he legally transferred all rights to *Vonósnégyes* to Béla Salamon. This one-act play not only provided Salamon with a break, ensuring that he would have a steady stream of professional engagements for the years to

come, but also meant that he had a sure-fire act to fall back on if needed. Salamon used the opportunity well and is now mostly remembered for his role in *Vonósnégyes*, a television recording of which from the 1960s is available online.

In an interview in the early 1930s Salamon himself describes his own comedy and comic success as something he didn't discover, but was discovered for him by others: if people laugh at someone for long enough that person must de facto become a comedian. Furthermore, according to Salamon all comedians need to have a different grotesque feature, otherwise their comedy would end up annulling each other. (Salamon)[26] What Salamon claims in this interview, and the way he is assessed both by Molnár Gál, by Székely and Kerényi, by his colleague and friend Szőke Szakáll and other sources confirm that in a way he was the essential pesti kabaré comedian figure: he was not a slapstick film comedy star like Pufi Huszár, he was not a writer-comedian like Szőke Szakáll, he was not a dancer and singer like Gyula Gózon and he did not act in serious roles beside his comic roles like Gyula Kabos did. He was a pesti kabaré comedian, not more and not less. He had no international career and did not perform in other languages, but maintained a steady stream of successful cabaret roles in Budapest. In this sense Béla Salamon could be considered the personification of pesti kabaré style comedy.

Apart from the above performers, aside from Vilma Medgyaszay and pesti kabaré performer Sándor Rott's wife Berta Türk, all the above mentioned performers are male actors or writer-actors; yet three actors also need to be mentioned in this section of the chapter, who will all be written about in further detail below. These actors all started their careers on the pesti kabaré stages and became prominent film stars in the 1930s and 1940s, all appearing in one or both of the two Hungarian films analysed in this thesis: *Hyppolit, the Butler* and *Skirts and Trousers*. They are Gyula Kabos, who plays the main role in *Hyppolit, the Butler*; Kálmán Latabár who plays the main character in *Skirts and Trousers*; and Gyula Csortos who plays the title character in the former and an important supporting character in the latter. I will write in detail about all four of these performers in the second large section of the chapter (Sections 3.7, 3.9 and 3.12).

[26] quoted by Szineszkonyvtar http://www.szineszkonyvtar.hu/contents/p-z/salamonbelet.htm, accessed 12/04/2016.

6.2.3 Yiddish Theatre

In the last section examining theatrical traditions I interrogate Yiddish theatre, which is somewhat more difficult not only to define than music hall and pesti kabaré, but also appears more elusive than the other two theatrical traditions, with little data of its Eastern European origins. In this section, therefore I aim at extrapolating from American Yiddish theatre traditions and the historic backgrounds to the particular ways Eastern European Yiddish theatrical traditions may have viewed the question of performance and possibly of stardom. I am drawing heavily on David S. Lifson's comprehensive monograph on American Yiddish theatre (Lifson) to do so, as well as on Ruth R. Wisse's work on the character of the schlemiel (Wisse), a typically Jewish character both in ordinary everyday life and on stage and screen. Whereas Wisse's work is mostly focused on literary aspects of the schlemiel, it places the character in a historic context that is helpful in the understanding of the establishment of early Yiddish theatre within the environment of 19th Century Jewish enlightenment (see also Introduction chapter of this thesis). Lifson's monograph, however, is a detailed account of the process that enabled Yiddish theatrical traditions to continue far away from their original setting, the shtetl, in America, mostly in New York City. In order to do so, Lifson describes the Eastern European origins of this re-settlement, which enables understanding of some of the aspects I aim at researching in the section of the chapter, such as the establishment and functioning of Yiddish speaking theatre companies; the status of performers within the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe; or the relationship between theatre and religious life within these same communities.

One of the most significant differences between both music hall and pesti kabaré traditions as opposed to Yiddish theatre traditions is the apparent lack of star status of performers within the latter. Whereas in both music hall and pesti kabaré traditions, after a brief period of amateur performers in song and supper rooms or even amongst the wandering performers of early Hungarian speaking theatre, professionals took the stage and both theatrical traditions produced their own stars, whose status as stars could be measured either by their commodification – such as the Barrison Girls – or by the size of the crowd at their funeral, as seen in George LeRoy's *Music Hall Stars of the Nineties*; in Yiddish theatre this seems to have worked differently. Lifson points out that in Yiddish theatre it was the team effort, the theatre troupe, the collective that was at the focus of both artistic

aspirations and of practical aspects of theatre making. (Lifson) While describing the evolution of Yiddish theatre in Eastern Europe in their respective works, neither Lifson nor Wisse make mention of any particular performers, whether male or female, whether comedians or dramatic performers, whether in the context of Purim plays or of established theatre groups. It is only in the sections describing Yiddish theatre in New York City that Lifson dedicates a chapter to the prominent performers of the New York stages. This supports the idea asserted by him earlier that theatre was regarded as a team effort rather than an environment for individual advancement or a possible means to achieve stardom.

Lifson is, in fact, quite critical of early Yiddish theatre actors, and sees a shift towards a more intellectual or artistically driven theatre with the appearance of the playwright Gordin's plays. He describes the earliest instances of these theatrical traditions in a harsh and deprecating manner, both in terms of the artists and their audiences:

> The Yiddish theatre in those days appeared like a poor country fair where a world of confusion prevailed. It had no artists but untalented jesters, vaudevillians with painted-on beards and sideburns, with hand-me-down tawdry costumes of royalty topped with paper crowns and tin breast-plates – all for an uneducated audience. The actors had no respect either for themselves or for their audience. (Lifson 48)

> The Yiddish actor never learned a stage speech. His pitch was loud, with increased decibels to outyell the boisterous audience. (Lifson 138)

Elsewhere he maintains that early Yiddish theatre actors were charmless and had little respect for the boundaries of their profession. He quotes Mestel, as well as Leon Kobrin when he claims that

> Originally the Yiddish theatre drew to its stage actors from the non-intellectual or working class so that there was little graciousness, charm, and intellectual stature among the actors. Leon Kobrin wrote that prior to 1918 on the Yiddish stage in New York the actors had no artistic pride. They would get the audience involved in their private scandals; they would get married on the stage and invite the audience; and they would indulge in asides about private quarrels. (Lifson 126)[27]

This above quote is significant not only because it sheds light on aspects of class in relation to early Yiddish theatre performers, supporting the notion that they were uneducated and

[27] quoting (Mestel 35).

uncouth, but also because if we assume that these early New York City Yiddish theatre actors and actresses behaved in a similar way to their Eastern European counterparts, then that would indicate a lack of professionalism missing from both music hall and pesti kabaré traditions. Although it has been argued elsewhere in this thesis that music hall was a predominantly lower-class type of entertainment in Britain; and despite the above mentioned on-stage fight instigated by orpheum actress Carola Cäcilie, in both of these traditions the performers aimed (with how much success is a topic for a different argument) at maintaining boundaries between their professional and private lives. They created their on- and off-stage personae, partly to reinforce the duality of their profession, specifically the 'one of us'-aspect in music hall traditions, but similarly the notion of topicality and the emphatic focus on current urban life in pesti kabaré traditions that made the performers accessible and distant at the same time. The early Yiddish theatre performers who blurred the lines between the personal and the professional also questioned the duality of the star status and the star system. This may or may not have been a question of pride, in any case it must have meant a somewhat different theatre going experience for the audiences and a different kind of professional life for the performers.

When writing about the origins of Yiddish language theatre, both Lifson and Wisse agree that it was the Purim plays that paved the way for what became a theatrical tradition in its own right. Jewish religious rules do not allow theatrical entertainment, neither as performer nor as consumer, whether in Hebrew, Yiddish or any other language. The development of Yiddish theatre traditions, therefore, are different from the other two traditions, which, as seen above, also developed in markedly different ways regarding specifically language and thus tapping into issues of nationality and cultural heritage. Lifson specifically quotes the theatricality of religious rituals, links them to Yiddish theatre traditions and cites them as a possible origin for the establishment of this tradition in later decades.

> The roots of Yiddish theatre history may be found in the traditional religious rituals: the high-church impressiveness of the reading of the Torah, and the protocol of the Passover feasts, with the theatricality of suspense in the opening of the door for the invisible prophet Elijah. (Lifson 19)

Despite the overall theatricality of religious rituals, in Jewish culture it was only during the celebration of Purim, a religious holiday commemorating the victory of the Jews, led by Queen Esther, over the evil Haman, that actual performances of any kind were allowed. "Spectacles and plays (were considered) un-Jewish at other times of the year. But they are

an important part of Purim" Lifson quotes Zborowski and Herzog[28]. The function of these plays could be seen as similar to the medieval mystery plays reiterating the story of the birth of Jesus Christ, and is the only such story in the Jewish religious holiday calendar that is commemorated by being acted out.

> The origin of the Jewish drama is the Biblical story of Esther. The historian of the Yiddish theatre, Gorin, said that the presentation of the story of Esther began 415 A. D. The start was in the reading of the story in the synagogue during the Festival of Purim. Because no dramatic presentation was permitted in the place of worship, the crude drama was enacted out-of-doors in the courtyards of the synagogues. (Lifson 26)

This haphazardness might be a possible key to understanding why in old style Yiddish theatre the performers did not respect the script and, as seen above, did not maintain a professional distance between themselves and their audiences. In spite of the differences in its development, however, Yiddish theatre traditions were established in a similar fashion from two aspects to the other two theatrical traditions discussed in this section, the Song and Supper Rooms pre-dating the British music hall traditions, and the early instances of the pesti kabaré. Firstly, this concerned the Purimspiel and those taking part in performing in it from the 15th Century onwards – more of which below – and secondly, those amateur performers who sang in cafés, just as the performers of the Song and Supper Rooms in Britain. Lifson describes them chiefly as singers, but asserts that '[o]ccasionally they introduced prose and costumes', choosing as an example from the 1850s

> … a group of folk singers from Brode, Galicia, [who called] themselves the Broder Singers, became popular over all Eastern Europe. Their material was the songs and lyrics by the folk poet, Velvel Zbarsher. They improvised dialogue to provide continuity. (Lifson 36)

The combination of music and dialogue, specifically the appearance of improvisation in case of the spoken material, is a characteristic of Yiddish theatre traditions and becomes rather prominent in the American incarnation of this tradition, particularly when it comes to the performers' attitude towards written texts and their disrespect for written scripts (Lifson 130).

[28] quoting (Herzog és Zborowski 401-402)

Similarly to the café singers, the performers of the Purimspiels also had a lax attitude towards scripts and preferred to create their own versions of Queen Esther's story. According to Ruth Wisse a number of the characters appearing in some Purimspiels have little to do with the Biblical story:

> In Purim plays dating from the end of the fifteenth century the comic figures were replicas of the German narr, as their very names – Hans Wurst, Pickelherring – reveal. (Wisse 7)

From that period onwards it was partly the semi-professional entertainers, busking in the open air, performing the Purim plays, or locals, members of their respective communities who performed on this religious festival. As Lifson explains, during Purim many of the strict rules of the Halakha were suspended and drinking, dressing up, even cross-dressing was allowed, and women were permitted to take part in these performances as well.

> Thus people themselves started to play theatre (the *Purimspiel*); the people themselves created their own first theatre people; the folk were the first to come to the theatre. As for language, in the early nineteenth century, Yiddish gained wider currency and became the dialect used in the *Purimspiel*…

The rest is mostly speculation regarding Yiddish theatre traditions in Eastern Europe as the particular performers written about in detail in Lifson's book are all stars of the New York stages and it is unknown to what extent their particular traits reflect the traditions of Eastern European style Yiddish theatre, beyond what is already described above. So apart from the – according to Lifson – unprofessional aspects of theatre making in old Yiddish theatrical traditions and the importance of the collective efforts of theatre troupes as opposed to the individualism of the star system, there are only two more aspects I would like to mention about Yiddish theatre traditions: firstly, the prevailing popularity of comedians and female singers in Yiddish theatre; and secondly, perhaps connected both to the above mentioned aspects of blurring the boundaries between the professional and personal affairs of performers and the notion of theatre collectives, the fact that a number of the prominent performers mentioned by Lifson are connected to each other by family ties – husbands and wives, fathers and daughters, etc. Both of these aspects have gender implications that I would like to address in the paragraphs below.

Lifson, in a similar tone to George LeRoy in his description of music hall stars of the late 19th Century, describes that successful performers in Yiddish theatres strived to strike a

balance between pathos and the comic. Another similarity, as opposed to pesti kabaré traditions, is the presence of female performers. Although in all three theatrical traditions successful female performers usually provided musical entertainment, their numbers were marginal in pesti kabaré traditions, which, as seen above, was a more verbally focused type of entertainment. In Yiddish theatre, as on the music hall stages, the number of female singers or actors was more significant. According to Lifson in Yiddish theatrical traditions this was linked particularly to the perceived natural, unspoilt aspects of femininity, in spite of the fact that apparently a number of these female performers were not talented actors.

> The Yiddish acing art had its roots in the sentimental, banal, tear-in-eye song […]. The Yiddish comedian was always more popular than the tragedian who had lesser triumphs with the public […]. Actresses who could not read Yiddish, with little acting ability, but who could sing well, gave the Yiddish theatre a primitiveness and folksy charm. (Lifson 135)

As mentioned above, in Yiddish theatre, more than in any of the other two theatrical traditions described in this thesis, personal issues and dramas permeated the on and off-stage personae of the performers, both the reason and the explanation for which could lie in the family connections, at least in the New York City Yiddish theatre performers. When Lifson writes about the stars and the star system of the New York City Yiddish stage, despite emphasizing the importance of the theatre collective and the team efforts in this tradition, he mentions two theatre couples, whose names come back in later chapters of the book: Mr and Mrs Jacob Adler, and Mr and Mrs Thomashevsky. In connection with the former couple, Lifson describes the below incident, which supports the notion that within this theatrical tradition the performers allowed their personal affairs to seep into their professional spheres, furthermore, it is telling in terms of the presence and status of female performers, other than semi-illiterate singers who could not act.

> The night of Miss Adler's benefit, the stage witnessed a drama, at the end of the third act, when her many-time married father and his former wife, her mother, met. Both embraced Miss Adler simultaneously as a climax to the ceremony that honored her. (Lifson 128)

The Miss Adler in the quote is Celia Adler, the daughter of the aforementioned Mr and Mrs Jacob Adler, a renowned actress of the New York City Yiddish stage of her own right, whose career is described in detail in the 'Noteworthy Stars and Their Efforts to Improve

the Yiddish Stage' section of Lifson's book. In status she was an equal to the male performers of New York City Yiddish theatres, without the implications of Victorian morals regarding actresses, as in the case of the majority of British female music hall performers, though perhaps this status was a result of her family.

6.3.1 Actors and Actresses – Brief Introduction

> Hollywood studio era discourses suggested that stars created performance by playing themselves, and thus the category of star determined that a performance should be read as not involving acting skill (Lowe)

Victoria Lowe makes the above assertion in her article on stardom and film acting, and it serves as a suitable introductory statement to this section of the chapter on the performance of the individual actors and actresses appearing in the films I analyse, one of them Robert Donat, on whom Lowe's article focuses. Suitable, because it is partly this dichotomy that serves as focal point to the section, and the chapter as a whole: to what extent is star text dependent on acting talent; how are the on- and off-screen personae of these actors perceived in relation to their alleged 'real' selves? I aim at addressing some of these issues in the second large section of this chapter, where I will be writing about the actors and actresses appearing in the four films I have chosen to analyse. As there is no space to write about all the performers who have screen time in these films I have chosen the actors and actresses based on a number of criteria that I will describe briefly in this introduction, then I place the argumentation within the framework of star studies, before moving on to writing about the performers themselves.

One of the tools I used to establish which performers to write about was the promotional material to the films: whose names were on the posters; who was mentioned in the contemporary advertisements and reviews in the press? I looked at a number of nationally appearing daily papers from the weeks when the films originally premiered, both in case of the British and in case of the Hungarian films. This indicates that those performers whose names were used as selling points for a film were then considered the stars, the commodities whose star status could be exploited in order to sell the film in question. Apart from this, I used the results of the chart I had constructed for the previous chapter on humour to pick the performers to write about, and selected those performers whose

characters are featured prominently in this chart, therefore whose comic performance is essential for the humour of the particular film to work.

In the sections below, therefore, I aim at writing in detail about a number of performers who I consider significant based on the above criteria and address questions regarding their on and off-screen personae; how these performers negotiated their star status – where applicable – in their careers; where in their careers they were when the particular films were made; how their commodification played into the particular roles they took in the films in question, and how their off-screen personae played into these roles, addressing the issue of typecasting. When examining the careers and the particular roles of the performers in question I aim, thus, at taking into account their role in the film; if this role corresponds with any typical character in music hall/pesti kabaré/yiddish theatrical traditions; how this role relates to the performer's previous roles and his or her extra-textual persona; and I will look at these performers' individual acting styles, including examining some elements of mise-en-scene, such as costume, make-up and particular props; and I try to establish how these films are positioned within the particular performers' oeuvres.

6.3.2 George Formby

As both Formby's biographers, Alan Randall and Ray Seaton, and David Sutton, whose work on inter-war British comedies I have used throughout this research, claim, Formby cannot be characterised as character actor, and mostly uses his well-known and well-established comic persona throughout his films. In over two thirds of all the films he has acted in his character is called George, and throughout his film career he has perpetually come back to playing the same gormless, slapstick-prone but honest Northern lad; in these films not only the name and personal traits of the characters he plays, but the narratives remain variations of the same theme. As Jeffrey Richards describes:

> First there would be his bashful courtship of a brisk, sensible girl, almost always with a cut-glass Kensington accent. He would have to overcome a suave upper-class rival, who usually turned out to be the crook. But he would win the girl in the end. (Richards, The Age of the Dream Palace - Cinema and Sociey in Britain 1930-1939 199)

Trouble Brewing, which is the seventh film where he plays the gormless, slapstick-prone, honest Northern lad George, follows this formula to the letter. Watching George Formby's

acting in it there seems little difference between his performance and the general consensus in literature about his acting in general. Formby's acting here offers little to provide a different angle to either his acting or to his on-screen persona. My observation is that compared to *Bell Bottom George* (1944), which was one in his many patriotic, near-propagandistic films made during the Second World War, his acting remains much the same.

The particular features that I examined while watching George Formby in *Bell Bottom George*, comparing these features to his performance in *Trouble Brewing*, were: firstly, the way he uses his body to perform physical comedy; secondly, his facial expressions; thirdly, the way his character relates to the female lead; fourthly, the way his character relates to figures of authority; fifthly, the way he performs his songs, though rather than looking at the content of the particular songs, I aimed at examining his performance of the songs *in Bell Bottom George*; and finally the use of props and costume in the film. Other than George's reaction to figures of authority and the use of costume in the narrative of the film, I found little evidence of a change in George Formby's performance from *Trouble Brewing* to *Bell Bottom George*.

The key to the difference between George Formby's characters' relation to figures of authority in the two films lies in the narrative rather than Formby's performance, however. Whereas in *Trouble Brewing* the figures of authority in the diegetic world of George Gullip are his boss, who turns out to be a money forging crook, and the chief of police, who is suspected of being a money forging crook and is severely beaten by George and Bill; in the military world of *Bell Bottom George* figures of authority are neither crooked nor ridiculous. These features are taken over by the German spies, rendering the narrative patriotic and Second World War-ethic compliant. The other difference, the significance of costume choices in *Bell Bottom George* also stems from the difference in context, namely that *Trouble Brewing* was made before, and *Bell Bottom George* during the Second World War. Just as it seemed too risky to make authority figures the antagonists and/or butts of jokes in the context of the war, this context also provided narrative comedy twists revolving around military uniforms and the implications of wearing these particular garments.

George Formby was, as mentioned elsewhere in this thesis, a music hall performer-turned film actor, therefore it is logical to briefly examine his acting from this angle, linking it to music hall traditions explored in section 2.1. Firstly, I would like to examine accounts of

his early music hall performances, including his first appearances in his father's costume and make up. It is telling of his ability to mimic his father's act that in *British Music Hall – A Story in Pictures* the picture corresponding to the description of George Formby Sr (Mander and Mitchenson 124) (Randall and Seaton) is not in fact of George Formby Sr but George Formby Jr doing his father's routine in his costume and make-up. Based on the pictures in Formby Jr's biography of him doing his father's routine after Formby Sr's death (See figure 6.1 for the picture that is allegedly of George Formby Sr, and figure 6.2 for the image from George Formby Jr's biography), seeing the pictures side by side and examining the costume and make-up in detail, it looks like they are two pictures shot during the same session.

Figure 6.1.

Figure 6.2.

How are George Formby Jr's music hall beginnings reflected in his acting, as well as in his on and off-screen personae? I think the key to this is the similarity between what was described above in connection to music hall performers: that their costume and make-up worked as a kind of trademark; similarly, George Formby's 'gormless George' persona worked as his trademark, together with the toothy grin, Lancashire accent and the ukulele/banjulele songs performed semi-narratively, carrying the sexual connotations and

innuendos unspoken elsewhere in the films. Data seems to suggest that this is not only the case in the two films I have watched starring Formby, but both scholars and his public have pointed these particular features out in connection with Formby. In this respect these particular characteristics of the George Formby on-screen persona work as his trademark, much like the trademark make-up, costume and on occasion song of a particular music hall performer.

In other aspects, however, George Formby's on-screen persona has a lot in common with that very archetypally Jewish character, the schlemiel. As Ruth Wisse describes the schlemiel in her academic assessment of this character, the schlemiel is

> the active disseminator of bad luck […]. The schlemiel's misfortune is his character. It is not accidental but essential. […T]he schlemiel's comedy is existential, deriving from his very nature in its confrontation with reality. (Wisse 14)

When looking at not only the way George Formby uses his body and face to make his comedy physical, but also the types of (comic) situations his characters find themselves in, and the way they react – passively or proactively – to these situations, we will find that the George Formby-character resembles the schlemiel in that the very nature of his on-screen persona hinges on the mishaps and unfortunate situations he finds himself in.

6.3.3 Googie Withers

George Formby's female acting partner in *Trouble Brewing* is Googie Withers, who was very much at the beginning of her career when *Trouble Brewing* was shot: she was in her early twenties, and her role in this film was one of the first significant parts of her career, which was to span more than half a century after *Trouble Brewing*. Apart from being in different stages in their careers, the other significant difference between the two lead actors in this film is their status as performers. As George Formby was one of the biggest stars in Britain at the time, and undoubtedly the star of this film, he got to play his usual 'gormless George' character, and Withers was required to play the role of 'leading lady to George Formby', with little creative in- or output.

Nevertheless, compared to *Bell Bottom George*, the character of the leading female performer, and romantic interest to George Formby's character, is placed in a more proactive narrative context. That is to say, the character Withers plays in *Trouble Brewing*, Mary, the secretary, is more complex than the character of Pat, played by Anne Firth in *Bell Bottom George*. The reason I make this claim is because Mary's character, as opposed to Pat, is not a passive onlooker and, as established elsewhere in this thesis, takes initiative and active part not only in the solving of the mystery of the slushers, but also in her own rescue from the slushers' captivity. Although Pat is presented as taking active part in the war effort, a uniformed Wren officer, other than often disapproving of George she does little to move the film's narrative forward in *Bell Bottom George*. In this sense, this particular set of circumstances, including the pre-war setting, as well as Googie Withers's contemporary image as performer, enable the character she plays in *Trouble Brewing* to fit in a narrative structure where she may be an active participant in the film's plot.

Withers playing this particular – proactive and assertive – female lead opposite Formby makes sense when looking at Withers's public image and the roles she was playing around the time *Trouble Brewing* was made in the late 1930s. During this period her roles were typically smart, independent young women (McFarlane), who were often not only able to stand up for themselves verbally, very much in the screwball-vein, but also to exercise some control over other aspects of their lives: in *Trouble Brewing*, for instance, she plays a working girl, the connotations of which have, again, been described elsewhere in the thesis – see the Narrative chapter for details on this. Apart from not being afraid to act for herself and speak her mind, asserting herself as an active agent in these roles, Googie Withers was usually cast in them as a comic leading or supporting actress during this period, from the mid-1930s to the early 1940s. Her image as a comic actress would change during, and especially after the Second World War, when she was cast in more serious, dramatic roles, both on screen and on stage, establishing herself as a dramatic, rather than a comic actress.

6.3.4 Robert Donat

The other British male lead was also a Lancashire lad, though of very different artistic aspirations than George Formby. Rather than coming from a music hall background, Robert Donat was a classically trained theatre actor who found himself one of the most

sought after romantic male leads by the mid-1930s. The most significant difference between these two Lancashire-born actors I do not see in their backgrounds or in the types of roles they were playing during the period I examine in my thesis, but in their markedly different attitudes to their own stardom, their art, their place in culture and cinema, and their expression of these attitudes. Whereas George Formby, his public image, his star status and his commodification were more or less all managed by his wife, Beryl, leaving Formby by all accounts contented; Robert Donat was conflicted both about his swift rise to stardom and by the commodification of his talent, regularly writing about this conflict both in private correspondence to his friends, colleagues and family, and in the form of articles appearing in magazines, to the public. Victoria Lowe quotes Donat claiming 'One thing I do want to make clear is that whatever happens, I refuse to be the stock "hero"' (Lowe)[29]

It is this self-reflexivity that is significant about Robert Donat the actor from the perspective of my argument: how he saw the differences between stage and screen acting; how he dealt with the ambiguities of his star status and commodification; how he constantly strived for artistic freedom and fought actively against being typecast. Victoria Lowe writes extensively about Donat's acting, and in this section I aim at using her work, particularly regarding Donat's dual roles as basis for my argumentation, as well as drawing on Donat's biography by J. C. Trewin (Trewin) and two works by Jeffrey Richards, his article on Robert Donat (Richards, A Star Without Armour: Robert Donat) and the chapter 'The Romantic Adventurer: Robert Donat and Leslie Howard' of his book on 1930s British film consumption practices (Richards, The Age of the Dream Palace - Cinema and Sociey in Britain 1930-1939). This aspect of Donat's acting, connected to the aforementioned ambiguities Donat experienced about his art, is the double role he plays in *The Ghost Goes West*, namely playing both Murdoch Glourie, first as a young man who is rather fond of girls, then as a ghost haunting Glourie Castle for two centuries; as well as his descendant, Donald. In Donat's career, especially when regarding his work on stage as well, playing multiple characters or multiple stages in one character's lifetime is a fairly frequent occurrence, and as Lowe also emphasises this multiplicity characterises many of his roles on screen. In the paragraphs below I would like to look at the differences in Donat's acting

[29] quoting (Donat)

when he plays Murdoch and Donald Glourie, drawing partially on Lowe's assessment of Donat in *The Ghost Goes West*[30].

Lowe asserts that playing dual roles and wearing disguises provided a way for Donat to challenge his own star text as romantic male lead. '[R]ole-playing, disguise, and doubling. These emphasize the distinction between performer and role, undermining uncomplicated star appeal'; and that accepting to play in *The Ghost Goes West* was partly due to the fact that he was to appear in a dual role (Lowe). She quotes the pivotal scene on board the ship where Donald and Murdoch face each other and claims that the

> 'scene operates to showcase […] Donat's versatility as an actor. […] It invites admiration of Donat's acting skill in playing two parts simultaneously and displaying the ultimate in versatility: convincing the audience that he *is* two different people, in the same scene. (Lowe)

Lowe continues by describing the particular acting tools Donat uses to mark the differences between Donald's and Murdoch's characters, then links the scene and Donat's skills back to the dichotomy of star versus character actor, and the concept of stardom and star image.

> Donat alters his posture here to capitalize on the difference between him and the ghost. He also signals the difference between the two by using two distinct tones of voice: the ghost voice is lower and deeper than the Donald voice, which seems more naturally pitched. […] Donat's ability to be the star but also to play the character part, thus displaying two contradictory performance modes simultaneously. […] The simultaneous presence of Donat in star mode and a character role unsettles the easy identification with the star for the audience. […] Consequently, the distance between performer and role, denoting a more theatrical presentation of character, is sustained, undermining a straightforward Donat star image. (Lowe)

It should be added to Lowe's assessment, however, that in the prologue of the film, the sequence set in 18th century Scotland, while Murdoch is still alive, Donat uses the same vocal inflections and pitch that he uses later in the film when performing as Donald. It is

[30] Due to space restrictions I will not be able to address all aspects of Donat's acting; however, Lowe's articles, especially "Something That is US" provides extensive and relevant insight into Donat's performance *in The Ghost Goes West* and other films made immediately before and after this picture.

only after Murdoch dies, when he becomes the Glourie Ghost that the pitch changes and the tones of voice between Donald and Murdoch become distinguishable. This can be linked to one of the arguments presented in Chapter 4, namely the idea of questioning traditional masculinity within the changes in Murdoch's character between the 18th and 20th century settings.

Furthermore, Lowe also connects Donat's reluctance to become a Hollywood commodity to the film's narrative that problematises Anglo-American relations by claiming that much of the criticism the film proposes towards the nouveau riche Americans, also expanded on in previous chapters of this thesis, in Aspects of Narrative and Visual and Aural Aspects most prominently, is channelled through Donald Glourie's character. Donald's disapproval of modern appliances in the rebuilt Glourie Castle for instance[31] signals an extra-textual meaning, connecting 'Donat's publicly stated ambivalence about working in Hollywood' (Lowe) with the film's narrative. In this sense, Donat's performance in *The Ghost Goes West* carries powerful extra-textual meanings linked both to his complex relationship with his own stardom and star text, and to his status as British star and commodity who refuses to be typecast and become a Hollywood star.

6.3.5 Jean Parker

Similarly to Googie Withers in *Trouble Brewing*, Jean Parker was very young and at the start of her career when she played the lead female role in *The Ghost Goes West*, and despite the many similarities between the two characters, Mary and Peggy; the subsequent films of the two actresses, as well as their roles in them, were markedly different. Although both Mary and Peggy are portrayed as relatively independent, witty young women, as described in more detail in the Narrative chapter of this thesis, Peggy's character is a romantic female lead who is more or less equal partner to the male lead(s), Donald (and Murdoch) Glourie. Whereas Mary is independent both financially, as a working girl with a solid position at a press office, in rank above the male lead, George Gullip; Peggy is an American girl with a nouveau riche father, having financial wealth but lacking cultural

[31] See Section 4.2.2, pp. 68-69 of the Visual and Aural Aspects Chapter

capital, which Donald has an abundance of, being a Scottish aristocrat, putting the two characters on equal footing.

Due to the nature of the two films, however, *Trouble Brewing* being one of many George Formby vehicles, as opposed to *The Ghost Goes West* made with an international cast and crew to capitalise, among others, on the success of Alexander Korda's London Films, the rising star status of Robert Donat, and René Clair's visit to the United Kingdom; the relationship of the two female leads to their male counterparts are quite different. Despite the similarities mentioned above, and even despite the fact that Mary is above George in the hierarchy of the firm, her character, like other female leads opposite George Formby in his films, is little more than a narrative device to provide motivation for the male lead. Peggy Martin in *The Ghost Goes West*, however, partly due to the fact that she sets the entire narrative in motion by persuading his father to buy the castle; partly by being the only person other than Donald who is not afraid of Murdoch, the ghost, has a different function and a more round character than Mary in *Trouble Brewing*.

As opposed to Googie Withers, whose career started around the time she played opposite George Formby in Trouble Brewing; Jean Parker did not succeed in securing a career as Hollywood A-lister, and went on to play in B and C movies for the rest of her long career, playing a variety of two-dimensional characters. The film I saw her in was *Roar of Press* (1941), made six years after *The Ghost Goes West*, in which she plays the female lead, the newly-wed wife of a newspaper reporter. Her character, as I see it, is an unfortunate combination of a number of highly problematic female tropes, such as the woman-in-peril, the shrew and the passive wife waiting for his husband to come home. The film's narrative and this role do not give Jean Parker a significant chance to shine, but in spite of the problematic nature of her character, the wit and comic timing she also showcases in *The Ghost Goes West* allows this character to overcome the bounds of the stereotypical tropes of B-movie wives.

6.3.6 Eugene Pallette

As it was the case with Jean Parker, there is very little academic data available on Eugene Pallette, one of the most recogniseable comic character actors of the 1930s and 1940s. His physical shape and the gravelly sound of his voice were his trademark features, much in

the vein of music hall performers who had their trademark make-up or costume. Pallette was an incredibly prolific actor, appearing in a large number of Hollywood films during the 1930s and early 1940s, usually in a supporting role of the romantic female lead's father, similarly to Gyula Kabos, as I shall demonstrate below; or also quite often in a supporting role as a policeman or a detective. In the 1944 film *In the Meantime, Darling* (1944) Pallette plays again the father of the female lead, as in *The Ghost Goes West*; and in *Strangers of the Evening* (1932) he plays the detective in charge of a murder investigation. After watching his performance in these two films, the characteristics of his acting style become clearer and give an indication on the one hand on how these other roles compare to his performance as Joe Martin; and on the other hand on how his performance as Joe Martin compares to Mátyás Schneider's character in *Hyppolit, the Butler*.

Whereas on the surface it may seem that Pallette's role as Henry B. Preston in *In the Meantime, Darling* is merely a variation on his role as Joe Martin in *The Ghost Goes West*; due to behind the scenes political decisions during the filming of *In the Meantime, Darling* the role of the father of the female lead was significantly altered. Although Pallette's name is the third on the cast list, straight after the male and female leads, therefore his star persona was intended to be capitalised on by the studio, his screen time is limited to just a few minutes at the beginning of the film. Allegedly, the reason for this was that Pallette was fired after exhibiting problematic behaviour off-screen, between takes. (Fujiwara 34) Instead of re-casting, they left Pallette's scenes and re-wrote the script to fit the reduced cast. After *In the Meantime, Darling* Pallette only made four films, one more in 1944, one in 1945 and two in 1946. Compared to the number of films he had made in the previous years per annum (for example in 1935, the year *The Ghost Goes West* came out he made another five films) this effectively means that his career came to a halt due to the incident during the filming of *In the Meantime, Darling*. The fact that the studio still promoted the film with Pallette, though, means that at least until 1944 and this incident, his star persona was a sought-after commodity and would be used to attract audiences to watch the films he appeared in.

As for his performance both in *In the Meantime, Darling* and in *Strangers of the Evening*, his acting remains much the same as in *The Ghost Goes West*. In both films, as in *The Ghost Goes West*, he uses his trademark croaky voice and round figure, together a commanding presence, to impress those who share the screen with him. His always gruff and serious manner lend him an air of respectability, and he rarely uses his bulky frame for

comedic purposes, unlike numerous comedians before him. Especially in *Strangers of the Evening*, where he has significantly more screen time, but also as much as he appears in *In The Meantime, Darling*, his movements, as well as his facial expressions remain passive, nevertheless it is precisely this passivity of expression and movement that he uses for effective comic timing, just as he does in *The Ghost Goes West*.

As seen elsewhere in this thesis, most notably in the Narrative and in the Cinematography chapters, the similarities between Joe Martin in *The Ghost Goes West* and Mátyás Schneider in *Hyppolit, the Butler* are striking, and one of the reasons this research was undertaken in the first place. In the paragraphs below I aim at comparing the performance of the two actors, Eugene Pallette and Gyula Kabos, focusing on their movements: gestures, facial expressions, mannerisms; their voices: tone, inflections, distinctive characteristics; and to a lesser extent on costume. As there is a separate section below on Gyula Kabos, on his star persona and on how his other roles relate to his performance in the role of Mátyás Schneider, in this section I will focus purely on the comparison of Joe Martin's and Mátyás Schneider's characters from the perspective of performance.

Both Gyula Kabos and Eugene Pallette, as it has been pointed out on numerous occasions elsewhere in this thesis, most prominently in the Narrative chapter, play the character of the physically rotund, verbally expressive nouveau riche father of the romantic female lead of the respective films they appear in. This physical resemblance, the round shape of the torso, the round face in both actors and the receding hairline of dark hair, gives them an instantly recognisable similarity, prevalent even before they open their mouths to speak. One might argue that perhaps it was a standard generic trope of 1930s comedies that the father of the romantic lead should have such an appearance and should act a specific way, and to be fair in case of Hungarian comedies of the era specifically we very often see Gyula Kabos in that particular role. The fact, however, that in *Barátságos arcot kérek* (Smile for the Camera, 1936) the aforementioned Szőke Szakáll plays this particular role, and does it with very different mannerisms than Kabos in most of his films or than Pallette in *The Ghost Goes West* contests the above notion and suggests, as argued before, that the character of the rotund nouveau riche can be seen as a meme appearing in these two particular films, amongst others.

Aside from their strong physical resemblance, both Kabos and Pallette have very distinctive vocal patterns, evident from the primary sources that are their films, but also reiterated in secondary material, such as academic sources or promotional material on the

two actors. Whereas Pallette's trademark gravely, croaky, booming voice was one of the features used in promotional campaigns to advertise his films, as contemporary trailers show; Gyula Kabos had a distinctive speech pattern rather than an instantly recognisable voice. In *Hyppolit, the Butler* he delivers his lines rather quietly, in a mumbling, stuttering fashion, quite a contrast to Pallette's booming delivery, nevertheless one as distinctive as the other. Furthermore, as seen below in the section on his star persona, his stuttering speech, this particular way of delivering his lines was used in all of the examined films, regardless of the type of role Kabos was playing in them. The voice or speech patterns of these actors, thus, paired with their physical appearance, appearing in the role of the nouveau riche father of a young woman, who is in turn the romantic female lead of the films they are in, is a meme both in *Hyppolit, the Butler* and in *The Ghost Goes West*.

Pallette's mostly passive performance, as described above, can be contrasted with the more expressive gestures of Gyula Kabos as Mátyás Schneider in *Hyppolit, the Butler*. This is particularly significant when thinking about the cinematography of the two films: whereas *Hyppolit, the Butler* works mostly with a static camera in front of theatre-like sets, *The Ghost Goes West* has more dynamic camera movements, therefore the performance of the two actors create a similar effect in the two films. Kabos's expressive gestures make the static frames more dynamic, while Pallette's passive delivery can be seen to be used to balance the dynamic camera movements. Moreover, the changes in mise-en-scene, specifically in the costume of the two performers, show a parallel trajectory in the two films: Schneider has to get rid of his moustache and wear a dinner jacket to make him seem more gentrified; whereas Joe Martin dons a kilt in order to take part in an adopted tradition of Scottish aristocracy. Both of them, thus, buy into a culture that is not their own: old money and aristocratic mannerisms are reflected in these costume choices.

6.3.7 Gyula Kabos

In order to appreciate the significance of Gyula Kabos's performance in *Hyppolit, the Butler*, and its parallels with Eugene Pallette's performance in *The Ghost Goes West* I will now elaborate briefly on Gyula Kabos's star persona, on his role in the Hungarian film and cultural history of the inter-war years, and on some of his other roles from this period. As I mentioned on several occasions above, Kabos was well-known for playing father-of-the-bride types of roles throughout the 1930s, in fact, in three out of the four randomly chosen

films I saw him in he plays this particular role, even though he was only in his early to mid-fourties when he was typecast to play these fatherly roles.

In *Hyppolit, the Butler*; *Borrowed Chateau* and *Pay up, Madam!* (Fizessen, nagysád!, 1937), thus, Gyula Kabos plays the role of the romantic female lead's father, whereas in *Half Price Honeymoon* (Nászút féláron, 1936) he plays a young office worker, Lajos Fernauer, who just got married and is on his honeymoon in Italy. His partners in this film are Pál Jávor, who in both *Hyppolit, the Butler* and in *Pay up, Madam!* plays his son-in-law-to-be; and Mici Erdélyi, who plays Mimi, the cabaret singer in *Hyppolit, the Butler*, whose character in that film is suggested to be much younger than Mátyás Schneider's character. It is therefore significant, that in *Half Price Honeymoon* Kabos should play a character suggested to be the same, or of a similar age to Pál Jávor's and Mici Erdélyi's characters, the latter playing Lajos Fernauer's brand new bride. In this setting, where Kabos plays a markedly different role than his regular middle-aged fathers-of-the-bride type of characters, both in age and in temperament, his trademark speech patterns, gestures and facial expressions remain the same.

In fact this trademark speech-pattern was picked up on by one of Kabos's earliest critics: as early as 1900 a local critic remarked that Kabos's acting was skilful after a theatre performance, also calling his speech humourous. (Bános 35) His biographer, Tibor Bános refers to this phenomenon, which he claims to be a significant source of his comedy when describing his performance in a stage play *Elvált asszony* (Divorced Woman) early in his career, where he only has a small, supporting role, in which he nevertheless outshines the main cast:

> The new orchestra and the wonderful set pale when he mumbles something stutteringly, with a serious expression. He can say anything. Because it's not what he says but how he says it, the shy standing, the apologetic look on his face that resonate in you. (Bános 41)

Elsewhere Bános claims that his stuttering, which he describes as 'strongly staccato pun-specialty' (Bános 191), was so popular with the audiences that after every appearance they would reward him with furious clapping.

Although on a narrative level his character in *Half Price Honeymoon* is rather different from either Mátyás Schneider, Menyhért Gruber (from *Borrowed Chateau*) or any of the other father figures Kabos plays, his performance remains a constant. For instance Lajos

Fernauer, who is a supporting character in the film, is in a sequence intended to showcase Kabos's comic talent, when he gets drunk with Italian sailors, is subsequently dressed in as one and goes off to sea. This behaviour is unlike the behaviour of any other character played by Kabos; nevertheless his comic timing, the way he delivers his lines, stuttering and gesticulating, is not different from his performance in other films. In this sense, somewhat similarly to George Formby in his star vehicles, Kabos is expected to deliver a particular performance, regardless of the age, profession or social status of his character. This is a commodity: his comic star persona who can stammer and mumble and pull faces and flap with his arms in any role, whether he be a paper-pushing young groom or a middle-aged nouveau riche business owner.

In fact, all literature on Hungarian inter-war comedies seem to converge in Kabos's praise, regardless of their – often markedly dismissive – assessment of the films of the era. István Nemeskürthy, for instance, calls Kabos 'that wonderful comedian without whom our entire filmmaking industry of the Horthy-era[32] would have fallen to pieces and would have failed, who was personally responsible for the success of every single Hungarian films of the period.' (I. Nemeskürthy 34-35) Gyöngyi Balogh and Jenő Király talk about the idiosyncratic nature of Hungarian cinema in the inter-war years, where 'the comedian is the superstar', specifically quoting Gyula Kabos as an example, and claiming, as Nemeskürthy, that the success of *Hyppolit, the Butler* was partly down to him personally (Balogh and Király 143). The comedy scholar Károly Szalay goes as far in his assessment of Kabos as to openly declare his bias towards the comedian, and states that he could 'never judge Kabos objectively', linking his most memorable childhood experiences of comedy to him, and his family's devotion to Gyula Kabos. (Szalay 269)

Kabos in his subsequent roles often plays, broadly speaking, the character of the 'everyman', a distant cousin to Chaplin's tramp: an impressionable, middle-aged man, who, even when he is wealthy, is easily influenced by others (Gyertyán). His roles are often supporting, yet his – however brief – appearance in the comedies of the time guaranteed success. Aside from *Hyppolit, the Butler*, the other popular and successful Hungarian comedy of the 1930s was *Meseautó (Dream Car)*, the story of the CEO of a large firm who, disguised as the chauffeur of his pretty, young secretary, successfully woos her and marries her as a reward to her loving him without knowing his true status in

[32] Miklós Horthy was the Governor during the inter-war years and the first years of the Second World War, therefore this era is sometimes called Horthy-era.

life. In this film Kabos plays the small supporting role of one of the firm's accountants; making this small role, however, a memorable and popular one.

In several other films from the mid-1930s Kabos played supporting roles that, while small roles, proved one way or another crucial to the plot; furthermore, even in these small roles he played characters that remained in the nation's psyche and provided the Hungarian language with catchphrases still remembered in the 21st Century. Most notable of these is his declaration at the end of *Hyppolit, the Butler*, when despite Mrs Schneider's aspirations for sophistication, and the efforts of the butler, Hyppolit, Schneider states that from then on he would eat everything with onions, he would even eat onions with onions. Similarly well-known is the confused speech he conveys in *Dream Car* as one of the employees of the CEO, Szűcs, in a telephone conversation with another employee, played by Ella Gombaszögi – often Kabos's female partner in films. In this speech Kabos's character, Aladár Halmos plays out a pun between the name of the CEO whom he is spying on in the scene, and a Hungarian tongue-twister he successfully twists his tongue with.

6.3.8 Pál Jávor

Unlike Gyula Kabos, who could deliver markedly different lines and play markedly different characters with the same inflections of the voice and mannerisms, Pál Jávor was a straight romantic male lead throughout the 1930s and early 1940s in Hungarian cinema, whose performance, as well as the characters he tended to play, were much the same. The films I have seen him in, including watching his films with older relatives who remembered him from his hey-day, as well as watching some specifically for the purpose of this research, it is not only the style of his performance, which can be described wooden, but also the characters he plays that remain static. In *Hyppolit, the Butler,* his first significant film role he plays a supporting character, who may nevertheless be decoded as the straight romantic male lead, for even though Mátyás Schneider is the main character of the film, and his struggles as a nouveau riche are in the focus of the narrative, the non-comic romantic plotline belongs to István Benedek, played by Jávor, and Terka Schneider, played by Éva Fenyvessy. Jávor's acting in *Hyppolit, the Butler*, described above as 'wooden' – the delivery of his lines, as well as his manners stiff, his tonal inflections even

and his facial expression ranging from smiling to looking stern – is reiterated in his other films. Not only that, but also the characteristics of Benedek – handsome, hard-working, honest, ambitious, courteous in his manners, respecting authority and exercising it fairly when it is required, and unfailingly polite, nevertheless patronising towards women – can be used to describe his other roles, at least both in *Half Price Honeymoon* and in *Play up, Madam!* In these films he plays the main character, a single man working in respectable positions: architect in *Half Price Honeymoon*, and the manager of a mill in *Pay up, Madam*; who does not intend to but still manages to fall in love with the romantic female lead, and of course she with him.

As in case of Eugene Pallette and Gyula Kabos, a very brief comparison between Pál Jávor and Robert Donat, who wore similar trademark moustaches and whose film careers started approximately at the same time, similarly in romantic male lead roles, seems appropriate at this point. Despite these similarities in appearance and initial career moves, the two actors developed different star texts and more significantly different attitudes towards their profession, towards being typecast, and therefore towards what roles they should appear in. Whereas, as seen above, Donat was actively fighting being typecast, in numerous cases making decisions that seemed at the time, some even in hindsight, to have halted or disrupted his rapid ascent into superstardom: refusing to move to or make films in Hollywood, insisting on having an active theatrical career parallel to his film acting, and most notably taking the lead role in *Goodbye, Mr Chips* (1939); Jávor seems to have been comfortable being typecast as the dashing young romantic leading man. During this period he played romantic male lead in a large number of Hungarian films, and in most of them he plays either an engineer, a lawyer, or a manager of some firm or other, and as Hungarian politics got increasingly nationalistic during the late 1930s and during the Second World War, Jávor started to play more and more 'thoroughly Hungarian' aristocrats or military officers: Baron This, Count That, Captain Something or Lieutenant Other.

While there is no evidence that he ever wanted to try himself in other roles or that he was unsatisfied with being typecast in these roles, wishing to experiment with playing more challenging characters, this might have been the case; furthermore, the circumstances – having to work in an increasingly authoritative, nationalistic and dictatorial country – may have effected Jávor's wishes or chances to become artistically more ambitious. It should also be added that this on-screen persona was mostly reiterated in Jávor's off-screen persona as well, especially concerning his role as a straight romantic leading man,

suggesting that this star persona became a commodity by the mid-1930s. According to his biography in the Hungarian actors' encyclopaedia Színészkönyvtár, 'Jávor is shining as the male ideal of the 1930s both on screen, on stage and in his private affairs'. Nevertheless, the writer of the biography, Ildikó Dévényi adds that due to his sudden ascent into stardom 'Jávor's real self starts to exists only in the shade of his beloved roles'[33], which might suggest a schism between Jávor's on- and the off-screen personae, a shift of the latter towards a more complex character than the handsome, hard-working, honest, etc. man he tended to play in his films.

6.3.9 Gyula Csortos

Gyula Csortos, like Gyula Kabos, started his career on the pesti kabaré stages, where one of the most prominent Hungarian playwrights, Ferenc Molnár, author of *Liliom*, wrote roles for him. Unlike Kabos, who started his film career with *Hyppolit, the Butler* and was subsequently propelled into stardom after its release, becoming the number one commodity; Csortos had appeared in a number of silent films, and remained a prolific character actor appearing mainly in supporting roles throughout the 1930s and early 1940s. While Kabos brought his on-screen persona and star text into all the films he appeared in, creating essentially the same character through the different roles he played in various films, based on watching Csortos in both *Hyppolit, the Butler* and in *Skirts and Trousers*, he appears to create different characters in a variety of roles. Hyppolit in *Hyppolit, the Butler* speaks, acts and moves differently than Kálmán, the director in *Skirts and Trousers*. Csortos plays Hyppolit as a haughty, pompous man who speaks curtly, in short sentences with staccato inflections, who spares neither word nor gesture, someone who is stiff and upright. Not once do we see Hyppolit sitting down or smiling or being anything other than stern. Kálmán, contrastingly, is a jovial man, delivering lengthy, though as discussed elsewhere, highly problematic speeches about women and is often seen sitting, even lying down in Sóvári's flat on the sofa.

Looking at the original poster art for *Hyppolit, the Butler*, it is clear that Csortos was intended to play the main character of the film: the title character is Hyppolit, not Schneider. Csortos's name is listed as the first one on the poster, above Jávor's and then

[33] http://www.szineszkonyvtar.hu/contents/f-j/javorelet.htm accessed on 06/06/2016.

Kabos's, but most prominently half of the poster is a portrait of Csortos's face as Hyppolit, looking down sternly at the minuscule figures of Kabos as Schneider and Mici Erdélyi as Mimi, the cabaret singer (see figure 6.3.). This suggests that when the film was made in 1931 it was Gyula Csortos who was considered as a commodity, whose star text as a performer would be seen as appealing to audiences. When looking at the original film poster for the 1938 film *Maga lesz a férjem* (You Shall Be My Husband), once again with Gyula Kabos, Gyula Csortos and Pál Jávor, it is the faces of Jávor, Kabos and the female lead, Irén Ágay who share the poster space, in more or less equal proportion, their names written above or beside their faces, and the rest of the cast, Csortos at the top, written in a column on the left (see figure 6.4.). This shows the shift of star texts of all three men: whereas Jávor's face was not even on the original poster of *Hyppolit, the Butler*, he is the largest (by a margin) on the original poster of *Maga lesz a férjem*; while Kabos became the supporting character whose star persona was used to sell pictures.

Figure 6.3.

Figure 6.4.

6.3.10 Mici Erdélyi

Mici Erdélyi plays Mimi, the cabaret singer in *Hyppolit, the Butler*, the role of a woman of dubious, if not outright disreputable character, as it is described in more detail in the Narrative chapter of this thesis. Her character, just like that of Terka in *Hyppolit, the Butler*; Peggy in *The Ghost Goes West* or Mary in *Trouble Brewing*, is a young working woman. The mise-en-scene of Mimi's character: the clothes she is – or is not – wearing, the setting of the nightclub; together with the vulgarity of the language she uses, swearing

and using informal personal pronouns when talking to Schneider, however, mark her character as different from the other women mentioned above, rendering her character and behaviour morally questionable.

The character Mici Erdélyi plays in *Half Price Holiday*, Lujza, differs markedly from her portrayal of Mimi in *Hyppolit, the Butler*. Although in both films she is paired romantically with Gyula Kabos, in *Hyppolit, the Butler* this pairing is shown as unequal and problematic in the films diegesis on multiple grounds: on the one hand, Mátyás Schneider is portrayed as a middle-aged man versus Mimi's young woman; on the other hand Schneider is a wealthy, even if nouveau riche, business owner, whose struggles to gentrify his family are the very premise of the film, while Mimi is suggested to live off of 'donations' from patrons of the club she sings in (this is alluded to by Hyppolit, when he first mentions Mimi). Furthermore, beside the differences in age and class, Mimi is portrayed as a woman of ill repute, whose mere presence at the Schneiders' party is a liability and a danger to the Schneider household's respectable reputation.

In *Half Price Holiday*, however, Mici Erdélyi's character, Lujza is the aforementioned Lajos Fernauer's (played by Gyula Kabos) new wife. This not only legitimises her femininity and her relationship with Kabos's character, but also puts the two of them on equal footing. They work in the same office, they are portrayed to be of roughly the same age, and there are none of the differences between these two characters that were so prominently apparent in *Hyppolit, the Butler*. Moreover, Erdélyi's make-up and costume, as well as the way she talks are so different from her portrayal of Mimi, that I had to double check the cast list while watching the film to make sure it was indeed the same actress playing both characters. Where Mimi is vulgar, Lujza is soft-spoken, where Mimi is clad in overly sexualised garments Lujza wears sensible clothes, and even when on her honeymoon she is the model of respectability. Erdélyi's effective portrayal these two different characters suggest on the one hand that she was a skilled character actress, and on the other hand, as indicated by the lack of academic data and extra textual material on her, that she had no significant star text or trademark features to bring to the films she appeared in.

6.3.11 Éva Fenyvessy

Similarly to Mici Erdélyi, I also watched Éva Fenyvessy play a markedly different character from her portrayal of Terka Schneider in *Hyppolit, the Butler*, and once again had to double check if it was really her rather than an actress of a similar name who acted in *Barátságos arcot kérek* (Smile for the Camera). I watched the film originally to see Szőke Szakáll in a Hungarian speaking film role, and to compare his performance as the father of the romantic female lead to Gyula Kabos's performance in *Hyppolit, the Butler*. I saw Éva Fenyvessy's name on the cast list and was somewhat taken aback to see that she played the romantic female lead's rival and antagonist, Mary Bálint in the film, who, again just like in case of Mici Erdélyi's portrayals, is a distinctly different character to the demure, morally strong, kind and innocent brunette, Terka Schneider. Mary Bálint, engaged to be married to the romantic male lead, who, as it is usually the case in these films, through a series of misunderstandings falls in love with the romantic female lead instead.

Perhaps to make this narrative turn justifiable, Mary Bálint is shown to be a blonde seductress, openly flirting – and it is suggested by the dialogue that perhaps she is not only flirting, something that was considered just as scandalous as Mimi's profession at the time – with multiple young men; she is obsessed with her looks, especially her figure; and schemes unashamedly against his fiancé's new romantic interest, despite her own transgressions. Again, similarly to Mici Erdélyi, as seen above, the differences between Éva Fenyvessy's portrayal of the two characters can be seen both in mise-en-scene: as opposed to the chaste, yet feminine wardrobe of Terka – as pointed out in the dialogue by István Benedek's character, described in detail in the Narrative Chapter and the Visual and Aural Aspects Chapter – Mary Bálint wears provocative and sexualised dresses and make-up; and her voice, her inflections and especially her laughter are harsh. As in Erdélyi's case, I am again inclined to draw the conclusion that the presence of little to no secondary material on Fenyvessy, combined with the skill with which she portrayed the stark contrast of the two characters in these two films are evidence for a lack of star status in case of Fenyvessy in the context of Hungarian inter-war films.

6.3.12 Kálmán Latabár

The most famous member of an acting dynasty, Kálmán Latabár, together with Gyula Kabos, is one of the most recognisable figures of Hungarian cinema. In every episode of

the Hungarian satirical television programme from the 1990s, *Uborka* (Cucumber, 1991; very similar to the British satirical programme *Spitting Image*) there was a sketch with Latabár and Kabos sitting in a coffee house in heaven, discussing the absurdities of current politics. The two of them became the symbols of the inter-war years, even though they only appeared in three films together, all of them with Kabos in a main and Latabár in a supporting role. It was only after Kabos left Hungary that Latabár's popularity and star status grew, nevertheless posterity places them side by side.

Perhaps one of the reasons for this is because like Kabos, Latabár's star text was also solid and unchanging, as was the type of comedy he brought into all of his films. Even when playing supporting characters to Kabos's protagonists, Latabár's mannerisms, facial expressions and vocal idiosyncrasies are the same as when he plays the lead role. Péter Molnár Gál writes extensively about Latabár's unique physical comedy, describing him as object-like.

> He acts in his films like an anthropomorphic wooden block. The man-turned-object. He rarely plays sitting down, and even then he is wooden: he movers contrapuntally, and his agility threatens with him at least falling off the chair or his loosely screwed in limbs unscrewing. […] His movements, as though led by unseen strings, resemble the staccato, angular movements of wooden puppets from the puppet theatre. (Molnár Gál, A Latabárok. Egy színészdinasztia a magyar színháztörténetben 406)

It is indeed this agility, this perpetually moving quality that Latabár displays in his films, both in supporting and in main roles, which is a prominent aspect of his star text. In *Pay Up, Madam*, his scenes with Kabos are a surreal combination of verbal and physical humour: absurd one-liners and whole conversations based on misunderstandings are combined with Latabár's puppet-like physicality, such as dancing as a bird, then having Gyula Kabos's character sit on his lap. His bird-dance especially supports Molnár Gál's assessment of Latabár resembling a string puppet with loosely-screwed limbs.

It wasn't, however, only this instantly recognisable physical comedy that marked Kálmán Latabár's star persona, but also his family history, specifically his double act with his brother Árpád. The Latabárs were a well-known and well-established thespian family in Hungary, starting from the earliest years of the wandering actors (see above in section 2.2). Kálmán and Árpád's grandfather, also called Kálmán Latabár, as well as their father, also

called Árpád Latabár, were popular actors in Budapest, and from the late 1920s onwards, Kálmán and Árpád Latabár toured the world as a double act, performing on variety stages with musical, dancing and acrobatic acts. This was the basis for the aforementioned idiosyncratic physicality of the Latabárs' comedy, which, just as in case of George Formby, was paired with music, and, in the Latabárs's case with dancing too.

Károly Szalay links Latabár, his acting as well as his star persona, to American slapstick traditions, particularly to the art of Buster Keaton, as well as to vaudeville and music hall traditions. As Molnár Gál, Szalay also mentions Latabár's movements, specifically his gestures, the flexibility of his movements as the key to his acting style, but he also refers to this acting style as the element that heralded a marked change in Hungarian comedy style. (Szalay 288) Furthermore, he claims that Latabár was not a character actor, and asserts that 'real, great comedians play themselves, their own personae in every role' (Szalay 290), a statement that is telling both in terms of Latabár's comic persona, and in terms of his star text, which, in turn, links into Hungarian acting and comedy traditions.

6.3.13 Rózsi Csikós

Playing Ibolya in *Skirts and Trousers* was the most prominent role of Rózsi Csikós's film career, despite the fact that her husband was Szabolcs Fényes, the composer who wrote the music of a fair number of films in the 1930s, '40s (and beyond), as well as of stage productions, and popular songs of the time. Fényes was a well-known and influential figure in Hungarian artistic circles of the time, and it is partly because of his work as composer and theatre impresario that his wife, Rózsi Csikós had a career on stage and to a lesser extent in films. Csikós, similarly to those early Yiddish theatrical acts, was an attractive young woman and a talented singer, who was not an especially talented actress, nevertheless, because she could sing well and her husband supplied her with material, she could maintain a steady career in the years immediately before, during and after the Second World War.

She married Fényes in 1941 and from 1942 onwards appeared in the Fővárosi Operettszínház (Capital Operetta Theatre), directed and managed by her husband, retiring in the late 1940s aged just 36. The fact that on film she mostly played actresses or singers – as she does in *Skirts and Trousers* as well – may be telling in terms of her acting talent,

something that comes up in the narrative of *Skirts and Trousers*, giving the film and the character of Ibolya Pintér a meta-textual quality. Péter Sóvári remarks multiple times in the dialogue that Ibolya is not a talented actress, and even Ibolya's friend and dresser, Kamilla is of the opinion that she has little acting talent and should find a rich and/or influential husband – what actually happened to Rózsi Csikós in real life, securing her a film, and more prominently a stage career. In this sense her star text at the peak of her career in 1943, being Szabolcs Fényes's wife, was reiterated in her most famous role as Péter Sóvári's girlfriend.

6.3.14 Ida Turay

From the above paragraphs on the Hungarian performers it seems fair to argue that while many of the male performers had star status in the era in question, complete with trademark speech patterns, movements or moustaches, so far none of the female performers in these films could be seen to have been cultural commodities with relevant corresponding star texts. While particularly Kabos, Latabár and Jávor brought their characteristic star personae from film to film, from role to role; from the female performers of the two films it is only Ida Turay who, as evidence suggests, had a distinguishable star persona, specifically a comic star persona during the examined period of the inter-war years[34]. Whereas, as seen above, both Éva Fenyvessy, Mici Erdélyi and Rózsi Csikós are character actresses appearing in various different roles; Ida Turay, much like Gyula Kabos, Kálmán Latabár or Pál Jávor, had a set of recognisable vocal patterns, facial expressions and movements that she played in the same manner in the films I have watched in order to assess her performance.

Although the character of Kató Koltay in *Borrowed Chateau* is not as different from Kamilla, the dresser in *Skirts and Trousers* in terms of narrative as Mici Erdélyi's cabaret singer vs office girl or Éva Fenyvessy's chaste romantic female lead vs female antagonist vamp, as it has been seen above, it is not so much the type of the specific characters that could be classified as similar or different regarding the star text of the performer. Furthermore, the spoilt Anni, the character Turay plays in *Villa for Sale* (1935), while

[34] Turay's career, unlike some of the other Hungarian performers of this section, thrived beyond the Second World War, well into the socialist era of Hungarian filmmaking.

different in social status and personality from Kató or Kamilla, is played by Turay in much the same way. This was also the case of Gyula Kabos, who played middle-aged fathers with the same mannerisms as young husbands, similarly to Ida Turay, who uses the same vocal patterns and inflections, the same comedy-crying and specifically the same facial expressions to play Kató, Anni and Kamilla.

Moreover, her biographers also point out that her success both on screen and on stage was partly due to 'her always sunny personality, pretty voice and her all-powerful sense of humour'[35] Although some Hungarian actresses at the time played roles that required comic timing, it was usually for the purposes of screwball-style romantic encounters between the female and male romantic leads – see for instance Klári Tolnay's Mary Gruber in *Borrowed Chateau* – there was no other female comedian in the inter-war years than Ida Turay. In both of the aforementioned films she has comic one-liners, scenes in which she dresses up and pretends, badly, to a comic extent to be someone else (the poor relation in *Borrowed Chateau* and the Spanish widow Dulcinea Juarez in *Skirts and Trousers*), and openly pulls faces for comic effect. All these comedic tools were male privileges in this context, Latabár's and Kabos's in particular, yet it was due to these that Ida Turay's star text was built and commodified in the films she appeared in.

6.4 Conclusion

The fact that many of the Hungarian actors deliver the same style of performance in various different roles, playing different types of characters, despite the fact that these roles were rarely written specifically for them, unlike George Formby's characters in his vehicle films, may reflect on the structure of the Hungarian films of the era in general. Whereas in the two British films examined in the thesis, especially in George Formby's *Trouble Brewing*, the actor playing the male protagonist brings the most prominent star persona into the film in question, in the Hungarian pictures it is a cast composed of multiple actors who bring their various star personae to the films. In the paragraphs below I shall elaborate briefly on the structures of the four films in terms of performance, linking them to the three theatrical traditions expanded on in section 2, but only after writing briefly about the

[35] http://manda.blog.hu/2013/09/28/turay_ida_elete_teljes_volt accessed on 6/6/2016

character of the schlemiel that links the four films together, as well as to Yiddish theatrical traditions.

As it emerges, the argumentation of this chapter is less conclusive than the previous chapters on narrative, visual aspects and humour were. The reason I make such a statement is because while the Hungarian films' link to both pesti kabaré and Yiddish theatre traditions are arguably apparent, it is less so in case of the two British films, especially concerning *Trouble Brewing*. Or to be more precise, in the case of *Trouble Brewing* the existence of the duality of innocence and base, of the profound and the murky can be traced back both to music hall and to pesti kabaré traditions, and there is no evidence to indicate where the memes may originate. The only thing I can confidently argue that George Gullip's sexually charged songs indicate memes relating to both traditions.

The other significant aspect of *Trouble Brewing* that could be deemed more evidently conclusive in terms of the cultural transference of Eastern European Jewish traditions is George's character who can be read as the schlemiel, as mentioned earlier in section 3.2. The schlemiel is a prominent character of both Yiddish literary and theatrical traditions, of pesti kabaré traditions and of the films of the era, including the ones this thesis focuses on. Beside George Gullip, a number of Gyula Kabos's and Kálmán Latabár's roles have many traits in common with the schlemiel, including their accident-prone nature and their philosophical disposition. In *The Ghost Goes West* the character of Ed Bigelow can be seen to share similar traits with the schlemiel: firstly, in his rivalry with Joe Martin he is always seen to lose; secondly, in his scene with Murdoch his physical humiliation as source of humour is evident.

As mentioned above, the structure of the films' use of star texts is also indicative of cultural transference, though, again, less conclusively so in case of *Trouble Brewing*. Whereas the two Hungarian films, as well as *The Ghost Goes West* to a certain extent, resemble Yiddish theatre troupes in the sense that although multiple performers bring their star personae to the films, these are arguably collaborative efforts. The fact that when selecting a film to watch with one of the performers from *Hyppolit, the Butler* or *Skirts and Trousers* I immediately find another two, three or four names in the cast from the two films indicates that these films, rather than intended to be the star vehicles for a particular performer's star persona, comprised multiple performers, including a number with significant star texts, with the intention to capitalise on all of these star texts together, rather than focusing on one. The makers of *The Ghost Goes West* probably intended to

capitalise on the emerging stardom of Robert Donat, as well as on Eugene Pallette's star text; whereas *Trouble Brewing* was written for George Formby, and all the other performers serve the purpose of enabling his star persona.

In this sense, thus, the most significant pieces of evidence to suggest the presence of cultural transference on the level of acting and performance are the character of the schlemiel on the one hand, and the idea of collaborative film performances on the other hand. Furthermore, the peculiar duality of sexual or scatological comedy balanced by profound or philosophical dimensions could also indicate cultural transference, though the existence of these memes may indicate both pesti kabaré and music hall traditions as origin.

Chapter 7 – Conclusion

As demonstrated in the six chapters above, the aim of this thesis was to review and revisit the understanding of British comedies in the 1930s, the prevailing reading of which involves a steady evolution from music hall through silent comedies to the canonical inter-war era film comedies. I demonstrated in the thesis how I contest this straightforward progression and argue that those filmmakers who immigrated to the UK before or during this period, that is, the inter-war years, did have an overall impact on the films made in this country, and more specifically to my field of interest, on the comedies. The other purpose of the thesis, closely connected to the first one, was to interrogate whether, and how, humour can be seen an intercultural or transnational phenomenon. The starting point of this work involved a particular style of comedy popular in urban areas in Hungary from the late 19th and early 20th Centuries and through to the inter-war era, called 'pesti kabaré'; and Eastern-European Jewish theatrical traditions.

In order for me to investigate all these questions I have been analysing four films, two Hungarian and two British ones, from several angles and perspectives. *Hyppolit, the Butler*; *The Ghost Goes West*; *Trouble Brewing* and *Skirts and Trousers* were the films chosen for analysis; and the aspects along which the analyses were conducted were narrative; visual and aural aspects; aspects of humour; and acting and performance, preceded by an introductory chapter and a chapter on methodology. Instead of dividing the thesis into chapters according to the four films and analysing each film separately, further

dividing the chapters into sub-chapters along the various angles of analysis, I have taken the various perspectives of textual analysis and divided the thesis into chapters according to these, then further divided them into sub-chapters per film or per themes found in the analyses. This way, that is by using the latter option, I was able to provide a direct juxtaposition of the films along aspects of analysis, therefore a comparative analysis could be achieved with greater ease and purpose, because the structuring thread connecting the thesis were the aspects of textual analysis and the themes, similarities and differences found in the films that are up for direct comparison.

The most significant memes in terms of possible cultural transference could be found in each chapter to a greater or lesser extent, providing an overarching theme to the type of cultural transference discussed in this research – these are on the one hand the figure of the physically large nouveau riche with social aspirations; and on the other hand, very much connected to the first meme, the dichotomy between aristocratic and bourgeois values, between old money and new money. In the narrative chapter this is discussed extensively, specifically in the section on class, where both the figures of the nouveau riche, who in the particular films discussed in the thesis are Mátyás Schneider and Joe Martin; as well as the subject of inter-class romance are raised. In the Visual and Aural Aspects Chapter the sections on mise-en-scene, particularly the section on set design focuses on this issue and provides supporting evidence for the instances of cultural transference by pointing to the memes concerning the dichotomy of old money and new money value systems. Furthermore, there is another meme to consider when concluding the presence of cultural transference, and this is the theatrical nature of the films, once again apparent on all levels: narrative; visual and aural aspects; humour; and acting and performance. The two latter chapters, on humour and on acting and performance, concentrate more on the theatrical aspect in the four films: the number of verbal jokes in *Trouble Brewing* points particularly to the possible cultural transference of pesti kabaré traditions; whereas the presence of the archetypal Jewish character of the schlemiel in the films in question also suggest cultural transference.

As already raised in the Introduction Chapter of this thesis, the question of how particular Jewish stereotypes can be interrogated in and negotiated with a British cultural context is crucial to the understanding of cultural transference within my argumentation, and in the positioning of this research. Looking at on the one hand how the Jewish stereotypical characters in the four films – for instance the nouveau riche or the schlemiel – can be

negotiated with their perception as universal archetypes; on the other hand, the covert nature of these Jewish stereotypes within the films and within a wider cultural context both in Hungary and particularly in Britain, helps to clarify some of the key arguments of my thesis. In order to do so, I am providing here a brief content analysis of *Money Talks*, an exception to the norm of not showing explicitly Jewish characters in Western film industries; comparing some of its aspects to the four main case studies of this work, and interrogating it from the perspective of overt versus covert Jewishness, and the cultural positioning of Jewish stereotypes.

Several academic works on Jewish stereotypes, as well as common understanding of the subject converge in suggesting that Jewish people are concerned with money and material wealth – whether this is about Jews being talented at handling finances and trade, or about pettiness and greed is merely different aspects to the same stereotypical image. Sveta Roberman approaches the connection between Jewish people and money from the perspective of émigré Jews, claiming that '[t]he special relationship between Jews and money is a much-discussed issue in immigrant discourse'. She continues by placing this stereotype within a historical context '[t]racing their roots to medieval images of money lending, [...] nourished by later stereotypes of the greedy money-loving Jew' (Roberman 334). Dana Mihãilescu also positions the stereotypical image of the money-focused Jew within a historical and literary context, and argues that, at least the literary incarnation of this Jewish stereotype stems from the de-humanising of Jewish people.

> [Writers] simply reach for the obvious literary conventions of the Jew, and identify him in terms of ingrained clichés of the Western civilization rather than as a human being. The resulting effect was a universally accepted stock image of the Jew. [...] "Shylock" as a symbol of greed with the human element reduced to the notion of an instrument of money making [...]. (Mihailescu 202)

Using the title *Money Talks*, therefore, is already suggestive not just of the overt Jewishness of the film, but the of use of ingrained – potentially negative – stereotypical images of Jews. Furthermore, as the title suggests, the plot of the film revolves around money, and emphasizes the money making talents of Jewish people, linking these abilities to a form of magical agency. The main character of the film, Abe Pilstein (Julian Rose), whose Jewishness is not only implied but is made explicit through his Yiddish accent, his neighbourhood on Magenta street and the yarmulke-wearing religious Jews there, and the more covert clues of his name and occupation, is to inherit a hefty sum of money from a

recently deceased aunt, but only on the condition that he is broke – hence the motivation for him to lose all his remaining money, which by luck, chance or some mystical Jewish power he is unable to do. All his seemingly, and deliberately terrible investments bring large profits, and the seemingly suspicious people he lends money to all bring him back the profits, rather than embezzling his money. Some aspects of this plot parallel the plotline of *Trouble Brewing*, where George wins money at the horse races, in spite of realising that the horoscope he and Bill used to place their bet was written by him, and is therefore rendered unreliable. It could be argued that the same magical agency, as described in more detail in the Narrative Aspects Chapter[36], is at work in both plots, only in *Money Talks* there is an overtly Jewish aspect to this, whereas in *Trouble Brewing* the material angle, and the schlemiel nature of George are parts of a covertly Jewish nature or identity that can be negotiated with the overall Britishness of the film and George Formby's star persona. This is also supported by two prominent settings featured in both films: firstly, the aforementioned horse races, and secondly, the boxing/wrestling ring that appears in both *Money Talks* and in *Trouble Brewing*, the latter with similar visual representations, and where George's attempts at wrestling can be seen as almost a parody to real-life boxer Kid Berg's character in *Money Talks*.

However, it is not only this overt aspect that links *Money Talks* to the aforementioned Jewish stereotype of a Shylockian character: non-verbal jokes and imagery strengthen the greedy and petty stereotypical image of Jews, such as the watering down of the wine at the wedding, as well as the image of the wedding guest shovelling the food into her handbag rather than eating it. These images do not further the plot in any way, but serve merely the function of presenting and perpetuating the Jewish stereotype of stinginess. Furthermore, the tradesmen on Magenta Street quarrel loudly and fight for their customers; they do not seem at all perturbed by cheating their customers or their fellow tradesmen out of their money, although, understandably, these tradesmen, including Abe Pilstein and his rival, Hymie Burkowitz, tend to be highly suspicious of one another. Whereas Joe Martin and Ed Bigelow in *The Ghost Goes West* are less explicit and more sophisticated in their rivalry – their discussions involve far larger sums and fewer verbal and physical assaults than Pilstein and Burkowitz's – they nevertheless demonstrate some traits of stereotypically Jewish tradesmen rivalry. The scene where they are seen comparing the ancient chateaux they had bought can be read from this perspective: they are not only trying to upstage one

[36] Section 3.1 in Chapter 3

another on how ancient and haunted their old/new castles may be, but they explicitly quote the sums they paid for these; therefore it can be argued that they are displaying characteristics of covert Jewish stereotypes, which is then, in turn, negotiated with their contextualisation as American businessmen. Overall, then, these aspects of Jewishness, which can be seen as stereotypes, such as the materially-minded Jewish bankers or tradesmen, or the character of the schlemiel described in more detail in the section on Yiddish Theatre[37] can effectively be negotiated with universal archetypes, when taking into account the cultural contexts within which these stereotypes and archetypes are interrogated. As seen from the examples above, when juxtaposing the overtly Jewish characters and situations from *Money Talks* with characters and situations from the two British case studies examined in this thesis, I argue that they demonstrate covertly Jewish traits, which, in turn, can be connected to the instances of cultural transference demonstrated through my argumentation in the above chapters.

The contributions of this thesis, thus, are partly to the debates surrounding the 1930s in British film history, a decade that is traditionally dismissed in British historical cinematic discourse, on which, however, various excellent work has been published in the past few decades. Within this literature, this research contributes primarily to the overall discussions surrounding on the one hand the role of comedy in the canon of British film tradition, and on the other hand the cross-cultural nature of humour and the place of émigré artists within this context, complementing the findings of both American works on immigrant comedy, and the studies on émigré filmmakers in Britain. Both of these areas of research had their most significant contributions in the 1980s and there has not been great interest in the areas since then, even though both fields leave the issue of British immigrant comedy traditions unaddressed. This thesis sets out to rectify this omission by focusing on cultural transference between Eastern European, specifically Hungarian urban comedy traditions and British comedy.

While the scope of this research has been restricted to the framework of the 1930s, in some instances extended to the end of the Second World War, its implications should not be confined within this period. Humour has been one of the defining characteristics of Britishness both when it comes to Britain's own definition of itself – see the sections on British comedy included in the examination criteria for naturalisation; and the stereotypical views of Britain from outside its borders, with comedy shows among its most profitable

[37] Section 6.2.3 in Chapter 6 on Performance

exports, including the instance of Mr Bean featuring prominently in the 2012 London Olympic opening ceremony. In his work on the connection between perceptions of British national identity and film, Jeffrey Richards (Richards, Films and British national identity - From Dickens to Dad's Army) repeatedly mentions a sense of humour as one of the defining characteristics of that nation. He points out the omission of the British sense of humour from an international survey on national characteristics (Richards, Films and British national identity - From Dickens to Dad's Army 5); quotes '[f]ilms about the People's War […] characterised by […] a self-deprecating good humour (Richards, Films and British national identity - From Dickens to Dad's Army 106); he states that the '[f]irst – most vital' quality of a post-war British national character is a sense of humour (Richards, Films and British national identity - From Dickens to Dad's Army 87); and he describes Hungarian-born Baroness Emma Orczy's fictional character, Sir Percy Blakeney as 'sporting, chivalrous, cool, daring, patriotic, aristocratic, and with a notable sense of humour' (Richards, Films and British national identity - From Dickens to Dad's Army 4).

Within this context opening a discussion about the cultural implications of comedy and the complexities of Britain's comedy traditions might serve not only an academic, but also a larger, social and cultural function. Particularly following Britain's vote to leave the European Union, the need for this nation to re-define itself both in relation to its former imperial status, and in terms of its role within a Western European context is becoming one of the focal issues, and comedy traditions, as well as a tendency to diffuse tension with humour play a significant role in the process. Nearly twenty years before the Brexit vote Jeffrey Richards made the juxtaposition of anti-European sentiment and humour, though rather than citing humour as a tool being used to alleviate social tensions, he points out that humour has become malevolent, when writing that the British

> are still insular and feel superiour to foreigners, a feeling which lies at the heart of the knee-jerk anti-Europeanism and the sinister undercurrent of racism […]. There is still a sense of humour too, but it is now all too often cruel, sour and spiteful […]. (Richards, Films and British national identity - From Dickens to Dad's Army 25)

Is it possible that in the background of this phenomenon, in which the interrogation of immigrant comedy is missing from British film history as a whole, there lie these aforementioned anti-European feelings? In the introduction to this thesis I speculate briefly about the reasons why British comedy is so unchangingly connected to music hall, and mention the ambiguities of studying British humour in the inter-war era: whereas it is not

explored vastly as an academic subject, it is still intrinsically linked to Britishness, and thus arguing that its origins can be more varied than its music hall roots could be considered almost a heresy, especially if this argumentation involves European immigrant filmmakers or artists. Thinking about foreign, Central and Eastern European immigrants within the context of British comedy traditions is, therefore, a delicate subject, nevertheless one that needs to be raised in the hope that it opens up a discussion not only about cultural transference, the transnational aspects of humour, but also about the cultural implications of immigrant culture and immigrant comedy. This PhD research is completed at a time when interest in Hungarian film, specifically the Jewish aspects of pre-Communist Hungarian filmmaking is on the rise, with David Frey's volume on the controversial attitude towards Jewish filmmakers in the inter-war era Hungarian film industry awaiting publication; both works tapping into the insecurities of ethnic and immigrant culture within film, and wider cultural contexts.

Apart from these aspects, the process of doing this research has alerted me to the life and work of one of the people excessively mentioned in this thesis: Robert Donat. In 1971 Jeffrey Richards wrote about him (Richards, A Star Without Armour: Robert Donat) that '[p]erhaps no star of the British cinema is remembered with as much warmth and genuine affection as Robert Donat.' I have to admit that, perhaps as a result of my cultural heritage, I had not been aware of Donat's oeuvre before starting this research, and during both formal and informal discussions about my work I have found that many native English speakers, whether British, Canadian, Australian or American, also had no or only vague recollections of Donat. Apart from the invaluable work of Victoria Lowe on Donat's career, and occasional repeats of *The 39 Steps* and *The Magic Box* on the BBC, recently there has been little academic or public interest in Donat's oeuvre. Hopefully this thesis can serve as a tool in the process of bringing Robert Donat's work back to the forefront of British cultural history, and to begin a discussion about the relevance of his art in a 21st Century context. To follow up on section 6.3.4 of this thesis, and to complement Victoria Lowe's articles on Donat, a comprehensive study of his star text and his conscious efforts to play an active part in its formation, within the context of Anglo-American industry relations, could serve the purpose re-assessing his work from the perspective of 21st Century filmmaking practices.

Furthermore, by devising a methodological framework that uses memes as its unit of analysis and a multi-auteurist approach, allowing elements to be analysed without

attempting to attach them to particular contributors of particular films, the methodology of this PhD thesis can serve as an innovative tool in the understanding of transnational comedy and cultural transference. By using memes as the basic unit to analyse texts within a multi-auteurist context, it is not only problematic aspects of authorship that can be circumvented, but also, more importantly, argumentations concerning national cinema, television, or media texts can be outlined within a logical structure, with links to particular traditions the user wishes to explore. This methodological framework can be lifted from the context of inter-war era British comedies and applied to a range of other contexts where studying transnational aspects of media texts, whether film, television or new media, is the aim of the research. This way the thesis is promoting a better understanding of cross-cultural implications of analysing media texts and offers a valuable contribution to the debates surrounding transnational cinema.

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