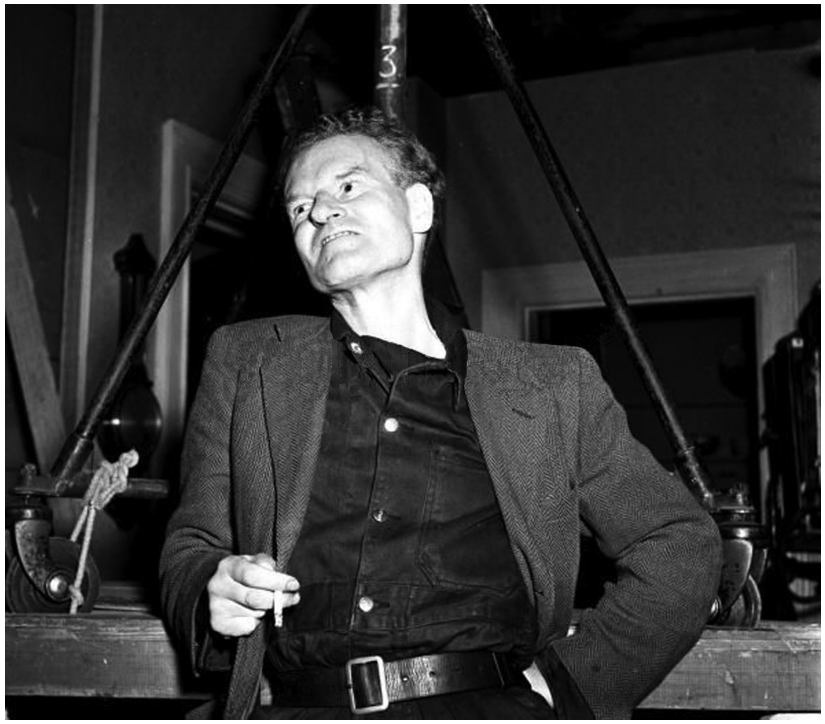
The Asquith Version

Anthony Asquith was born in London in 1902. His father, Herbert Henry Asquith, was a Liberal prime minister of England from 1908 to 1916 and became 1st Earl of Asquith and Oxford in 1925. In his youth Anthony aspired to be a composer, but he abandoned these ambitions when he became convinced he did not have the talent for it. He studied classics at Oxford and became intrigued by the cinema. Along with G.B. Shaw and H.G. Wells, he was instrumental in founding the Film Society in London shortly after leaving Oxford. He visited Hollywood with introductions enabling him to stay with Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks. He observed Lubitsch and others working on their movies and then returned to England to begin working in the film industry there. His father is reputed to have regarded his involvement with movies as something of a joke, but he began writing and working as an assistant director, and by the time he was 25 he was co-directing *Shooting Stars*.

During the next few years Asquith came to be regarded as a promising virtuoso of cinematic technique comparable to Hitchcock. His 1929 *A Cottage on Dartmoor* is considered by some to be a classic of English silent cinema, but Asquith had difficulty finding a niche during the thirties. His reputation for being "artistic" may have worked against him, and his career seemed to have run aground by 1938 when he was able with some help from Shaw to get an assignment directing Leslie Howard and Wendy Hiller in a film adaptation of *Pygmalion*. *Pygmalion* was a resounding success receiving four Oscar nominations including Best Picture, and Asquith was launched on a phase of his career in which he adapted plays, eschewing the technical virtuosity of his early films for the an understated style more suited to the filming of plays. Unlike Hitchcock, who is reputed to have regarded actors as cattle to be herded into his compositions, Asquith's charm endeared him to actors. His sensitivity enabled him to bring out the best in them and to see the emotional potential in dramatic scenes. His next picture was an adaptation of a phenomenally successful play by a new young playwright, Terrence Rattigan's *French Without Tears*.

While he was still at Oxford Rattigan had written a play about the romantic entanglements of some students. When it was produced in London, Rattigan announced his intention to abandon any preparation for a diplomatic career and devote his life to the theater. His father agreed to support him in that endeavor for two years, and when he failed to get another play produced by that time he was forced to seek employment. He found it as a screenwriter for Warner Brothers in London. He did not achieve much success at first as a screenwriter, but it enabled him to support his playwriting habit until he hit it big with *French Without Tears*. Even after the success of the play he was unable to get out of his contract with the studio, partially because they were able to lease his services out to other studios for many times what they were required to pay him. Paramount bought the screen rights to *French Without Tears*,



Asquith in 1952 at work on The Importance of Being Earnest,. *the movie he made after* The Browning Version

and Rattigan was one of three writers credited with the screenplay.

Rattigan and Asquith hit it off well, and worked together on eight more films over the next 26 years, including three more adaptations of Rattigan's plays. During the Second World War Rattigan was assigned to the film unit of the RAF and worked with Asquith on *The Way to the Stars*, which featured Michael Redgrave as an aviator. After the war Rattigan continued to collaborate with Asquith and one of the projects he proposed to Asquith and producer Anatole de Grunwald was a film based on a famous trial. Neither the producer nor the director saw its potential as a film, so Rattigan wrote it as a play. *The Winslow Boy* marked a turning point in Rattigan's career since it was a serious drama. The play was a success, and Asquith directed the film version from a script by Rattigan. When he followed with *The Browning Version*, it was natural that he would adapt it for the screen for Asquith to direct.

The Screenplay

Since *The Browning Version* is a one-act play set entirely in one room, it became a classic example of the way in which a play is "opened up" when it is adapted for the screen. Physically the space is expanded to include the entire school, and the time of the action is extended to encompass at least 24 hours. A dozen speaking parts have been added, although the character of Mrs. Gilbert has been dropped.

Some of the alterations can be derived from a cardinal rule of screenwriting: show; don't tell. Instead of just having Taplow tell Frank about the incident in the classroom when he laughed to be polite, we also have that scene in the classroom. Instead of having Frank talk about his relationship with the students, we witness his interactions with them in his classroom.

More of the additions and alterations can be ascribed to a desire to flesh out or mine more deeply the possibilities inherent in the original story. In the process of doing this, however, Rattigan has managed to alter both the emotional impact and the "meaning" of his play. Drama critics who ap-

preciated the claustrophobic intensity of the one act form felt that the film adaptation weakened the impact. Most also felt that the additional scene at the end in which we hear Andrew's farewell remarks sentimentalized the play. Rattigan, however, won the best screenplay award at the 1951 Cannes Film Festival. My own assessment is that the speech itself is not a problem, given the way in which the overall meaning of the work has shifted, but that the students' response to the speech may be facile. To see why we must analyze the structure and impact of the film adaptation.

Andrew is on screen for only a little over half the film. Before we see Taplow practicing his golf swing in Andrew's house, we have had 20 minutes of scenes taking place at the school earlier in the day. Taplow's appointment for extra lessons is at noon rather than at the end of the day. The scenes with the Headmaster have been moved from the house to the cricket field, and several hours pass before Taplow brings his gift and Frank stops by the house for drinks. Some of the exchanges between Frank and Andrew have been postponed until a dinner party that evening at the Headmaster's house. The story continues the next morning with Millie's departure, the farewell address and a final exchange between Andrew and Taplow.

Perhaps the biggest change is the way in which the role of Gilbert is expanded and altered. Rather than using him and his wife as almost a form of comic or ironic relief in the middle of the meltdown, the wife is eliminated and Gilbert functions as proxy for the audience and in a sense becomes a kind of moral center for the film. He is still a double for the young Andrew, a brilliant Oxford scholar who has taken all the honors and been offered a good teaching job at the school and as such he underscores what has become of Andrew during his career. Bringing Gilbert in at the very beginning of the film and letting him observe Andrew in different settings during the course of the entire film makes him even more effective mirror for Andrew. The elimination of Mrs. Gilbert and all of the banter about their marriage sharpens the focus on the parallel between Gilbert's potential career and Andrew's. Allowing Gilbert to observe Andrew's last class enables him like the audience to form an initial judgment of Andrew as a teacher and a human being, and the way in which that judgment is transformed as he comes to know Andrew better parallels the path along which the audience is led.

Gilbert is still the one who informs Andrew that he is known as "The Himmler of the Lower Fifth," but the moment is moved to a scene in Andrew's classroom after Andrew has returned to gather some papers and discovered the manuscript of his verse translation of the Agamemnon. Instead of coming on the heels of the argument with Millie about his pension, there is the additional "beat" with Andrew alone in the empty classroom reflecting on his years at the school and on the abandoned ambitions of his youth.

Gilbert intrudes on him in a private moment rather than arriving at the climax of a marital conflict, so that the emotional context of the remark is very different, and the scene is much more intimate than it could be in the house with the wives going and coming. The empty classroom becomes a visual metaphor for Andrew's failure as a teacher and for the responsibility that Gilbert faces. At the end of the scene Gilbert is given a moment alone in the classroom ostensibly to deal with his anxieties about facing a classroom of students, but coming after his gaffe he is confronting his own limitations in a way that sets him up to feel more sympathy for Andrew.

(There is a telling bit of dialog added for the film in which Andrew responds initially to Gilbert's revelation by saying, "Himmler? Oh yes, the Gestapo chief." In 1946 Rattigan had no doubt that theater audiences would know who Himmler was. Five years later it seemed necessary to remind film audiences and 43 years later the reference will be changed from Himmler to Hitler.)

The scenes with Gilbert are indicative of the shift of emphasis in the film to Andrew's failure as a teacher rather than the struggle of his marriage. The film ends with a scene between Andrew and Taplow in which Taplow expresses admiration for Andrew's manuscript and Andrew bends the rules by letting Taplow know that he has received the promotion permitting him to study science. (In the play he gives Hunter permission to deliver the news.)

The ending of the play seems to have been transposed into a lunch which Andrew and Millie have at home before Andrew has learned about his pension or received the gift from Taplow. It follows the temporary resolution of the tension between Millie and Frank in which she says she would kill herself if he did not come to Bradford. She examines herself in the mirror after Frank leaves clearly looking for evidence that she can hold onto Frank, and then she goes to offer her husband lunch telling him it is "only cold." (The play ends with Andrew taking the initiative: "Come long, my dear. We mustn't let our dinner get cold.") Instead of a climactic moment where things still seem to hang in the balance, Andrew and Millie's cold lunch together is a perfunctory ritual punctuated only by Andrew's resetting of the clock. Andrew's obsession with resetting clocks is a touch added for the screenplay as is Frobisher's comment on Andrew's punctuality.

In the film we see Millie leaving the next morning and we know that the only thing on her mind is Frank. There is every reason to believe the marriage has in fact ended. We stay with Andrew and see him tell Frobisher he has decided to exercise his prerogative of speaking after Fletcher. It is almost as though Millie's departure has helped him retrieve some of his integrity. His farewell remarks then turn into a heartfelt apology for his failure as a teacher. The point of the film seems to be that he has failed in a noble calling and that his only redemption is in acknowledging his failure. The coda with Taplow suggests

two things: he may resume his work on the translation of the Agamemnon, and at his new school he may be less rigid and more sympathetic to the needs of the students.

Another indication of the way in which the structural changes cause this shift in emphasis or meaning is the aftermath of Millie's debunking of Taplow's gift. In the play this is the one moment when Andrew exits the stage. He takes his medicine and leaves the room. When he returns Millie checks the contents of the bottle and Andrew assures her that he would never take an overdose. In the film Andrew takes the medicine bottle and leaves, but he is going to change for dinner and he does not return to the sitting room. There is no exchange about an overdose, and the first part of the scene between him and Frank occurs because Frank decides to go to him after he has told Millie he is leaving her. The difference seems slight, but it does involve a shift away from focus on the relationship with Millie. Frank's pursuit of Andrew also militates against my interpretation of the Andrew's re-entry in the play as a resurrection. In the film Andrew withdraws, clearly wounded and in need of medication, but the scene with Frank ends on Andrew's admission that Millie has long since succeeded in killing him. The irony in this remark like the irony in his reframing of the incident with Taplow seems in the film to imply that Millie's cruelty is only another blow that he can withstand. Dialogue has been added which emphasizes the clarity of Andrew's vision, his ability to "face facts":

Play	**Asquith Film**
FRANK: She's out to kill you.	FRANK: She's out to kill you.
…	ANDREW: Powdered glass, you mean?
…	FRANK: Not that kind of killing. Something deadlier than poisoning the body.
ANDREW: My dear Hunter, if that was indeed her purpose, you should know by now that she fulfilled it long ago.	ANDREW: The soul? Oh, yes, in that other sense she is, as you rightly say, "out to kill me." That is only another fact that I have managed to face – as indeed I have faced the more important fact that she succeeded in her purpose long ago.

In the film the principal transformation that takes place in Andrew is this increase in clarity. It is an element in the play ("I am now seeing the matter in a different light…"), but the real point of the play seems to be the actions that indicate that Andrew is back on his feet: his decision not to accompany Millie to Bradford and his decision to insist on his rightful place in the ceremony. In the last moment of the play it seems to be Andrew who is in charge. In the film the payoff is more his farewell remarks in which he expresses the full realization of his failure as a teacher. The film has prepared for this by giving Andrew reflective moments alone where the discoveries of the day have

a chance to sink in rather than just being fended off by the irony with which he fortifies himself. It is as though the addition of the farewell speech gathers threads present in the play and pulls them to the foreground. Andrew achieves a different kind of integrity by publicly acknowledging and apologizing for his failure. Whether the boys would have appreciated the acknowledgment is another matter, which we shall address eventually.

The roles of Taplow, Frank Hunter and Frobisher are all expanded as the play is "opened up" into a screenplay. Taplow is given several scenes during the initial setup. In the chapel we see enough of him to sense that his attitude towards The Crock is somehow different from that of his classmate. Then we see him in Hunter's science class where he has the temerity to suggest that the experiment has not worked because Hunter was using the wrong proportions for the ingredients. This is probably the least satisfying addition made for the film, and it is unclear to me what purpose it was intended to serve other than providing an occasion for the conversation between Hunter and Taplow about his promotion. It obviously shows us that Taplow is serious about wanting to study science, since he already believes he knows more than the teacher; but it does not make Taplow more engaging or sympathetic. Perhaps it portrays him as precocious in some way that can be related to his appreciation of the *Agamemnon* or his empathy for Crocker-Harris. It seems more likely to me that it was written simply to provide the excuse for the exchange between Frank and Taplow and to show more of how Frank deals with students.

When Taplow arrives in Andrew's classroom he is able to reveal that Andrew has a heart problem and the expression of sympathy or pity for Andrew which comes during his opening scene with Frank in the play is transferred to a conversation among the classmates.

The rest of the scene in Andrew's classroom is mostly a straightforward presentation of what Taplow describes in his conversation with Frank later. There is an additional element in the exchange between Andrew and Taplow when Andrew corrects the work that Taplow is doing, but this is more about Andrew than Taplow.

The other main addition to the function of Taplow in the film revolves around the manuscript for Andrew's verse translation of the *Agamemnon*. Taplow spots it on the desk when he brings Millie a message from Frank the next morning. Having Taplow serve as a go-between to deliver Frank's farewell gesture seems a bit gratuitous and is justified only by having Taplow take Andrew's manuscript when he leaves. He returns the manuscript to Andrew after the ceremony with a mild apology but without really seeming afraid of how Andrew will react. Perhaps we can believe that a student who can critique the science teacher's experiment would have no qualms about taking a very personal manuscript from the desk of another teacher not to mention returning it in person and offering his

critique of it. When Andrew responds as though he is genuinely interested in Taplow's opinion of the translation, we are being told something about the transformation that has taken place in Andrew, but we are also being asked to believe something about Taplow's sophistication and taste.

The stretch that is required for this is part of the larger sentimental stretch represented by the cheers of the students after Andrew's farewell remarks. We have seen enough of Taplow during the remarks to believe that he is the one leading the "Good old Crock!" cheers in the midst of the tumultuous applause.

Whether or how well the ending of the film works may depend on what the viewer is looking for in the movie. It is hard not to conclude that there was an agreement to send the audience out of the theater feeling good which dictated the choices for the ending. Imagine what the net effect of the film would be if the students had responded in what would surely be a more realistic manner, by being embarrassed for the old man or by being sobered with the realization that this man of whom they had been so contemptuous was a human being after all who has failed in the way we all fear we may. Imagine if Rattigan and Asquith had stuck with the instincts involved in expanding the role of Gilbert and viewed the speech more through the eyes of Gilbert and Frank rather than Taplow. There is a look of sympathy from Gilbert that almost seems to trigger the change in tack in Andrew's remarks, and certainly the last glimpse we get of Gilbert does not seem to be one which will easily give way to cheers for the Old Crock. Frank's amazed admiration for Andrew's integrity and courage builds to a point where we can believe his applause may express more than the polite response required by the ceremony, but it is still hardly cheerful applause. Imagine if the students and other teachers had been too sobered or ashamed to applaud at all. The net effect would have been sobering and caused the exit from the theater to feel like a funeral procession, but surely this would have been the kind of anti-climax that Andrew felt to be most effective.

There is a bit of dialogue from Wilson in Andrew's classroom which may be an indirect indication of how Rattigan viewed the ending.

WILSON: I say, do you think he's dying? Heart problem's nearly always fatal isn't it? I mean, in plays and films people are always saying, "The old ticker's a bit sick, you know." They always die in the end. I say, supposing he dies in the class, right in front of us!

Wilson's excitement at the morbid possibilities involved in Andrew's condition is typical adolescent sentimentality. Its immediate function is to provoke a discussion of sadism, but it also plants a seed of ironic distance from the excesses of adolescence. Being able to cheer for Good Old Crock may be another example of adolescent excess of feeling,

although it is hard to sense any ironic distance intended in the ending of the film.

The expansion of the role of Hunter seems primarily aimed at showing rather than telling us something about his relationship with the students. His attitude towards the last day of class is about as relaxed as the students, and he basically strives to provide entertainment before letting them out early. In substituting this scene for his conversation with Millie about the boys Rattigan and Asquith emphasize the "attitude of false and hearty and jocular bonhomie" that Frank describes in the play. The contrast with Andrew's classroom is obvious, but Frank's own self-consciousness and ambivalence about it is not necessarily apparent. Nor is his boredom with teaching science evident. His attitude could be "a bit of end-of-term," and he might well be a dedicated and enthusiastic teacher the rest of the year.

Another element that has been dropped in the presentation of Frank is his political activism. In the play Taplow knows he canvassed for Labour in the last election. There is no indication of that in the film, and nothing Frank says or does implies that he is the least bit concerned about politics.

Frank is used in three scenes prior to his rendezvous with Millie. He is introduced as one of the ushers taking up collection during the morning service, and when he avoids returning Millie's look, we have an indication of the imbalance we shall see later in their feelings for each other. He has a brief exchange with one of his students who wants him to do an experiment involving an explosion at his class and an exchange with Millie in which she invites him for a drink at noon, another small piece of evidence that she is pursuing him.

The headmaster insists on introducing Frank to Gilbert and there is a brief scene on the way to Frank's classroom in which the contrast between Frank and Andrew is expressed not only in terms of classroom discipline but also in a more basic contrast between the humanities and science. Little is made of this except for the facetious association of Frank with the inhumane results of science, i.e. atomic warfare.

After his class Frank encounters Mrs. Frobisher who invites him to a farewell dinner for the Andrew and Millie. The main purpose of this scene seems to be to let Mrs. Frobisher comment on Millie and implicitly question why she ever married Andrew. Since we do not really know yet that Frank is involved with Millie, the irony of this exchange is realized only in retrospect, and Frank appears mainly as good humored and polite.

The rest of Frank's dialogue in the film is pretty much straight from the play although scenes have been broken up or transposed to fit the revised timeline. We do get the additional touch of having Frank return the cigarette case given to him by Millie and we see Frank's reaction to Andrew's farewell address.

Frank's transformation is more emphatic in the film than it is in the play. He breaks with Millie and reaches out to Andrew in the play, but the film seems to emphasize more how he has seen his own failings or limitations as a result his confrontation with Andrew. His last gesture in the play is to persuade Andrew to let him tell Taplow about his promotion. The last thing we see of him in the film is his admiration for Andrew's farewell speech.

That Frobisher's role should be expanded to stretch from the very beginning of the film to the end is only natural given the way in which the script has been opened up. Two things strike me about his role in the film. The first is a minor observation: I suspect Rattigan enjoyed the opportunity to demonstrate even more the headmaster's florid diction and tendency towards circumlocution:

FROBISHER: So prodigious is your predecessor's sense of punctuality that the boy's have been known to set their watches by his comings and goings.

The second thing that strikes me about Frobisher's function in the film is the use of him to inform the audience explicitly upfront of things that the play allows the audience to figure out as the action unfolds. We are informed at the outset that Andrew is leaving the school due to health problems. We also see Frobisher discussing Andrew's situation with a member of the school board before he tells Andrew of their decision. We learn only that someone must inform Andrew of some bad news, but it puts the scene between Frobisher and Andrew on a different footing in the film than in the play. It almost seems to go against Rattigan's ideas about the sense of theater involving things unsaid. At the very least it points up a difference in technique for engaging the audience. Rather than engaging the viewer by requiring him to figure out what is going on, the film engages the viewer's expectations by informing him that something is about to happen to a character whom the story has been following.

To some extent the additional scenes with Frobisher are simply the best way to "flesh out" his character. He and the General discuss his efforts to persuade Fletcher to stay at the school:

FROBISHER: I need hardly tell you, General, that to persuade him to stay I tried every ruse in my repertoire.

GENERAL: Well, that's pretty extensive I grant.

Frobisher also makes a mildly diplomatic effort to get the General to inform Andrew of the decision instead of having to do it himself.

FROBISHER: You don't think, General, that it might come better from you as head of the governing body?

GENERAL: No, certainly not. Your business, headmaster. Sorry.

The General's mildly amused response indicates he knows the game Frobisher is playing.

Earlier in the classroom Frobisher goes out of his way to inquire about a student's mother but gets the student's name wrong.

The other characters added for the film function more as a chorus than as integral elements in the drama. Mrs. Forbisher, Betty Carstairs and the other women at the dinner party provide commentary on Andrew and Millie's marriage.

MRS. FROBISHER: I'm terribly sorry for her.

MRS. WILLIAMSON: I'm afraid I can't agree. I always found her quite detestable.

MRS. FROBISHER: Think how much she's had to contend with, poor dear. After all they're complete misfits.

MRS. WILLIAMSON: Yes. A marriage of mind and body. It never has worked since the world began.

Mrs. Williamson's summary of the problem precedes Andrew's own description of it to Frank, and the exchange is a parallel to the exchange between Frank and Andrew where Frank expresses his judgment of Millie and Andrew defends her. The film has chosen to indicate that at least some of the masters' wives see that the Crocker-Harris's marriage is strained. Perhaps others besides Betty see that Millie is having an affair with Frank. The main function served by these characters seems to be to hammer home one of the themes of the story. The theme of the marriage of misfits climaxes with Andrew's line before the fade out as they watch the fireworks:

ANDREW: I don't think that either of us has any longer the right to expect anything further from the other.

The obliviousness of Betty's husband provides a kind of caricature of Andrew's cerebral abstractedness. Wilson and his mother provide additional perspectives on Andrew. The porter showing Gilbert the campus even provides a contrast with Andrew by winking and letting Wilson enter the chapel late.

The Cast

By the time the film was scheduled for production Eric Portman was not available to play the role of Andrew Crocker-Harris. I can find no indication of whether it was offered again to John Gielgud, but Michael Redgrave accepted the role when it was offered to him. Redgrave was 42 years old. He had graduated from Cambridge and taught school for a few years before becoming an actor in 1934. He had been acting in films since his first role in Hitchcock's *The Lady Vanishes* in 1938, and he had been nominated for an Oscar in 1947 for *Mourning Becomes Electra*, his first American film. He had previously worked with Asquith and Rattigan in 1945 in *The Way to the Stars*. He was,

of course, even more established in the theater. In addition to his university education and his experience as a schoolmaster, Redgrave may have brought something else more personal to the role. He was married for 50 years and had three children, but late in life he confessed to his son that he was bisexual and reportedly had hesitations about getting married because of it. He received he best actor award at the Cannes film festival for his performance in *The Browning Version*, and according to his son and daughter *The Browning Version* was one of his three favorite roles, along with *The Loneliness of a Long Distance Runner* and *The Dambusters*.

Redgrave himself did not view the role of Crocker-Harris as in any way personal:

> Rattigan's script was a marvel of its kind. There are scripts, now and then, where every line seems so right that you do not have to learn them. It is enough to repeat the words a few times for every line to fall into place. Rattigan's script also gave me that rare opportunity, such as I had in *Dead of Night*, and would have again as Barnes Wallis in *The Dam Busters*, to create a character totally different from my own. This is not necessarily the highest achievement of acting. I could equally, if not more, admire a Garbo, who could change her mood in a score of different ways without ever changing character. Nevertheless, it is one of the most satisfying.[1]

He summed up his view of Andrew in another comment in his autobiography:

> One thing I learned from working with Fritz Lang — or, rather, relearned, for I think I knew it already — was that not only should a film have a strong central idea, but its idea should be such as can be conveyed in a single sentence. Not all good films, I realize, conform to this criterion. But I have found when answering that other favourite question, 'What's it about?' that if you can awaken the interest of your questioner in a sentence or two — 'It's about a ventriloquist who thinks he's possessed by his dummy,' 'It's about an embittered schoolmaster whose defences break down because someone, unexpectedly, is kind to him' — it's a fair, though not complete, test of the appeal that your film will have at large.[2]

In the BBC interview included with the Criterion DVD Redgrave refers to Andrew as "an elderly schoolmaster." The use of "elderly" and "embittered" to describe the character seem to point in a different direction from my own interpretation of the play. It is particularly striking that he should view Andrew as "elderly" when in fact the character is intended to be two years younger

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1 Mind's I p.196

2 Missing Reference

than Redgrave was at the time, especially since Rattigan had been concerned about Eric Porter's tendency to play him as old. Of course one must not take too literally Redgrave's use of the term as it may just function as a metaphor for all the ways in which Andrew has been worn down during his 18 years at the school. The same can be said for "embittered." I would be more inclined to describe the character in the play as resigned or perhaps defeated than embittered; and, despite the fact that Andrew says their love has turned into "bitter hatred," I don't see anything that Andrew does in the course of the play or the film as an indication that he hates her. He seems to have withdrawn and armored himself against her, but his is not actively trying to destroy her.

It may be indicative of the way in which Redgrave prepared for a role that his descriptions of his portrayal of Andrew begin with three physical traits: his voice, his hair and his eyeglasses:

> The 'look' of a part is always highly important, especially in films, where once the first scenes are in the can it is too late and too expensive to make any substantial changes in one's appearance. For *The Browning Version* I did a number of camera tests. There was the question of spectacles. I was in two minds about this. Spectacles are the first thing that actors lay hold of when they have to play an academic character. So I thought, I won't wear spectacles. I tried one camera test without. Then another, with: the first pair concealed too much of the expression in my eyes, so I asked them to make me another without rims to the lenses, and then, when these seemed to suit, a spare pair for safety's sake.
>
> I also asked for camera tests with sound. I wanted a light head-voice for Crocker-Harris, and I knew that when one first assumes a pitch or an accent different from one's own, it is hard to get a true impression of what it will sound like to an audience because the sound in one's own ear at first is often very exaggerated.
>
> I lightened my hair with very strong peroxide, which in black-and-white photography would give a look of hair that was fading and turning grey. I also had the hairdresser shave the crown of my head (though to my annoyance this bald patch was seen in only one shot in the film).

> Despite these preparations it was a terrible beginning. We had to do the last shots first, and these last scenes were very emotional. There were none of the scenes of minor importance which one usually did first so as to work one's way into the film. I can still see perfectly clearly in that film where the camera angle changes during a scene, where my make-up changes; even my weight changes from scene to scene. (At that time I could gain weight and

> shed it almost at will, which was very useful for certain character parts, because even a slight change of weight would show immediately in my face, altering its expression. But in taking on *The Browning Version* at such short notice, I had not had time to lose as much weight as I wanted at the start.)[3]

Michael Redgrave was 6'2" tall, and it is safe to assume that he could be a fairly commanding physical presence when he was in his thirties and forties. For *The Browning Version* he obviously chose to diminish that effect by his posture and physical mannerisms as well as his voice. His use of his hands especially seems to emphasize the way in which Andrew has withdrawn and is as Taplow says "all shriveled up inside like a nut." At the same time he is meant to be an intimidating presence in the classroom, although it is be more the rigidity and severity of his adherence to the rules than his manner or physical presence which causes the students to fear him. The gesture by which he summons Taplow to the front of the class epitomizes the power he has over his students. Even in the play when Taplow imitates it, the stage directions say he "very gently, crooks his forefinger to him."

Redgrave commented on the difficulty of achieving the right balance of self-possession and obsequiousness in relation to a scene with Frobisher:

> In the scene with the headmaster at the cricket match, there is another mistake in my playing, which shows if one looks for it. Not many in the audience would spot it, I think, but C. A. Lejeune, the Observer critic at the time, who had been bowled over by Portman's performance in the part, noticed it immediately. 'For such a big man,' she wrote of me, 'his performance is wonderfully delicate' — ominous compliment — 'but it is the delicacy of a floorwalker rather than a scholar.' And, as far as the cricket—match scene went, she was right. At the last minute, and to my surprise, Wilfrid Hyde-White had been cast as the headmaster. A very successful actor in his chosen field, but too smooth and urbane, I thought, for this part. I tried to adjust myself, but in doing so I somehow slipped into a manner that was too deferential, almost obsequious, where my character should have stood his own ground more firmly. 'The delicacy of a floorwalker' — how one phrase like that remains in the memory long after recollections of the most lavish praise have faded, and all the more so if one recognizes its partial truth.[4]

Whether Wilfrid Hyde-White is too smooth and urbane to be believable as the headmaster of a prominent English public school is difficult for me to judge. He seems appropriate for role as revised for the film, though of course the role may have been rewritten specifically for him. He en-

3 Mind's I p.195f

4 MI p.196f

ables Frobisher to manage his gaffes and lapses of memory with aplomb and his smoothness seems appropriate for someone described in the play as "more like a distinguished diplomat than a doctor of literature and classical scholar." The satirical aspect of the portrait is subdued, but the irony of his political instincts and maneuvering is not lost. I personally like him in the role and enjoy the way in which his smooth wit enables him to glide through the day in contrast to Andrew's turmoil.

Redgrave's misgivings about his scene with Hyde-White may be valid. It is when they walk along the cricket field that I am most aware of the way in which Redgrave holds his hands in front of himself in what I would be inclined to call a "mousey" gesture. As Andrew surmises what Frobisher is after with the pension and the ceremony, he could have been more challenging or simply called Frobisher's hand without doing him any favors. Redgrave adopts a similar slumped over posture with his hands in front of his chest during the exchange with Frank and Millie regarding the seat at the concert. How far this mannerism tips the balance in Redgrave's interpretation of the character is another matter, but it may have been a factor in my own initial reaction to the film. Only on a third viewing of the film did I begin to like Redgrave's performance and to be moved by it.

Perhaps even more powerful than the ending speech is the scene between Andrew and Frank while Andrew is getting ready to go to the headmaster's for dinner. This corresponds to the moment in the play when Andrew re-enters as though he has risen from the grave. When Andrew lets Frank know that he is aware of Millie's affair with him, Redgrave's body language conveys a very different attitude. He seems refortified enough to dismiss the incident of Taplow's gift as "a lot of fuss," but he also seems more self-possessed and sure of himself. In the final moment of the scene he seems to have claimed the moral high ground via the clarity of his self-knowledge. Even though he is pronouncing himself long dead, he has acquired a kind of stature which contrasts with his previous tendencies towards obsequiousness.

Only another fact that I have managed to face.

Wilfred Hyde-White's performance in *The Browning Version* is only one in a long string of stage and film roles which lasted 50 years despite the fact that he is reputed to have said, ""I learned two things at drama school: first, that I couldn't act; second, that it didn't matter." He is, of course, fondly remembered by many as Colonel Pickering in the film version of *My Fair Lady*.

Jean Kent's casting as Mille Crocker-Harris was a watershed moment in her career. Kent grew up in vaudeville and had been acting in films since she was 13. She was at the peak of her career and was something of a star, although she tended to be cast as the other woman or a femme fatale. Apparently Kent had liked the play of *The Browning Version* and was very interested in the role when she learned it was being made as a film, even though the character was supposed to be about ten years older than she was at the time. The role had initially been offered to Margaret Lockwood, but Kent had just starred in *The Woman In Question* for Asquith so presumably she was able to let him know that she was intrigued by how the character could be made sympathetic despite her coldness. She later concluded that playing a cold, older woman at that point was bad for her career, even though her performance was well received critically.

Millie is introduced in the chapel scene as the person who happens to be sitting next to Gilbert. She does seem a bit more glamorous than one might expect to find in the school chapel. The two women sitting behind her are attractive enough but seem staid in comparison. Millie makes a friendly gesture of identifying the headmaster for the visitor sitting next to her, but there are vaguely conspiratorial overtones in her look and we start the film with an image of her making contact with an unknown younger man. She also casts a furtive glance at Gilbert after the lady behinds her responds to the headmaster's remarks about her.

There is a rather pointed close up of Millie glaring at Frank during the collection hymn. We obviously at this point cannot know what is at stake, but we get a clear image of the intensity of her emotions. As they

leave the chapel she chats with Gilbert, but she is clearly distracted and interested in something else until she realizes he is Andrew's replacement. She then makes a characteristically caustic remark about Andrew's career, which is perhaps the first indication in the film that Andrew has failed in some way. (Taplow and Wilson have reacted to the announcement of Andrew's departure in a way that indicates he is not beloved.)

Most of the time Kent seems to have focused on Millie's jealous anger or contempt as though the key to her character is "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned." Even when she professes her love for Frank, her expression is colored by hurt and anger, and it is certainly easy to imagine that Frank is tiring of her behavior even as he insists he has no intention of breaking off with

her. The few times we see her smiling and being sociable with the Headmaster seem, in retrospect at least, to be hypocritical, but she does seem to be genuinely pleased by his flattery.

Perhaps the moment when she seems most vulnerable is after she has slapped Frank and obviously regrets doing so. She moves almost immediately into a desperate attempt to hold onto Frank and into a state of denial when Frank announces that he is breaking off with her and not coming to see her in Bradford.

Kent's performance is certainly consistent, and there is no denying the power of her contempt or her desperation. Seeing her desperation with Frank helps us understand the roots of her contempt for Andrew, but I cannot help but wonder if Kent could have used her beauty and sensuality to make Millie more appealing in some way without undermining the role.

Nigel Patrick as Frank Hunter seems surprisingly urbane for a science teacher, and I find myself wondering if he were cast because his persona resembled that of Rattigan. The cigarette case Millie has given him and the way in which he rolls a cigarette between his fingers seem more characteristic of a London socialite than a schoolmaster. While he is appealing and sympathetic enough, there is perhaps initially a suggestion of superficiality or narcissism in Patrick's portrayal. He lacks the earnestness implied by some of Frank's dialogue in the play, and he no longer seems to fit the description in the original stage directions as "a rugged young man – not perhaps quite as rugged as his deliberately-cultivated manner of ruthless honesty makes him appear, but wrapped in all the self-confidence of the popular master." Patrick's Frank seems to have more of the self-confidence of a ladies' man than of a schoolmaster. Even in the play it is difficult to know how his ruthless honesty would be conveyed. It almost seems as though Rattigan began with an idea of a man of science but let it evolve as he wrote both the play and the screenplay so that the emphasis shifted from unsparing honesty to an arc in which he moves from being a Lothario to someone capable of making a gesture of genuine friendship and of admiring integrity. "Ruthless honesty" seems more pertinent to Andrew and Millie's relationship than it does to Frank.

Patrick is able to make Frank seem genuinely touched by Andrew's revelations and his gesture of friendship seems sincere. His desire to be of some help to Andrew is convincing when he pressures Andrew not to go to Bradford with Millie. The way in which he responds to Andrew's farewell remarks – first as Andrew seems to lose his train of thought and then as Andrew offers his apology – reveal his feelings for Andrew and the way in

which Andrew's ordeal has made him realize his own failings.

It is, of course, with the character of Gilbert in the film that Andrew's situation has the greatest resonance, and casting Ronald Howard makes Gilbert a totally appealing and sympathetic character. Ronald Howard, the son of Leslie Howard, had played one of the principal roles in the film of another Rattigan play which Asquith directed, *While the Sun Shines* (1947). He was

32, but he seems to embody the youthful earnestness of a recent Oxford graduate even if he is eight or ten years too old. (In the play his age is specified as twenty-two and he has taught for two months. In the film he does make one reference to having taught eleven-year-olds, so presumably he could have left Oxford at least a year or two earlier.)

He professes to feel lucky because of the position he has been offered at the school and seems appealingly self-effacing. When he comments

that he finds observing Andrew's class "extremely informative," there is a sense of how he judges Andrew as a teacher. His remark about human

nature seems rather pointed and even a bit challenging the way Howard delivers it.

ANDREW: Perhaps you would care to glance at some of these.

GILBERT: Well, not just now if you don't mind.

ANDREW: You might find them very informative.

GILBERT: Well you see, sir, the information I'm looking for hasn't very much to do with Latin verse.

ANDREW: Oh, indeed. What has it to do with?

GILBERT: Human nature.

He is quick, however, to realize his tactlessness in repeating the Himmler epithet to Andrew, and is obviously moved by Andrew's summary of his years of teaching. Howard is able to convey genuine remorse when he apologizes for having hurt Andrew. Gilbert also attends assembly the next morning so that we are able to see him react to Andrew's reference to the Himmler epithet. Howard's expression reflects not only Gilbert's remorse at having told Andrew about the nickname, but also his sympathy for Andrew and his shared sense of the nobility the teaching vocation.

Brian Smith's interpretation of Taplow seems to be based on the assumption that Taplow's gift to Andrew is totally sincere despite the fact that he is concerned about losing his promotion if Millie

tells Andrew about his mimicry of him. There is no indication of any duplicity when he gives him the book, and the final scene in which he says that he prefers Andrew's translation of the *Agamemnon* to Browning's underscores his admiration for him. In fact it seems as though Asquith has decided that the gift is sincere, partially to help set up the pay off of the student's cheering in the end. Certainly the way in which Taplow's role is expanded supports the notion that the gift is sincere. Even with his fellow students Taplow expresses sympathy for Andrew.

The self-possession and ease with which he explains his presence in Frank's classroom make Taplow seem somewhat precocious. That he would persist in his critique of Frank's experiment and discuss Andrew's policy regarding promotions in front of a classroom full of upperclassmen surely bespeaks an unusual degree of self-confidence.

During his tutoring session when Taplow asks Andrew if he should go on with the translation, he seems concerned that his remark about the other students might be taken as insulting to Andrew. He seems to want to get the lesson back on track as much from a desire to distract Andrew from the remark as from any fear that he may have harmed his chances for promotion. His anxiousness seems more related to the politeness which caused him to laugh at Andrew's Latin joke than to any self-interested scheming to obtain his promotion. When Taplow gives Andrew the book his concern that the Greek inscription may not be grammatically correct seems like normal anxiety in interpreting what he takes to be a negative reaction in Andrew rather than revealing any indication of duplicity. That he would have the temerity to "borrow" Andrew's manuscript from his desk certainly suggests that he is not acting out of fear. The expression on Smith's face as he portrays Taplow's reaction to Andrew's farewell apology also underscores the genuineness of his feeling for Andrew.

The Production

Asquith's deceptively simple direction is a case study in the classic conventions of film grammar. The film is still essentially a stage play even if it has been "opened up." The meaning is primarily in the dialogue and the visual dimension of the film serves to enhance the impact of the dialogue. The composition of the shots for the most part is determined by the same considerations that influence the blocking of the action on a stage.

Asquith described his approach to direction as primarily problem solving:

> Technique is after all nothing mysterious; it is merely the answer to the question "How?" – "How shall I put this particular scene on the screen?" The may obviously be a hundred and one ways of approaching a scene. It will be different with different directors, but al long as a director treats the scene as unique and particular and not as a specimen of a genus, his answer to the question "How?" has a chance of success.[5]

According to Redgrave as quoted by R.J. Minney in his biography of Asquith was more than open to suggestions. (Redgrave refers to him as "Puffin," the nickname Asquith's mother gave him because of the shape of his nose).

> Michael Redgrave then talked of his scenes in *The Browning Version* in which he played the ageing schoolmaster Crocker-Harris. 'I remember particularly the scene,' he said, 'in which Crocker-Harris, the villain—hero of the play, has to digest the fact that he is known as the Himmler of the Lower Fifth. The set for that scene – the classroom — was a very big one with only two people in it.
>
> 'Puffin said: "Where do you feel like going? Where would you like to be for that bit?" And I said: "I would like to walk away from the camera, with my back to it – away – away to the end of the long classroom, take in the names carved on the walls, the initials and so on. Then come back again and come into close-up." I wanted to do this great circumambulation in this scene for my very long speech.
>
> 'Puffin said: "Fine! Fine! But the sound people said, "We are going to pick up quite a lot of noise from the arc lights as the distance between the player and the camera gets longer and longer." One doesn't hear so much about arc noises these days. I don't know why it is, but it's just as well.
>
> '"I can either do it your way," said Puffin, "and put the sound on afterwards – or I can follow you with the camera." I said:
>
> "No. I will dub what I am saying afterwards." Not many directors, especially of Puffin's magnitude, would say to the actor: "Where would you like to go? What would you like to do?" and be able to accommodate the actor's wishes with his own concept of how it should be done. He could afford to give one those bits of latitude. He was so humble and truly modest as really good artists usually are au fond.'[6]

Obviously Asquith sensed the emotional potential of the large empty classroom as well as the logic of seeing Andrew from Gilbert's perspective. Redgrave may have been primarily concerned with the need to have something to do during a long bit

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of dialogue, and it seems as if he may have added a bit of dialogue as an added justification for his walk: Those boys sitting down there…". In any event the net result was typical of a very basic type of collaboration involved in filmmaking.

The classroom is used for five scenes in the film and this one may be worth dissecting as an example of the directing style of the film. It begins with Andrew alone in the classroom after he has learned that he will not receive a pension from the school. It has been set up by his telling Millie that he is going to his classroom to collect some papers. He walks along the cricket field while everyone else is walking in the opposite direction. He pauses to applaud the team as it comes out of the clubhouse and then walks off alone.

He enters the classroom in a full-figure shot as a silhouette in the doorway and the part of the classroom we see looks almost gloomy. The camera pans with him as he walks towards his desk, and he pauses to wipe perspiration from his face and neck. The pause serves to emphasize the step up to his desk. The fact that his desk is on a platform is exploited on several occasions in which students or Gilbert must look up at Andrew when they are speaking to him. The metaphor may be obvious, but it is also natural enough to work beneath the surface. Mainly we are aware that Gilbert and Taplow look up to Andrew. Gilbert, of course, looks up to Andrew even before he himself has begun to sympathize with him.

As Andrew pauses to put his handkerchief away he seems to be looking at the desk apprehensively. He then steps over to open the top of the desk in order to remove some books. Again the piece of business is perfectly natural and motivated by his reason for coming to the classroom, but the image does have metaphorical impact as Andrew begins to open the Pandora's box of reflection on his years at the school. The shadows cast by the sun coming through the window heighten this mood. He gathers some books and then turns to remove things from the cabinet behind his desk. Something falls to the floor from the cabinet and he bends over to pick it up. His posture as his face goes into darkness seems to convey defeat or dying. As he stands with the notebook he has picked up off the floor, there is a cut to a medium shot so that we can see his reaction before we know what he is reacting to. Then there is a cut to a close-up of the manuscript cover, and we have the real justification for this scene. In collecting his things Andrew has re-discovered the passion of his youth which he had told Taplow was lost forever.

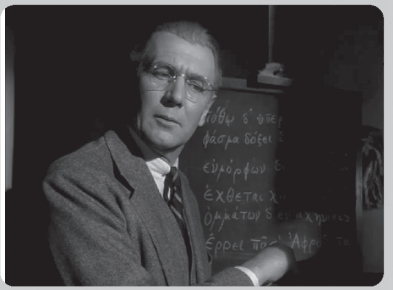
When we cut back to the medium shot, there is a sound of the door opening and Andrew pulls the manuscript to his chest as though he feels a need to protect it and hide it.


The
AGAMEMNON
of AESCHYLUS
Rendered into English Verse
by
A. CROCKER-HARRIS

"Well, the headmaster amongst others…"

"Oh I'm so sorry, sir I didn't expect..."
"Come in... come in..."

"I think he exaggerated. I hope he exaggerated."

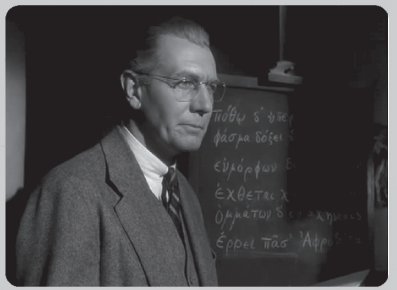


"I'm even told that you're known as the Himmler of the Lower Fifth."

"He only meant you kept the most wonder discipline…"

"Himmler of the Lower Fifth? Who told you that?"

"They're not bad boys…"



"I'm afraid I shouldn't have said that. I've been tactless, I'm afraid."

"Of course, from the very beginning I realized I did not possess the knack of making myself liked, but…

Gilbert enters the classroom unaware that Andrew is there in a medium shot similar to the one we started with except that Gilbert is not seen so much in silhouette.

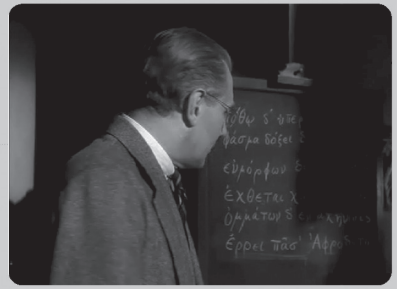
The camera dollies back and pans to include Andrew seeing Gilbert before Gilbert sees Andrew. Andrew then turns back towards his desk to continue removing his things as the conversation with Gilbert begins. Much of the time Andrew has his back to Gilbert so that both are facing the camera. Even though Gilbert does most of the talking and explains his presence in the classroom by revealing his personal feelings, the composition makes him seem less significant than Andrew's actions as he continues to gather his things. Gilbert is an interloper in Andrew's private moment up until the point where he makes the remark about Himmler.

There is a cut to a medium shot of Andrew as he reacts to "Himmler of the Lower Fifth," and asks Gilbert who told him that. A medium close up of Gilbert responding sets up the latter medium close up in which he begins to realize his gaffe. Andrew's initial reaction to Gilbert's apology seems to be hostile, but he tries to downplay the significance of the remark.

As Andrew turns away from Gilbert, there is a cut to a wider shot which is the first of two long cuts following Andrew as he walks around the room reminiscing. The cut back to Gilbert shows he growing remorse and when Andrew's walk around the room ends with them face to face, Gilbert lowers his eyes and is momentarily at a loss for words. The cut back to Andrew as he sees that Gilbert is disturbed and attempts to relieve Gilbert's discomfort by apologizing for embarrassing him is a sort of punctuation in which the emotional weight of the scene begins to shift to Gilbert. Andrew returns to his earlier position at his desk gathering his things with Gilbert hanging his head in the foreground.

Gilbert's apology is now deeply felt and is seen in a medium close up of him again looking up at Andrew. He no longer feels simply that he has tactlessly revealed a joke about Andrew. Now it is clear that he feels he has hurt Andrew, and he is genuinely remorseful.

Andrew continues his reflections on his career, but he has regained some of his ironic self-defense



“At the beginning at least I did try very hard…”

“…sometimes I had that success…”

“…to communicate to the boys…”

“That of course was in the early years…”

“…some of my own joy in the great literature of the past.”

“Of course, I failed as you will fail…”

“…the boys used sometimes to laugh at me, not with me but at me…”

"...at my little mannerisms and tricks of speech..."

"...and that made me very happy..."

"...I used to encourage the boys' laughter by rather overdoing those little mannerisms..."

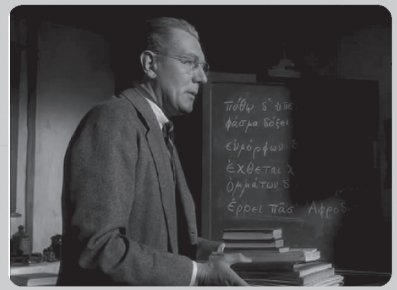
"...at least they found me funny as a character..."

"...for a time at least I had quite a success as a school master."

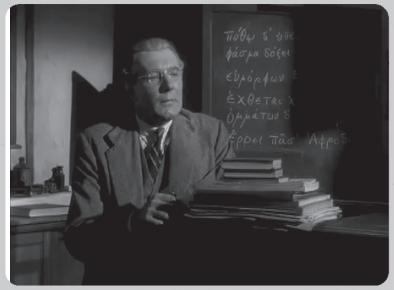
"I fear this is all very personal..."

"You need have no fears about the lower fifth."

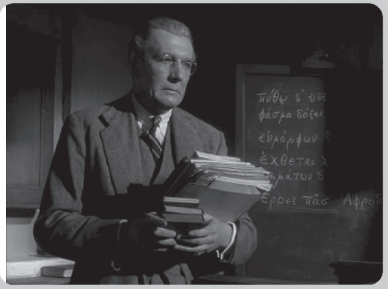
"I'm afraid I said something just now that hurt you very much. It's myself you must forgive, sir."



"...I should have known for myself..."



"I knew, of course, that I was not only not liked but now positively disliked..."



...an utter failure as a schoolmaster. Still, stupidly enough I had not realized I was also feared."

"Well, I bequeth you this room..."

"You will, I know, respect the confidence I have just made you."

"I should hate you to think I wouldn't..."

"…Good-bye, my dear fellow, and my best wishes…"

and dismisses Gilbert's apology. He sits down almost as though he is being crushed or drained by the full realization of his failure, and there is a note of anger as he rises to leave: ("Still, stupidly enough, I had not realized that I was also feared.")

There is a cut to a wider angle with Gilbert in the foreground as Andrew begins to leave. The camera stays with Gilbert as Andrew exits the frame. Gilbert is still at a loss for words, but he gathers himself together just in time to turn and open the door for Andrew. The camera follows him as catches up with Andrew and settles into a two shot of them facing each other on equal footing.

There is a final cut to an over the shoulder shot of Andrew as he asks Gilbert to respect confidences he has just made him and a corresponding shot of Gilbert assuring him that he will. There is another matching pair of shots as they say good-bye and wish each other well, and one last shot as Andrew reacts to the idea of his "future career" and turns to exit.

Again the camera stays with Gilbert in the wider shot as Andrew leaves and Gilbert closes the door. Gilbert then turns to take his place at the desk with some hesitancy and the scene ends on a shot of the empty desks in the classroom.

Aside from the formal symmetry it provides, perhaps the most striking thing about the quiet moment with Gilbert alone in the classroom is that is it an obvious moment for a music cue; but it is all the stronger because instead of music we hear

only the ringing of the school bell in the distance outside. This is, of course, consistent with the rest of the film as there is no score at all except with the opening and end titles. The only other music in the film is the organ music heard coming from the chapel and the hymn sung by the congregation. The music over the opening credits sounds to me like stock music for credits although the music department for the film apparently consisted of Arnold Bax and Kenneth Essex. The music at the end sounds like a bit of butchered Beethoven designed to rouse the projectionist and reassure the audience.

The film also makes sparse use of off-screen sound effects. About the only sounds that are not tied directly to things seen are the sounds issuing from Hunter's classroom, the sound of his students running through the hall as heard by the students in Andrew's class, the school bell, the sound of the fireworks during the headmasters dinner party, and the motor and horn of the taxi waiting out front for Millie in the morning.

The fireworks are perhaps justified by the ironic contrast between an end of term festivities and the apparent end of the Crocker-Harris's marriage. The sound of course combines a sense of celebration with an echo of warfare. The main function of the fireworks, however, seems to be to provide the occasion for a theatrical lighting effect as Millie and Andrew talk of going their separate ways.

The school bell is heard several times during the day starting with the opening shot as Wilson runs to chapel. It rings at the end of Andrew's class, emphasizing the ominous silence with which the students await Andrew's next instruction. It rings while Andrew and Millie are silently having lunch together, and provokes Andrew to excuse himself to reset the dining room clock. The sound of the bell while Gilbert sits alone in the classroom has already been mentioned, and finally it summons Andrew to the prize ceremony where he is to make his farewell remarks. The ringing bells are, of course, a natural bit of ambience for a school campus, but the also serve to underscore aspects of the story concerned with beginnings and endings. There is an inevitable association with the question of for whom the bell tolls. It summons Andrew to the encounter with his failure as it summons Gilbert to a confrontation with his limitations. The passage of time, which is reinforced by associating the bells with Andrew's apparent obsession with punctuality, is part of what seems to have defeated Andrew in his mission. He had some success at first, but he was worn down as the years went by.

The sound of the taxi outside the house in the morning puts pressure on Millie as she debates whether to make any kind of parting gesture towards Andrew and the sound of the taxi driving away adds a note of finality to Andrew's situation.

There is one other sound effect that has a gathering impact as the film progresses, the sound of a door opening or closing. This is also, of course, a visual motif, and it may seem strained to credit such a natural aspect of the action as a stylistic motif adding to the emotional impact of the film, but I think a case can be made for it in a film about passages – beginnings, endings, arrivals and departures – and about intrusion or the penetration of defenses. There are some 38 moments when a door opening or closing plays a role in the scenes.

0:01:49	Door closes on Wilson
0:02:16	Porter opens door for Gilbert
0:02:23	Porter lets Wilson go in
0:02:27	Wilson closes door behind Wilson
0:06:51	Frobisher and Gilbert as Frank closes classroom door
0:07:07	Frobisher opens Andrew's classroom door
0:10:22	Taplow enters classroom
0:11:40	Students react to sound of door opening
0:20:14	Off screen sound of classroom door closing as Gilbert leaves
NOTE:	There is no sound of the door when Millie arrives while Taplow is imitating Andrew.
0:23:50	Millie closes the door as Taplow leaves
0:25:14	Front door closes OS as Andrew arrives
0:27:24	Door OS as Taplow returns
0:26:52	Taplow enters sitting room
0:36:25	Frank leaves Millie closes door
0:36:53	Millie opens door enters sitting room
0:37:04	Andrew closes dining room door
0:47:35	Andrew enters classroom
0:48:23	OS Door classroom door opening
0:48:25	Gilbert enters classroom
0:53:20	Gilbert opens door for Andrew
0:55:59	Millie closes sitting room door
0:56:11	Taplow opens door to enter sitting room
0:59:27	Frank opens & closes door to enter sitting room
1:00:52	Taplow closes door OS as he leaves
1:01:53	Millie enters in background
1:03:18	Andrew closes door as he leaves with medicine
1:03:43	Frank opens door as he starts to leave
1:03:54	Frank closes door to say "We're finished..."
1:30:08	Frank opens door to leave for real
1:06:05	Frank knocks & opens bedroom door
1:08:33	Frank stops Andrew from opening door
1:08:55	Andrew finishes opening bedroom door
1:09:07	Millie opens door to enter hallway
1:09:24	Franks opens door as they leave house
1:09:30	Andrew closes door behind them
1:10:38	Carstairs opens door for ladies leaving dining room
1:15:01	Millie opens dining room door
1:15:18	Millie opens billiard room door & closes it behind her
1:20:58	Millie closes front door as she leaves

The most emphatic of the door closings is the moment when Frank closes the door he has partially opened with the intention of going to tell Frank that Millie was lying about Taplow. He pauses as Millie says Andrew will think Frank is only telling him that out of pity. When Frank closes the door to resume talking with Millie, it signals the end of their relationship. He looks at

According to Wikipedia the exterior locations were filmed at Sherborne School in Dorset, a venerable public school founded in 1550. This may be based on an identification of the square tower seen in the opening and closing shots, but it appears that some liberties were taken in constructing the setting for the film. The opening and closing shot seem to be the same angle on the school, but the opening shot has additional buildings added behind the main building. The courtyard used for some scenes appears to be real, but the setting for the final exchange between Andrew and Taplow is probably a set.

The school chapel is presumably a set designed by Carmen Dillon, who won an Oscar for Hamlet *(1949) and received BAFTA nominations for her work on The* Accident *(1967),* The Go-Between *(1970) and* Julia *(1977).*

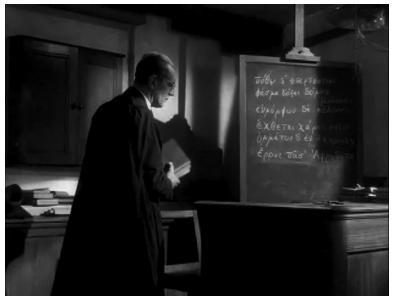
her for a moment and says, "We're finished, Millie, you and I."

Similarly when Andrew hears Millie shut the front door behind her on her way to get into the waiting cab, the closing door adds a sense of finality to their breakup.

The play of *The Browning Version* takes place in one room. The Asquith film has 16 different locations or sets:

1. The School Campus Quadrangle
2. The School Chapel
3. The West Cloisters (Hallway)
4. Frank's Classroom
5. Andrew's Classroom
6. Crocker-Harris Sitting Room
7. Crocker-Harris Garden
8. Crocker-Harris Entry Hall
9. Crocker-Harris Dining Room
10. Cricket Field
11. Tent on Cricket Field
12. Andrew's Bedroom
13. Frobisher Dining Room & Billiard Room
14. Frobisher Sitting Room
15. Frobisher Patio
16. School Assembly Hall

"Opening up" the play by spreading the action around several settings is a natural tendency in filming a play, but it also contributes to the shift in emphasis from Andrew's marriage relationship



to his failure in his career. The use of additional settings is judicious and the choices for the most part are obvious. The only two that seem to require any justification are the tent on the cricket field and the headmaster's house.

The cricket field itself is a fairly obvious solution to the question of how to move the conversation between Andrew and Frobisher out of the house into a setting the presents other opportunities for elaboration of themes. The tent is less obvious, but seems to be a natural and elegant solution to how to permit more fluidity in the grouping of the characters than would be possible with everyone seated and watching the match. Andrew and Frobisher can finish the first part of their conversation and move into the tent to join the others for tea during a break in the game. In the tent Frobisher can make his rounds leaving Andrew and Millie to have a private conversation. The tent also allows Frank to take his leave of Millie and provides an occasion for Wilson and his mother to observe Andrew and Millie.

Perhaps a dinner party at the headmaster's house is an obvious means of moving the final scenes of the play out of the Crocker-Harris's house and keeping Frank with them. The gathering of characters at Frobisher's house provides an occasion for recapitulating some of the themes. The gossiping wives provide an explicit statement of a major theme ("marriage of mind and body"). The presence of Betty Carstairs underscores Millie's anxieties about losing Frank. The party in general emphasizes the extent to which Andrew is a misfit in the social world of the school. The celebratory dinner also contrasts with the stifling lunch. The tension of the final exchange between Andrew and Millie is heightened by a semi-public setting involving fireworks.

The photography by Desmond Dickinson of the various settings added for the film creates a realistic image of the world in which the action takes place. Since the story takes place on the last two days of the spring term, it is not surprising that the image of the school is somewhat idyllic. The chapel and the West Cloisters convey a sense of tradition underscoring the theme of "the noblest calling that a man can follow – the care and molding of the young." Even the details of Andrew's classroom probably evoke a sense of the traditions of public schools for those familiar with them.

The lighting in Andrew's classroom and in the dining room of Andrew's house is fairly moody with deep shadows in keeping with the somber theme of Andrew's failure. Except for the fireworks effect the rest of the lighting seems completely naturalistic or at least conventional in terms of black-and-white photography.

There are two elements in the art direction which stand out as motifs: clocks and mirrors. Andrew's punctuality and his association with time is an element added to the play for the film. During the class he notices Wilson checking the time and tells him, "It lacks nine and a half minutes of eleven…" In addition to setting the clock during lunch, he sets his own watch and the clock on the mantel by the chimes. (He is nonetheless late to his appointment with Taplow.)

A mirror is a fairly obvious metaphor for introspection or self-awareness, and there are three in the Crocker-Harris house which are used rather pointedly.

The mirror in the entry hall is used only once; but when Millie looks in it before lunch, the image seems almost consciously reminiscent of the Queen addressing her mirror in the Disney version of Snow White. In this case the mirror is a means of underscoring her vanity and her anxiety about losing Frank.

The mirror above the mantel in the sitting room is included in at least a dozen shots, and, given the nuisance that a mirror can be in a film set (reflecting the camera, crew, lights, etc.), one must assume that there was a conscious decision to put a mirror above the fireplace for stylistic or thematic reasons.

The first use of this mirror is during the scene between Millie and Frank after she has sent Taplow to the village. Frank is standing in front of the mantel with his back to the mirror so that when Millie approaches him we are able to see her from two sides at once. Neither of them looks into the mirror. The point of this is not obvious, but it may have to do with seeing Millie from two

different perspectives as Frank and Andrew do.

Later when Andrew is showing Frank the schedule for the next term, the school bell rings and he walks over to the mantel to set the clock. At first the as Andrew sets the clock the mirror permits us to see Andrew's front and back simultaneously while also putting him between Frank and Millie in the mirror. When Andrew turns to face Frank and dismiss the idea that his new job is something to be sorry about, we get a complementary composition in which the interest shifts to the direct view of Andrew on the right side of frame. This shift underscores the shift in Andrew's manner from the somewhat ironic and even slightly self-pitying description of the job to the resumption of his pride and fortified public persona. In turning to face Frank and Millie, he is also turning his back on their reflections. The mirror in this case is clearly associated with "reflection" in the sense of inner awareness, and it enables the shot to become a miniature visual metaphor for the turn Andrew makes, which is the pivotal point of the story.

When Millie returns to the house after the cricket game and discovers Andrew clearing his desk, she walks over to the mantel and turns to continue talking to him. Asquith has obviously made a conscious decision to place her in front of the mirror. She turns her back on Andrew and preens in mirror as she asked him why he did not come back to the cricket match, and both sides of her profile are visible as she talks about Gilbert.

Asquith also has Andrew walk over to stand in front of the mirror while he describes Taplow's gift to Frank. In this instance the mirror frame behind Andrew simply seems to be a graphic element in the composition.

When Millie re-enters the room to join Frank and Andrew, the mirror catches her reflection so that we see two of her: a reflection of her associated with Andrew and her full figure associated with Frank. She then goes over to look into the mirror as she puts on earrings while Andrew and Frank continue there conversation across the frame.

When Millie takes the book from Andrew and begins to debunk Taplow's gift, she moves across

the room, and Andrew and Frank move so that Frank ends up in front of the mirror as Andrew leaves the room. During Frank's confrontation with Millie he is framed by the mirror reflecting mainly a door. Again the mirror seems to be mainly a graphic element in the composition, and it is probably best not to make too much of the

other instances in which the mirror is visible in the background.

The third mirror is in Andrew's bedroom. The shot is not such that the camera can see a reflection, but Andrew is clearly looking into the mirror as he ties his tie and brushes his hair. It is perhaps significant that this "bit of business" is used to set up a shot where Andrew is looking at himself and Frank is looking at Andrew. The content of the scene reveals that Andrew is much more aware than Frank imagines him to be.

It is hard to know how much weight to give to the use of visual motifs like this or how to gauge their contribution to the impact of the scenes. They surely contribute in some way to the formal coherence of the work and probably have an effect on the viewer even if it is subliminal.

There can be no doubt, however, about the impact of the compositions and staging in terms how we see the actors in the scenes. It is often instructive to view a movie like this with the sound turned off to see how much about the relationships between the characters is conveyed not only through the expressions and gestures of the actors but also through the compositions of the shots and the blocking of the action. This is most obvious in the extended scenes between Millie and Frank.

The first scene between Mille and Frank in the sitting room after Taplow has left on his errand consists of just two shots. The first is just over a minute and a half long. It begins on a full figure shot of Millie as she starts to offer Taplow money for some ice cream and pans over with her as she walks over to give him the money and shut the door behind him. There is a medium shot of Millie at the door as she turns to begin speaking to Frank, and the camera dollies back as she walks over to Frank in front of the mirror. The camera pans with Millie as she turns and walks away from Frank and dollies back again to permit a two-shot of them as Frank approaches her to offer her a cigarette. She then turns away from him again and walks towards the camera. With

While you're there, you might as well slip into Stewart's and have an ice cream."

"Thanks awfully, Mrs. Crocker-Harris."

"Thank you for coming…"

"Care to come back for cocktails this evening?"

"…if you may…"

"Do you know I haven't seen you for over a week…"

"Give me cigarette…"

"Ihad expected to be in Devonshire in September."

"You haven't given it away yet, I see…"

"Then you'll have to come to me in Auguest."
"But Andrew will be there."

"Luckily it's a man's case. I don't suppose any of your girlfriends would want it."
"Oh, don't be silly…"

"I think I can manage Septemer."

"Well that would be better from every point of view."

"Except that it means I shan't see you for six weeks."

"You'll survive that all right."
"Oh yes, I'll survive it, but not quite so easily as you will."

"Oh, Frank,darling, I love you so much."

a minimal adjustment the camera is able to frame a close up of her in the foreground with a medium shot of Frank behind her. Even without the dialog it is clear that her first approach was tentative and her real feelings are being revealed as she turns her back on him and walks away again. Frank approaches her and she turns on him as he plays with his cigarette eventually dropping it. He retrieves the cigarette and walks over to the mantel to use an ash tray. Now the camera pans off of Millie to stay with Frank, and he turns to speak to her. At this point there is a cut to a medium shot of Millie and pans with her as she moves over to confront Frank. Frank turns away from her as they talk, and just as Millie professes her love for him the scene is interrupted by the sound of Andrew coming in the front door. The staging of their conversation is a choreographed skirmish in which Millie is attacking Frank (either with complaints or with a desperate need) and Frank

"He should never have become a schoolmaster."

"How did you meet in the first place? I've often wondered."

"He wasn't always The Crock, you know…"

"It's me you should be sorry for."

"I am."

"Then show me."

is moving away or attempting to mollify. There is clearly an imbalance in the relationship.

The scene with Millie and Frank in the garden consists of five shots again starting with a sustained shot which is a minute and twelve seconds. Millie and Frank walk side by side through the garden, and the camera pans with them until they come to a bench where Millie prepares to sit down. She sits, but he remains standing with the result that the next cut, an over-the-shoulder angle on Millie has him looming over her and the complementary angle favoring him clearly puts him in a dominant position. She rises to confront him and there is a cut to another over-the-shoulder shot where she is literally in his face. There is a cut to the reverse angle on him, and he kisses her. This is the full revelation of their affair and of her betrayal of Andrew, who is on the other side of the wall behind them.

When the film returns to Frank and Millie in the garden, they have separated and apparently cooled off a bit. They are both seated although she is lower than he is. He smokes and plays with his cigarette avoiding her look until he realizes that he had forgotten he was supposed to sit with her at the concert at which point he turns to face her and apologize. He rises to walk away from her and she follows until the come to rest in a two-shot of him with his back to her. He turns partially when he responds to her, and then she turns her back on him and walks away. When she finally turns to respond he still faces away from her crushing his

"Look, I really must be going."

"Betty Carstairs has got her eye on you. I saw you at that tea party…"

"It'ss all right, my dear; as it happens we gave the seat away…"

"Frank, have you never been in love…"

"I know you're not in love with me, but haven't you ever been in love with anyone?"

"I told you I'm sorry. What more can I say?"
"Why not the truth?"

"Believe it if you like. happens to be a lie, but believe it all the same."

"For heaven's sake show me some pity…"

"Do you think it's any pleasanter to think you cut me because you forgot?"

"I meant to be so brave and not meantion the concert. Why did I."

"Frank…"

"I'll come down for the cricket this afternoon. Any chance of seeing you?"

cigarette with his foot. She again approaches him, but he still does not turn to face her. She turns away so that they have their backs to each other although he turns his head as he listens to her. He starts to leave, and only after he has exited frame does she turn to stop him. She exits frame to go to him, and the next cut is a medium shot of them at the door. He reassures her, and she follows him back into the house. Again the main impression of the scene is of her pursuing him and his turning away from her, which is of course precisely the nature of their relationship.

The brief scene between Millie and Frank in the hallway in which he assures her he is coming to Bradford plays in a single shot and is notable mainly for the way in which Millie moves to the window to watch Frank leaving.

Their scene together after she has debunked Taplow's gift begins with Millie standing at Andrew's desk and Frank at the mantel as Andrew exits through the door to the hall. It immediately cuts to a close up of Frank as he reprimands her and then to Millie from his point of view with her back to him. It cuts back to a wider shot of Frank approaching her, and the camera dollies back to end in a two shot of them as she turns to keep her back to him. She starts to walk away from him, and he heads for the door. He pauses as he opens the door, and she walks over to the mantel. There is a close-up of her at the mantel as she drives home her point that it is futile for him to tell Andrew she lied about Taplow. There

""I'm coming to Bradford." "I think if you don't I shall kill myself."

"I am allowed two at a time."

"In heaven's name, Millie, how could you?"

"Well, why not? Why should he be allowed his comforting little illusions..."

is cut to a close-up of Frank at the door hesitating and closing the door. After he tells Millie they are through, it cuts back to Millie turning around so that her back is to the mantel and smiling at Frank in an appeasing manner. A brief cut back to Frank as he says he meant it is followed by a dolly shot close-up of Millie as she moves from the mantel to the sofa and sits. The camera then tracks with Frank as he moves across to the mantel where she had been. There are two pairs of complementary close-ups of him looking down on her and then the camera stays with her as she rises to challenge him and walk past him. He circles around behind her. The over-shoulder close-up on her is even tighter as she turns on him again. There is a brief cut to a corresponding angle on him and then a cut back to her as she slaps him. On the slap it cuts back to him, and there are cuts back and forth with the same angles before there is a side angle two shot in which she reaches out to him and he pushes her away. She turns away from him not wanting to listen to what he is saying, and the camera drops back for a wider shot as she tries to get away from him. She walks into a close-up, and he pursues. She turns to pursue him as he exits frame, and the camera tracks after her as she goes over to kneel on the couch and appeal to him. He finally heads for the door in the same shot, and she is left in the room alone.

The staging and compositions in this sequence clearly reflect the shifting balance of power in the struggle going on between them. It begins with Frank's reprimand and ultimatum. If she won't

"You're to go to his room now and tell him it was a lie." Certainly not."

"We're finished, Millie, you and I."

"All right. See what happens. He knows I don't lie to him."

"Oh, Frank, really…"

"He knows I tell him the truth and he'll hate you for your sympathy…"

"I mean it, Millie."

"He" think you're making fun of him like Taplow."

"Oh, don't be silly, darling…"

"Come and sit down amd forget all about…"

"Frank, I don't understand. What is this: what have I done?"

"…artful little boys and their five-shilling presents and talk to me."

"I think you know what you've done, Millie. Go and look after Andrew."

"forget!" If I live to be a hundred…"

"Why all this sudden concern for Andrew?"

"…I shall never forget the glimpse you've just given me of yourself."

"Because I think he's been about as badly hurt as a human being can be."

"Hurt? Andrew? You can't hurt Andrew; he's dead."

"At your urgent invitation."

"Why do you hate him so?"

"I don't hate him. You can't hate the dead; you can only despise them and I despise Andrew…"

"Decency! You're a fine one to talk about decency, when all these months you've been deceiving him."

"Frank, forgive me…"

"Frank, I don't care how much you humiliate me…"

"I think you better learn the truth…"

"I can't let you go. You're all I 've got…"

"You wouldn't. You've tried to tell me so often before…"

It'll be all right in Bradford. You'll see."

"I'm not coming to Bradford, Millie."

"…but I've always kept you somehow….:

Looking from the dining room through the sitting room to the hall. The door to the dining room is the door to the left of Andrew's desk.

tell Andrew, she lied about Taplow he will. Then the balance shifts when she starts a counterattack which stops him from going. She tries to use seduction as she invites him to sit down with her. When he refuses and continues his attack, she rises to fight him on his level and eventually slaps him. She immediately regrets the slap even though he concedes it was earned. She tries again to approach him, but he rejects her and starts to leave. She becomes desperate and pursues him virtually pleading on her knees.

The direction of this scene seems to be a clear example of "problem solving." Given the room, the two characters and the nature of the exchange between them, how should it be presented? While there may be any number of ways this scene could be staged and shot, there is a clear logic to the solution that Asquith adopted.

The room of course is a set which has been designed to accommodate this scene as well as others, but it is a set for which all four walls have been built. At some point we see every wall and corner in this room.

There is no way of knowing whether the scene might have been story-boarded or blocked out before the set was designed, but it is fairly common for a set to be designed to provide as much latitude as possible for staging and shooting so that each scene can be worked out by the director and actors when it is actually shot.

This last scene between Frank and Millie follows the pivotal scene in which Millie punctures Andrew's joy at having received the book from Taplow. Again the direction of this scene has a kind of straightforward logic and clarity typical of Asquith. It begins with a wide shot containing all three characters, and the characters even converge as Andrew expresses his pleasure at the gift. Once Millie takes the book and begins her attack, the scene devolves into individual shots until she has delivered the blow and offers the book back to Andrew. The camera drops back to a wide shot as he tosses the book on his desk and takes the medicine bottle with him as he leaves. The scene began with Millie coming between Andrew and Frank, and it ends with Frank as a buffer between Millie and Andrew.

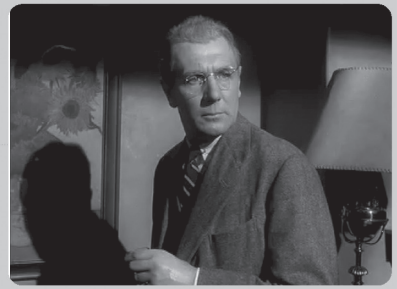
One other directorial choice worth noting is the way in which Asquith handles the moment during Taplow's private lesson when Andrew opens up to him, recalling his own attempt to translate the Agamemnon. Taplow sits beside Andrew and the entire lesson is shot in a side angle two shot. The camera dollies to the left as Andrew leans forward to refer to his text and then dollies back as he leans back again. As Andrew's thoughts turn inward he turns and faces away from Taplow. As a result the camera is able to see his full expression.

Two seemingly insignificant lines in this scene have been cut for the film: Taplow's second and third "Shall I go on, sir?" The second was before

The scene begins in a fluid moving camera shot in which Millie comes between Frank and Andrew while Frank tells Millie about the gift Andrew has just received.

Once Millie knows the gift is from Taplow, she takes the book and begins her attack.

As Millie moves away from the group saying , "the artful lillte beast" the scene splinters into single medium shots.



There are individual medium shots of Frank, Andrew and Millie until the point where Millie completely punctured Andrew.

As Mille returns the book the camera includes all three with Frank now between Millie and Andrew.

Andrew exits dropping the book on his desk and picking up the bottle of medicine.

The lesson takes place entirely in one shot with only a slight camera move to accomodate Andrew's lean forward to examine the text.

Andrew began his reverie about his own translation of the Agamemnon and the third came after Taplow had commiserated with Andrew on the loss of his manuscript. ("Hard luck, sir.") Apparently Asquith felt it was sufficiently clear that Andrew was drifting off and there was no need to milk the moment by having Taplow feel awkward. I suspect this may represent a missed opportunity in terms of the intensity of the audience's involvement with Andrew, but presumably both Asquith and Redgrave felt it was better for the pacing of the scene.

The warrior who can bear anything under seige by memories of his own youth.