

FIL 1001, SPRING 2003 TERM

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Introduction to Understanding Film

Narrative/Segmentation

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Charade's narrative creates a credible frame for the growing love between two characters, Regina Lampert (Audrey Hepburn) and Peter Joshua (Cary Grant). Four crimes take place during the narrative of the movie and are strategically used by the director to disturb the fragile equilibrium of their lives, which our characters desperately attempt to restore, with no luck until the end of the movie

Our characters (Regina and Peter) are problem-solvers, and in the end their persistence pays off, because they manage to find the money and reestablish the broken equilibrium of their lives. The narrative evolves around them and their quest to find and return the money, in order to be safe. This quest adds a temporal dimension to the narration, and helps connect the segments listed below (the segmentation is based on the unity of action):

I. First murder—Charles. This murder is the beginning of everything. The plot of the movie starts to unfold when Regina, the deceased's wife, meets Mr. Peter Joshua and falls in love with him. He is the only one who apparently helps and protects her. At her husband's funeral, she first sees Tex, Gideon and Herman, three bad guys who once were Charles' partners. They want to recover the money that Charles had stolen from them, and they think that Regina has it. She also receives an invitation to stop by the American Embassy, which she does the next day. At the Embassy, Regina meets with Mr. Bartholomew, who gives her some information about the

dubious past of her husband. He asks her to stay in touch and call him if she comes across any additional information about the stolen money. During her romance with Peter, she starts suspecting that he is also after the money. Regina confronts Peter who manages to calm her suspicions. He now goes by the name Dial.

II. Second murder—Herman. Regina suspects Peter once again. She calls Mr. Bartholomew who has more information for her. This is how she finds out that Peter lied again about his real identity and intentions. Because she is so very much in love with him, it doesn't take too long before she accepts his new explanation.

III. Third murder—Gideon. Tex thinks that Peter has the money and vice versa, but soon they realize that neither of them has it. Meanwhile, Regina gets a job, in her attempt to resume a normal life. Peter realizes that an agenda is missing, and Regina remembers that Charles had an appointment that day. They rush to that location, where a philatelic exposition takes place. They realize that the stamps in Charles' bag are very valuable (worth over a quarter of a million dollars). Tex rushes to Regina's room but finds nothing. Meanwhile, Regina recovers the stamps which she gave to her nephew.

IV. Fourth murder—Tex. Regina assumes that Peter was the one who murdered Tex, because he wrote "Dial" just before he died. She calls Mr. Bartholomew to tell him that she has the money and wishes to return it to the rightful owner, the American government. Dial follows Regina and tells her that Mr. Bartholomew is the actual killer. Once again she believes him. Bartholomew

tries to kill Regina but instead he dies in a deadly fall, which Peter causes in his attempt to save her life.

V. Epilogue. Regina returns the money and discovers that the actual treasurer is Peter/Adam/Dial, now Brian. She happily accepts his marriage proposal.

Charade follows the narrative pattern of classical Hollywood cinema because it starts with a crime, which disturbs Regina's life. Not only does she lose her husband and house, but she is also thrown into the middle of three consecutive crimes, which complicate her life every time she tries to rebalance it. In the end, everything returns to normal and she finds happiness with the man of her dreams. The style of the narration is invisible for the unaware spectator who is drawn into the movie. I think *Charade* is a great example of Hollywood's narrative machine and style.

Works Cited

Charade, dir. Stanley Donen. Universal Pictures, 1963.