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指導教授：劉紀雯老師

Dr. Kate Liu

**Ménage à Trois or Male Bonding? François Truffaut's *Jules et Jim***

學生：張俊凱 撰

Limo Chun-Kai Chang

Limo Chang

Professor Kate Liu

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Ménage à Trois or Male Bonding? François Truffaut's *Jules et Jim*

I. Introduction

- A. *Jules et Jim*, directed by François Truffaut, is a film based on French writer Henri-Pierre Roché's homonymous semi-autobiographical novel. Subject of "Catherine" or "Jules and Jim"?
- B. Catherine, originally Jules' wife, later turns out to be Jim's lover. The story mostly focuses on the relationships among the three: Jules' love for Catherine and generosity in giving his beloved to his best friend, Catherine's impulsiveness and fatality with her balancing in relationships, and Jim's struggle over Catherine's affairs and his own jealousy.
- C. However, besides the three main characters, the story also involves other minor characters, such as Thérèse, the cheerful and playful girl appearing at the film's beginning; Albert, Jules and Jim's friend and Catherine's almost successful suitor; Gilberte, Jim's long-term partner before his relationship with Catherine; and Denise, a lover of Jim's acquaintance whom he bumps into in Paris.
- D. Thesis paragraph
  - 1. Through the analysis of negative female representation, the ménage à trois, and Jules and Jim's relationship, this paper argues that the main subject of the film *Jules et Jim* is the two men's male bonding, but not their lover, Catherine.

2. Different from the other women who are either playfully promiscuous or quietly loyal, Catherine seems to take the center stage in the *ménage à trois*.
3. However, as the three characters nourish and circulate love among them to form mutual bonding, Catherine serves as a medium for the two men's love but meanwhile an obstacle as their love object, and ultimately she symbolizes a destructive force to their bonding.

## II. Background

A. Truffaut's life and especially his childhood have an influence on him as a French New Wave director and the film's adaptation.

1. It is his hatred for his stepfather that influences his New Wave ideal rejecting the authority of great classical literary text, or to quote from Stam, "rejecting the cinematic 'father's generation' of the tradition of quality as 'false fathers'" and preferring "substitute real fathers like Roché, Bazin, and Cocteau to false fathers." (8).
2. Furthermore, Erica Sheen in her journal article "Anti-Anti-Fidelity: Truffaut, Roché, Shakespeare" elaborates on how Truffaut criticizes *Cinéma de Qualité* (Tradition of Quality) as "[t]hat Famous Faithfulness" and "[a] cynical industrial imperative espoused by professional writers who have no real commitment to cinema," and thus "cheating the public with the anti-bourgeois populism" (248).
3. In fact, the French new directors' generation makes films as "an act of love" rather than preoccupies themselves with "fidelity" to the original text (258).
4. It is under this kind of "auteur" ideal that Truffaut follows to adapt Roché's novel into his own film.

### III. Literature review

- A. So far, related researches approach the film mostly from the female representation mainly of Catherine and homosocial bonding between Jules and Jim.
  1. Some critics focus on representation of Catherine as a mythological figure or a femme fatale under the male gaze of the film.
  2. Under the gaze of Jules, Jim, and Albert, the three male characters, Catherine is the “ultimate male mythological creation: the femme fatale” (Hanson-Lowe 18).
- B. Besides female representation, certain researches, few as they are, approach *Jules et Jim* from the aspect of the two male characters’ homosocial bonding.
  1. For instance, Gardner points out that Jules and Jim’s male bonding is constructed in a patriarchal society under the larger contexts of Nation (France), war, and French tradition of bonding through violence (not specifically World War I).
  2. Under the circumstances, Jules and Jim’s male bonding through violence further excludes Catherine in their trio relationship and hence makes her more and more reckless, unstable, and even fatal at the film’s end to bring death to Jim along with their ménage à trois, and further to destroy Jules and Jim’s bonding.
- C. Following up on these studies of female representation and homosocial bonding in *Jules et Jim*, the paper aims to provide a more thorough analysis of the female characters to prove that Jules and Jim’s male bonding is the film’s main subject and that this male bonding is maintained through women during wartime but at the same time hindered by them as the men’s love object, and finally destroyed by the death embodied in Catherine.

IV. In the film, Catherine and Thérèse on one hand, Gilberte and Denise on the other, are respectively presented as women of the loud and impulsive type and the quiet and loyal type.

A. First of all, Denise, as a foil character to Gilberte, is the flattest and emptiest woman regarded as a sex object by men in the film.

1. She does not even say a line and her presence is only introduced by her partner: “Don’t talk to her. She won’t answer. She never talks. She’s not dumb, just empty. It’s empty in here [her head]. She’s a thing. A pretty thing. A lovely object. Sex... pure sex.”
2. Here, Denise (called Nicole by Stam due to the different translation) not only is a flat woman confined by man but even becomes men’s “pure sex object” that is nearly senseless (Stam 96).

B. As the main character in the loyal type, Gilberte, despite giving voice to her thoughts, is presented as a woman confined by her lover, Jim.

1. Different from Denise who is speechless throughout the film, Gilberte presents her jealousy and displeasure at Jim’s decision to marry Catherine and further begs him to stay with her longer, only to find herself a powerless recipient of Jim’s every decision, either of not staying overnight with her to avoid the “obligations of a conventional marriage” or of marrying her after breaking up with Catherine.
2. This confinement of Jim can also be presented through the staging of Gilberte’s tiny flat, the “norms of the text” that translates “Jim’s view of marriage and monogamy as a claustrophobic prison” (Stam 101).
3. Gilberte’s flat, mostly the only place where she can meet Jim, best reflects Gilberte’s confinement of men in the film.

C. On the other hand, Catherine and her foil character, Thérèse, are presented as

women of impulsive type that are playful, reckless, and promiscuous.

1. At the film's beginning, Thérèse wantonly goes with Jules and Jim after running away from her partner or owner and stays with Jules in his house.
  2. However, ignored and bored by Jules who pays all his attention to Jim in the café, Thérèse immediately turns to other guys and again, wantonly runs away with one.
  3. From her story of her relationships and romances, one can see that Thérèse presents herself in the film as "a grasshopper leaping from man to man on a nightly basis" and a more promiscuous female character than Catherine (Stam 96).
  4. What's more, her way of ceaselessly speaking and neglect of the listener's attention also reflects her impulsiveness.
  5. Seeing from her wanton shifts among men and her uncontrollable speaking, one can find Thérèse a playful, impulsive, and promiscuous female character in the film.
- D. Finally, as the main character in the impulsive type, Catherine is presented as reckless and unstable figure in her plunge into the river, unreasonable suicidal threat to Jim, and her image as a femme fatale and a Siren.
1. Seeing that she is unable to fight against Jules' self-indulging comment, Catherine takes off her hat and jumps into the river right away.
  2. In this scene, Catherine is presented as a reckless, unstable figure that foreshadows her unpredictable infidelity later in her marriage with Jules.
  3. Catherine in this scene is turned into a kind of uncontrollable and dangerous "suicide bomber" (Stam 102).
  4. At last, in the singing scene, very tellingly Catherine chants the song Albert writes for her to Jules and Jim, and the song describes "her" as the

“Siren” who enchants the speaker with her “fatal voice,” while the speaker is willingly dragged into the “life’s whirlpool”:

5. This mythological image of monster-like Sirens and a femme fatale resonates with and further strengthens Catherine’s reckless and unstable characteristics
  6. Also, the pattern of relationship depicted in the song seems to be foreboding, in a dancing rhythm, the lovers are together and apart by turns, only to go down in life’s whirlpool “together” and “bound.”
- E. Lastly, Catherine’s instability of turning for affairs as substitutes for Jim in the ménage à trois shows her lack of real love and her relativism in love.
1. Seeing herself losing control of Jim, her love for him immediately declines and turns for others, in this case, Albert.
  2. Catherine’s love later alters and moves toward others again when she finds herself not pregnant with Jim’s child.
  3. In the two scenes, Catherine’s love for Jim, Jules or even Albert appears relative, and there seems no real or stable love in Catherine.

#### V. Jules and Jim’s male bonding

- A. Analyzed through the negative female representation from male perspective and Catherine’s relative and flowing love in the ménage à trois, the film ends off confirming the steadier and stronger male bonding between Jules and Jim in the triangular romances.
1. The story is narrated from the male perspective, and Catherine is also observed from that aspect throughout the film. According to Stam, Truffaut’s presentation of Catherine and treatment of Moreau is “masculinist” and “sexist” through the “male gaze” (101).
  2. Jim’s love for women, just like Catherine’s for men, is also unstable.

Nonetheless, Jim is the one to blame Catherine for trying to “adapt him to her” and being “egocentric,” while Catherine is presented only able to become reckless and dangerous to threaten Jim to death.

3. In the film, Jim’s Don Juanism is projected not onto Jim himself but unfairly onto Catherine, and this reflects Truffaut’s “sexual double standard” in the film to portray Catherine as the one not equipped for the challenge of reconciling fidelity and thus the one to “cheat” (Stam 102-103).
  4. It is under this situation that Catherine’s unstable flow of love in the *ménage à trois* shows her lack of real/true love and her usually “relative love,” while Jules and Jim’s male bonding and their love for each other, contrary to Jim’s rather unstable love for women, circulates steadily and is even strengthened through their love for Catherine and their relationship.
- B. Throughout the film, Jules and Jim’s male bonding is constructed and enhanced through their sharing of women, discovery of the Greek statue’s archaic smile and its embodiment in Catherine, and lastly, their sharing of Catherine in a triangular romance.
1. From the text, Jules and Jim’s friendship can be seen constructed on not only their sharing of the interests in poems, literature, and languages but later, that of women.
    - a. Their friendship and bonding between each other, in the film, starts with their sharing of relationships.
    - b. In the film’s beginning, Jules and Jim are shown a couple of two newly developed friends. With the montages of the two, the male voice-over recounts their friendship:
  2. Later when Jules and Jim meet their friend, Albert, and appreciate the



photos he has taken, both of them are stunned by a Greek female statue whose “archaic and tranquil smile grips them” and vow to follow the smile that turns out embodied in Catherine.

- a. This montage of the fast-paced, confusing shots reflects the “imagizing process” from male perspective, namely Jules and Jim here, in which Catherine is “conjured into view through an insistence upon the powers of seeing” (943).
- b. From this scene, one can clearly see that Catherine is actually not the focus but the “image of the Greek statue’s smile” that fascinates Jules and Jim and is embodied in Catherine.

C. Lastly, Jules and Jim’s homosocial bonding turns out to be steadier and stronger in their sharing of Catherine and their love for Catherine in the *ménage à trois*.

1. Seeing Catherine attempting to run away from him again, Jules, instead of giving Catherine to Albert, is willing to hand her to Jim only in order to keep Catherine with him.
2. From Jim’s words, one can see Jim’s concern for his relationship with Jules over that with Catherine in the triangular relationship.
3. From their conversation, Jules and Jim’s male bonding is evident and strong.
4. In this triangular love among the three, Catherine’s love flows from Jules to Jim and turns back to Jim from Jules at times.
5. There seems no steady and absolute love in Catherine, contrary to Jules and Jim’s absolute bonding and their steady love with each other, though implicitly expressed, growing stronger and stronger through their love for Catherine in the relationship.

6. However, Jules and Jim's bonding for each other is still confronted with obstacles.

#### VI. Obstacles for Male Bonding: Women as love objects, War, and Death

- A. Catherine (along with Gilberte in some way) in the wartime serves as the vehicle for Jules and Jim's bonding but, meanwhile, an obstacle as their love object, and ultimately Jules and Jim's bonding cannot survive the destructive death embodied in their lover, Catherine, in the *ménage à trois*.
  1. In the context of war, women are used in their friendship as vehicles for them to "socialize and bond" (Gardner 59).
  2. However, Catherine and Gilberte may seem a medium for Jules and Jim's love, but meanwhile they also become an obstacle for the men's bonding as their objects of love.
  3. Women as love objects become an obstacle to their bonding during wartime, in the same way when Jules first meets Catherine and wants to date her alone, and also when Jim develops his love with Catherine and later when he makes his decision to marry Gilberte.
  4. World War I and Jules and Jim's lovers then become the obstacles for their bonding.
- B. Besides the obstacles of World War I and women as their love objects, Jules and Jim's bonding ultimately cannot escape the destructive force embodied in their lover, Catherine.
  1. However, it is at the end when she realizes she can never gain her love (Jim) back that her power eventually goes destructive.
  2. This is also when Jules and Jim's male bonding finally cannot survive and last.
  3. This is when Jim decides to let go of his bonding with and love for Jules.

4. Their bonding, ultimately, cannot survive the beautiful, destructive force embodied in their lover, Catherine.
5. Jules feels “relieved” with Catherine, since she will no longer try to leave him and act like a bomber.
6. On the other hand, Jules’ friendship with Jim has no “equivalent” in “love,” even their love with Catherine, since his love for Jim, just as Jim’s coffin, “dwarfs” Catherine’s love for him, or even his own for her.

## VII. Conclusion

- A. Through analysis of female representation, the trio relationship, and Jules and Jim’s friendship and love for each other, the film, just as its name suggests, focuses on the two male characters’, Jules and Jim’s love with their female lovers and for each other.
- B. Jules and Jim’s male bonding is enhanced through their romances with women and their love for Catherine. Nonetheless, the bonding is hindered by the separation brought by the war and their love to their female lovers.
- C. François Truffaut’s *Jules et Jim* provides the audience a window to a complicated romance involved with marriage, friendship, and society.
- D. This paper, hopefully, provides a comprehensive analysis of what the present researches lack: a thorough female characters’ representation and Jules and Jim’s male bonding analyzed through the complex relationship in the ménage à trois, and thus helps to develop more about the homosociality or male relationship in the film *Jules et Jim*.

## Ménage à Trois or Male Bonding? François Truffaut's *Jules et Jim*

### I. Introduction

*Jules et Jim*, directed by François Truffaut, is a film based on French writer Henri-Pierre Roché's homonymous semi-autobiographical novel. It tells a love story of the ménage à trois among two men and one woman, respectively, Jules, Jim, and Catherine. Jules and Jim build their friendship through sharing of interests in languages, literature, and even women, their relationships. Catherine, originally Jules' wife, later turns out to be Jim's lover. The story mostly focuses on the relationships among the three: Jules' love for Catherine and generosity in giving his beloved to his best friend, Catherine's impulsiveness and fatality with her balancing in relationships, and Jim's struggle over Catherine's affairs and his own jealousy. However, besides the three main characters, the story also involves other minor characters, such as Thérèse, the cheerful and playful girl appearing at the film's beginning; Albert, Jules and Jim's friend and Catherine's almost successful suitor; Gilberte, Jim's long-term partner before his relationship with Catherine; and Denise, a lover of Jim's acquaintance whom he bumps into in Paris. In the film, the four female characters, Catherine, Thérèse, Gilberte, and Denise, are all presented through male's perspective in a negative way. Through the analysis of negative female representation, the ménage à trois, and Jules and Jim's relationship, this paper argues that the main subject of the film *Jules et Jim* is the two men's male bonding, but not their lover, Catherine. Different from the other women who are either playfully promiscuous or quietly loyal, Catherine seems to take the center stage in the ménage à trois. However, as the three characters nourish and circulate love among them to form mutual bonding, Catherine serves as a medium for the two men's love but meanwhile an obstacle as their love object, and ultimately she symbolizes a destructive force to their bonding.

## II. French New Wave & Background of Truffaut's Life

Truffaut's life and especially his childhood have an influence on him as a French New Wave director and the film's adaptation. Robert Stam in his book *François Truffaut and Friends* probes deep into Truffaut's life and especially his childhood, and presents his relationship with his parents. Truffaut never knows his biological father, and his stepfather, Roland Truffaut, has been in a bad relationship with his stepson to put him into jail. It is André Bazin, whom Truffaut later considers a "father figure," that rescues him out and adopts him from his parents. It is his hatred for his stepfather that influences his New Wave ideal rejecting the authority of great classical literary text, or to quote from Stam, "rejecting the cinematic 'father's generation' of the tradition of quality as 'false fathers'" and preferring "substitute real fathers like Roché, Bazin, and Cocteau to false fathers." (8). Furthermore, Erica Sheen in her journal article "Anti-Anti-Fidelity: Truffaut, Roché, Shakespeare" elaborates on how Truffaut criticizes Cinéma de Qualité (Tradition of Quality) as "[t]hat Famous Faithfulness" and "[a] cynical industrial imperative espoused by professional writers who have no real commitment to cinema," and thus "cheating the public with the anti-bourgeois populism" (248). In fact, the French new directors' generation makes films as "an act of love" rather than preoccupies themselves with "fidelity" to the original text (258). Thus French New Wave directors should be the dominant role of filming a literary text according to their own perspective, and filming process should be a "synergistic collaboration between the director and the author." It is under this kind of "auteur" ideal that Truffaut follows to adapt Roché's novel into his own film.

## III. Literature Review

So far, related researches approach the film mostly from the female

representation mainly of Catherine and homosocial bonding between Jules and Jim.

Some critics focus on representation of Catherine as a mythological figure or a femme fatale under the male gaze of the film. The story seems to concentrate on one woman, Catherine's relationship with the two male characters, but in fact, as the film's name suggests, it is Jules and Jim that dominate the film's perspective. As James Monaco points out that "We [audience] observe her [Catherine] always from the male perspective," and the movie is more about how men react to feminine freedom rather than the freedom itself (1054). In the singing scene, Catherine sings out Albert's lyrics that describe her as a femme fatale with a fatal voice that "violently goes from one extreme to another" and becomes a "Siren enchanting Albert with her voice of pleasure" (Hanson-Lowe 18; Dalmolin 242). Under the gaze of Jules, Jim, and Albert, the three male characters, Catherine is the "ultimate male mythological creation: the femme fatale" (Hanson-Lowe 18).

Besides female representation, certain researches, few as they are, approach *Jules et Jim* from the aspect of the two male characters' homosocial bonding. For instance, Gardner points out that Jules and Jim's male bonding is constructed in a patriarchal society under the larger contexts of Nation (France), war, and French tradition of bonding through violence (not specifically World War I). Under the circumstances, Jules and Jim's male bonding through violence further excludes Catherine in their trio relationship and hence makes her more and more reckless, unstable, and even fatal at the film's end to bring death to Jim along with their ménage à trois, and further to destroy Jules and Jim's bonding.

Following up on these studies of female representation and homosocial bonding in *Jules et Jim*, the paper aims to provide a more thorough analysis of the female characters to prove that Jules and Jim's male bonding is the film's main subject and that this male bonding is maintained through women during wartime but at the same

time hindered by them as the men's love object, and finally destroyed by the death embodied in Catherine.

#### IV. Analysis of the Negative Representation of the Four Female Characters:

##### Royal Type & Impulsive Type

In the film, Catherine and Thérèse on one hand, Gilberte and Denise on the other, are respectively presented as women of the loud and impulsive type and the quiet and loyal type. First of all, Denise, as a foil character to Gilberte, is the flattest and emptiest woman regarded as a sex object by men in the film. Denise only appears

in one scene where Jim bumps into

his acquaintance in a café in Paris.

She does not even say a line and her

presence is only introduced by her

partner: "Don't talk to her. She

won't answer. She never talks. She's not dumb, just empty. It's empty in here [her

head]. She's a thing. A pretty thing. A lovely object. Sex... pure sex." Denise

maintains her flat expression and empty look throughout the scene and to some extent

does not seem to show any sign of a "human being." Here, Denise (called Nicole by

Stam due to the different translation) not only is a flat woman confined by man but



even becomes men's "pure sex object"

that is nearly senseless (Stam 96). From

this scene, the film's negative

objectification of women is apparent in

sight.

As the main character in the loyal type, Gilberte, despite giving voice to her thoughts, is presented as a woman confined by her lover, Jim. Different from Denise

who is speechless throughout the film, Gilberte presents her jealousy and displeasure



at Jim's decision to marry Catherine and further begs him to stay with her longer, only to find herself a powerless recipient of Jim's every decision, either of not staying overnight with her to avoid the

"obligations of a conventional marriage" or of marrying her after breaking up with Catherine. In this way, Gilberte becomes confined by Jim and a comforting object for Jim, while he confesses to Catherine that "his promise to Gilberte means nothing" but only a "counterfeit." This confinement of Jim can also be presented through the staging of Gilberte's tiny flat, the "norms of the text" that translates "Jim's view of marriage and monogamy as a claustrophobic prison" (Stam 101). Gilberte's flat, mostly the only place where she can meet Jim, best reflects Gilberte's confinement of men in the film.



On the other hand, Catherine and her foil character, Thérèse, are presented as women of impulsive type that are playful, reckless, and promiscuous. At the film's beginning, Thérèse wantonly goes with Jules and Jim after running away from her



partner or owner and stays with Jules in his house. However, ignored and bored by Jules who pays all his attention to Jim in the café, Thérèse immediately turns to



other guys and again, wantonly runs away with one. Besides the opening scene, later when Jim returns to Paris for work, Thérèse, without caring whether Jim is really listening to her or not, keeps telling her stories of numerous lovers, affairs, and marriages. Even when Jim's friend shows up and chats with him, Thérèse does not show any sign of pausing her talk:



It lasted two weeks. I cheated on him. He found out, got jealous, stopped trusting me. He locked me up for three weeks. I was flattered, then furious. I got out on a painter's ladder with the painter. I got impatient. A guy wants to make me rich. I follow him to Cairo where he puts me up in a house. An Englishman rescues me. I move into his villa by the Red Sea, play tennis, ride horses. Then I get a letter. I go to wreck the wedding. I marry him. So I'm writing my memoirs for the Sunday Times Magazine in Europe. He was serious. He thought I wasn't. My husband divorced me finally. My undertaker married me. It's a perfect marriage, but no children. I've neither time nor energy to be unfaithful.



From her story of her relationships and romances, one can see that Thérèse presents herself in the film as “a grasshopper leaping from man to man on a nightly basis” and a more promiscuous female character

than Catherine (Stam 96). What's more, her way of ceaselessly speaking and neglect of the listener's attention also reflects her impulsiveness. Seeing from her wanton shifts among men and her uncontrollable speaking, one can find Thérèse a playful, impulsive, and promiscuous female character in the film.

Finally, as the main character in the impulsive type, Catherine is presented as reckless and unstable figure in her plunge into the river, unreasonable suicidal threat to Jim, and her image as a femme fatale and a Siren. After their going to a movie



together, Jules starts to express his misogynistic thoughts about how women should stay faithful to their husbands while the husbands do not necessarily need to. Seeing that she is

unable to fight against Jules' self-indulging comment, Catherine takes off her hat and jumps into the river right away. In this scene, Catherine is presented as a reckless, unstable figure that foreshadows her unpredictable infidelity later in her marriage with Jules. Besides the reckless plunge, after hearing Jim's confession to end their romance and marry Gilberte, instead of reasoning with Jim just like Jim does, Catherine suddenly becomes impulsive and reckless to threaten Jim with her revolver, saying to him



“You’re going to die. You make me sick. I’ll kill you!” Catherine in this scene is turned into a kind of uncontrollable and dangerous “suicide bomber” (Stam 102). At last, in the singing scene, very tellingly Catherine chants the song Albert writes for her to Jules and Jim, and the song describes “her” as the “Siren” who enchants the speaker with her “fatal voice,” while the speaker is willingly dragged into the “life’s whirlpool”:

She wore rings on every finger

More bracelets than I can tell

And she was the kind of *singer*

To put me *under a spell*

She had eyes, eyes of opal

They *fascinated* me

Her pale face was an oval

What a *fatal femme fatale*

I saw her again one night

Again she was an *enchanted sight*

I recognized her after a while

By her *mysterious smile*

Her face in an oval Her eyes of opal

Affected me more than ever

I drank as I heard her *sing*

Alcohol lets time lose its sting

I drank far too much

I awoke to her touch

We met with a kiss

A hit, then a miss

*It wasn't all bliss*

But we started

We went our own ways

In life's whirlpool of days

Again I saw her one night

Again her smile was alight

When you kiss

Why miss  
 When you return  
 Why be stern  
 Together, we make our ways  
 In life's whirlpool of days  
 We go round and round  
 Together bound Together bound

(*Jules et Jim*, italics mine)

The lyrics are written by another male character, Albert, and in the song that Catherine sings, she becomes the “femme fatale” that “fascinates” the speaker as a Siren. This mythological image of monster-like Sirens and a femme fatale resonates



with and further strengthens Catherine’s reckless and unstable characteristics. Also, the pattern of relationship depicted in the song seems to be foreboding: in a

dancing rhythm, the lovers are together and apart by turns, only to go down in life’s whirlpool “together” and “bound.”

Lastly, Catherine’s instability of turning for affairs as substitutes for Jim in the ménage à trois shows her lack of real love and her relativism in love. When Jim goes back to Paris for work, Catherine directly assumes Jim’s love affairs after reading his mail that says “I [Jim] must say a few little farewells.” At this, Catherine immediately asks Jules, “Do you think Jim loves me?” Seeing herself losing control of Jim, her love for him immediately declines and turns for others, in this case, Albert. After Jim

returns and learns Catherine's affair, Catherine says to him in bed, "You wrote me about your affairs. I have my own. You said goodbye to your loves. I went to say goodbye to mine." Catherine's love later alters and moves toward others again when



she finds herself not pregnant with Jim's child. Thinking herself losing the power and control over Jim again (shown in pregnancy here), Catherine blames this on Jim for still being in

love with Gilberte. This time, her love for Jim declines and moves toward the other guy in the ménage à trois, her husband, Jules. In the two scenes, Catherine's love for Jim, Jules or even Albert appears relative, and there seems no real or stable love in Catherine.

## V. Jules and Jim's Male Bonding

Analyzed through the negative female representation from male perspective and Catherine's relative and flowing love in the ménage à trois, the film ends off confirming the steadier and stronger male bonding between Jules and Jim in the triangular romances. The story is narrated from the male perspective, and Catherine is also observed from that aspect throughout the film. According to Stam, Truffaut's presentation of Catherine and treatment of Moreau is "masculinist" and "sexist" through the "male gaze" (101). Jim moves back and forward between Catherine and Gilberte, sleeping with Gilberte in Paris even during his relationship with Catherine. Jim's love for women, just like Catherine's for men, is also unstable. Nonetheless, Jim is the one to blame Catherine for trying to "adapt him to her" and being "egocentric," while Catherine is presented only able to become reckless and dangerous to threaten Jim to death. In the film, Jim's Don Juanism is projected not onto Jim himself but

unfairly onto Catherine, and this reflects Truffaut's "sexual double standard" in the film to portray Catherine as the one not equipped for the challenge of reconciling fidelity and thus the one to "cheat" (Stam 102-103). It is under this situation that Catherine's unstable flow of love in the ménage à trois shows her lack of real/true love and her usually "relative love," while Jules and Jim's male bonding and their love for each other, contrary to Jim's rather unstable love for women, circulates steadily and is even strengthened through their love for Catherine and their relationship.

Throughout the film, Jules and Jim's male bonding is constructed and enhanced through their sharing of women, discovery of the Greek statue's archaic smile and its embodiment in Catherine, and lastly, their sharing of Catherine in a triangular romance. At the film's beginning, Jules and Jim are shown a couple of two newly developed friends. With the montages of the two, the male voice-over recounts their friendship:

Next day they had a real talk and began to meet daily.

Each taught the other his language and literature, *sharing* and translating their poem together. . .

*Neither had ever found such an attentive listener.*

Jules had no girlfriend in Paris but wanted one; *Jim had several.*

He introduced him to a musician and their mutual crush lasted a week.

Then came *a pretty thing*, who outlasted them in the cafes till 6:00 a.m.

Then they made a *threesome* with a blonde widow.

Despite Jim's advice, Jules visited some prostitutes but found no satisfaction there.

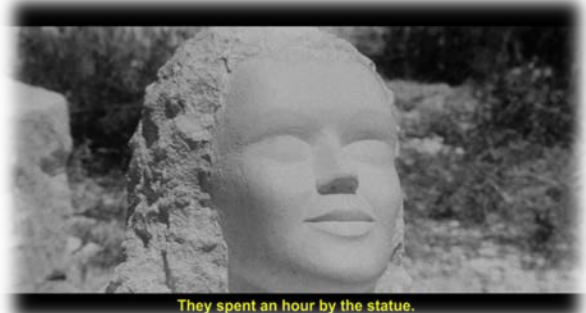
*(Jules et Jim, italics mine)*

From the text, Jules and Jim's friendship can be seen constructed on not only their



sharing of the interests in poems, literature, and languages but later, that of women. Jim introduces girls, or as the voice-over puts it, “pretty things,” to Jules, and they even try “threesome.” Their

friendship and bonding between each other, in the film, starts with their sharing of relationships. Later when Jules and Jim meet their friend, Albert, and appreciate the photos he has taken, both of them are stunned by a Greek female statue whose “archaic and tranquil smile grips them” and vow to follow the smile that turns out embodied in Catherine. In the scene



where Catherine first appears in the film, she is under the camera that “zooms in on her face in a series of quick, disorienting shots from all angles” (Flitterman-Louis 943). This montage of the fast-paced, confusing shots reflects the “imagizing process”



from male perspective, namely Jules and Jim here, in which Catherine is “conjured into view through an insistence upon the powers of seeing” (943). And this seeing is from the male characters, Jules and Jim. From this

scene, one can clearly see that Catherine is actually not the focus but the “image of the Greek statue’s smile” that fascinates Jules and Jim and is embodied



in Catherine.

Lastly, Jules and Jim's homosocial bonding turns out to be steadier and stronger in their sharing of Catherine and their love for Catherine in the ménage à trois. Seeing Catherine attempting to run away from him again, Jules, instead of giving Catherine to Albert, is willing to hand her to Jim only in order to keep Catherine with him. After



Jim returns from Paris and learns of Catherine's potential affair, he thinks his relationship with Catherine "hurts their friendship." Jim even says to Jules, "At times I'm jealous of you and your years

with her. I even hate you for not being jealous of me." From Jim's words, one can see Jim's concern for his relationship with Jules over that with Catherine in the triangular relationship. He has been jealous of Jules before for having Catherine, but he is more concerned about Jules' feeling, for he does not feel jealous as he did before. From their conversation, Jules and Jim's male bonding is evident and strong. In this triangular love among the three, Catherine's love flows from Jules to Jim and turns back to Jim from Jules at



times. Sometimes, her love even moves towards someone outside the ménage à trois, for example, Albert. There seems no steady and absolute love in Catherine, contrary to Jules and Jim's absolute bonding and their steady love with each other, though implicitly expressed, growing stronger and stronger through their love for Catherine in the relationship. However, Jules and Jim's bonding for each other is still confronted with obstacles.

## **VI. Obstacles for Male Bonding: Women as love objects, War, and Death**



Catherine (along with Gilberte in some way) in the wartime serves as the vehicle for Jules and Jim's bonding but, meanwhile, an obstacle as their love object, and ultimately Jules and Jim's bonding cannot survive the destructive death embodied in their lover, Catherine, in the ménage à trois. After Jules and Catherine's marriage,

Jules and Jim are separated by World War I. Their homosocial bonding that has developed till then is halted by the war. During the war, Jim is given a short break and



returns to Paris. When he is meeting Gilberte, he says to her, "I am afraid to kill him [Jules] in the trench." Similarly, while Jules is writing a letter to Catherine during the war, he says he is willing to go to the Russian front since he "is afraid to kill Jim



[t]here." Both in Jules and Jim's cases, they express their concern and love to each other through their love, their women, Catherine for Jules and Gilberte for Jim. In the context of war,

women are used in their friendship as vehicles for them to "socialize and bond" (Gardner 59). However, Catherine and Gilberte may seem a medium for Jules and Jim's love, but meanwhile they also become an obstacle for the men's bonding as their objects of love. During the war, Jules writes many letters to Catherine and expresses his stronger love for her, and Catherine later considers them "lovely letters." At the same time, Jim meets



Gilberte in Paris and their love is strengthened in the context of war. Although Gilberte tells him he does not have to marry her, Jim “thinks that he will grow old together with her.” Women as love objects become an obstacle to their bonding during wartime, in the same way when Jules first meets Catherine and wants to date her alone, and also when Jim develops his love with Catherine and later when he makes his decision to marry Gilberte. World War I and Jules and Jim’s lovers then become the obstacles for their bonding.



Besides the obstacles of World War I and women as their love objects, Jules and Jim’s bonding ultimately cannot escape the destructive force embodied in their lover, Catherine. In their triangular love, Catherine, presented negatively as unstable,



reckless, and even fatal from male perspective, also owns the destructive power just as “the Sirens” or “femme fatale” depicted in Albert’s song for her. Whenever

she feels her manipulative power lost in the ménage à trois, Catherine flows for others and finds “love” in others as a way to regain her balance or retrieve her power.

However, it is at the end when she realizes she can never gain her love (Jim) back that her power eventually goes destructive.

This is also when Jules and Jim’s male bonding finally cannot survive and last.

At the film’s end while Catherine invites Jim for a ride, Jim still goes with



her even if he seems to foresee the irreparable force in Catherine. In the montage of

Jim and Catherine's images in the car and on the bridge, Catherine wears a beautiful big smile. Surprisingly, Jim appears calm and does not try to struggle or escape from the car heading for the lake. In the close shot on their face, Jim even seems to wear a tender smile and have a determined look. This is when Jim decides to let go of his bonding with and love for Jules. Their bonding, ultimately, cannot survive the beautiful, destructive force embodied in their lover, Catherine. After Jim and Catherine's funeral, the only survivor of the ménage à trois, Jules, sends their corpses into fire. The male voice-over, at the end, recites Jules' mind:



Jules would no longer dread, as he had from the beginning...

*Her unfaithfulness* and that he might lose her...

Since she was gone now.

Their bodies were found in the river.

*Jim's coffin was huge.*

*It dwarfed Catherine's.*

They left nothing of themselves. But Jules had his daughter.

Did Catherine merely seek excitement? No.

But she had dazed Jules.

*He was overcome with relief.*

*The friendship of Jules and Jim had no equivalent in love.*

They enjoyed little things together.

They accepted their differences with tenderness.

Everyone called them Don Quixote and Sancho Panza.

(*Jules et Jim*, italics mine)

From the text, one can see how Jules reacts to Jim's and Catherine's death. Jules feels "relieved" with Catherine, since she will no longer try to leave him and act like a bomber. On the other hand, Jules' friendship with Jim has no "equivalent" in "love," even their love with Catherine, since his love for Jim, just as Jim's coffin, "dwarfs" Catherine's love for him, or even his own for her.



## VII. Conclusion

Through analysis of female representation, the trio relationship, and Jules and Jim's friendship and love for each other, the film, just as its name suggests, focuses on the two male characters', Jules and Jim's love with their female lovers and for each other. Jules and Jim's male bonding is enhanced through their romances with women and their love for Catherine. Nonetheless, the bonding is hindered by the separation brought by the war and their love to their female lovers. As the love really passes away at the end, what leaves with the trio is the following destructive force that brings death to not only the beautiful triangular romance but the precious male bonding between the two best friends. François Truffaut's *Jules et Jim* provides the audience a window to a complicated romance involved with marriage, friendship, and society. Through Jules, Jim, and Catherine, it leaves people with the beautiful love story in which people strive, struggle, and at last even blossom with their life. This paper, hopefully, provides a comprehensive analysis of what the present researches lack: a thorough female characters' representation and Jules and Jim's male bonding analyzed through the complex relationship in the ménage à trois, and thus helps to develop more about the homosociality or male relationship in the film *Jules et Jim*.

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