# Professor Jane O. Newman

CL 10 (Fall, 2016): Renaissance Europe Goes to the Movies

Viewing Questions: A Man for all Seasons (1966) (dir. Zinnemann) and article by Michael A. Anderegg, “A Myth for all Seasons: Thomas More” (1975)

Please note that the quiz will be on BOTH the film, A Man for all Seasons, AND on the assigned article by Michael Anderegg on the tradition of treatments of Thomas More!

**The Movie**

1. Some Orientation Points: This movie was directed by Fred Zinnemann (I will tell

you more about Zinnemann in lecture). It is based on an earlier played written by Robert Bolt. Bolt also wrote the screenplay for the film and the actor who played More on stage (Paul Scofield) also stars in the film. Keep all these names and identities straight, okay? Think about whether there is some kind of “medium envy” going on here. Is Zinnemann showcasing the very medium of film in some ways even as he capitalizes (as he did) on the incredible success of the play, its author, and its main actor by using them in the creation of his film? What can film do that a stage play cannot? Why might Zinnemann have highlighted these advantages of film in 1966?

1. The Production (see below for a question on the film’s “realism”): There are a lot

of design elements of this production to which viewers have often drawn attention. Think about the repeated use of shots of water and the use of the boats to ferry the characters from the city and the court (London and Hampton Court) out to More’s house in Chelsea. What is the message being sent here about the relation between the values of the court and More? What about the two parallel scenes when More calls for a boat at Hampton Court to take him back to Chelsea? What do these two scenes tell us about his status at the court? What about the development of Robert Rich’s (played by a very young John Hurt!) costumes – and / or the costumes of Margaret (Meg) More-Roper and William Roper and / or of More himself? Consider the relation of daytime to nighttime scenes and of outdoor to indoor shots (in confined spaces like the Tower, which nevertheless has a view out of the window, or the final “courtroom scene”). What about the two sweeping pan-shots of the public in attendance at the final ‘trial’ of More? What is the camera doing here and how do we, as viewers, respond to these shots in terms of the action of this scene? *What about the huge numbers of close-ups in this film? What is their impact?* How, in other words, do the visual elements of this film tell the story somewhat independently of the dialogue / plot?

1. The Politics: While much of this film seems personality driven and organized

around individual episodes, the political structures and developments represented by the characters and the event are important. There are, for example, several characters in this film – and in fact! – who acted as Henry VIII’s Lord Chancellor. Who are they, what is their ‘professional training’ for this office, so to speak, and how do their occupancies of the office differ? (Where do we see evidence of More’s legal training, in other words? Consider the lines: “In silence is my safety under the law” / “Qui tacet consentit.”) What is the main job of the office of Lord Chancellor, according to the King? According to each of its occupants? What are the responsibilities of the Duke of Norfolk? Of Thomas Cromwell (to “minimize inconveniences”…)? Is Henry VIII trying to centralize and maximize his power? Why is the question of him having a wife who can bear him an heir so important? Why does More resign his position as Lord Chancellor, but continue to hold his dangerous views?

1. The Conflict: In Zinnemann’s film, much is made of More’s absolute allegiance

to both the English law and to the separation between the authority and jurisdiction of the Roman Catholic Church / the Pope over matters of religion and the King and Parliament over secular ( = so-called “temporal”) affairs. Pay close attention to the ‘battle’ between sacred and secular authority in this film. It is a battle that reaches its peak in the Act of Supremacy (at 56 min.) which historically was Henry VIII’s move to declare himself Supreme Head of the Church of England in 1534 (thus circumventing the Catholic Pope’s authority to deny Henry the right to annul his marriage to Catharine of Aragon (Henry’s older brother Arthur’s widow). How does the film acknowledge these political developments? For example, why is More shown not appearing at the marriage of Henry and Anne Boleyn?

1. Gender in *A Man for all Seasons*: Much is made in this film of the way that

patriarchal structures shape both domestic and state politics. Take a close look at More’s relation to his wife, Lady Alice, as well as to his daughter, Meg (Roper), on the one hand, and Henry VIII’s relation to Anne Boleyn, on the other (do we see his first wife, Catherine of Aragon)? Does Zinnemann allow his female characters any kind of autonomy (consider More’s line: “A lion I married”!)? How does a woman show that she is equal to a man (HINT: Learn Latin? / Learn to read?) Can a woman be equal in some respects to men in this movie, but overall subordinate to them? What is the realm of equality?

1. Class in *A Man for all Seasons*: Most of the attention of this film is paid to

royalty, nobility, and the learned classes. But there are several members of the service classes – boatmen, stewards, jailers, executioners – who do play important roles in showing us how the social (and political) hierarchies of Tudor England functioned. Pay close attention to the presence of these figures in this film, and compare and contrast their roles to the roles played (or not played) by lower-class characters in other of our Renaissance films. How might we say that Zinnemann’s film compares to the other films in this respect?

**The Article (by Michael Anderegg)**

1. One of Anderegg’s interests in his article is in how the film of A Man for All

Seasons (1966) (dir. Zinnemann) differs or does not differ from Robert Bolt’s play, A Man for all Seasons (1960). Anderegg writes, for example, that “More becomes increasingly isolated after each encounter” (297). As you watch the film of this play, consider whether Zinnemann has transferred this shape of More’s story into his film. It is true that we first see More surrounded by his family; at the end, he is pretty much alone. Track whether More becomes “increasingly isolated” as the movie proceeds. Likewise, is it the case in the film that “[w]hat More dies for remains obscure” (Anderegg, 297)? Does the film focus only “on one aspect of More’s career – his martyrdom” (Anderegg, 305) and does Zinnemann focus on More’s loyalty to his “conscience” as Bolt does (see Anderegg, 298 and 303)? Is the “Common Man” a separate figure in the film (as he is in the play; See Anderegg, 299 and 301-2)? Etc., etc. – Also: What is Anderegg’s argument about Bolt’s use of More’s son-in-law, William Roper’s biography of More as one of his sources?

1. In his article, Anderegg writes of the “painstaking realism” of Zinnemann’s film –

which he also calls a “visual treat which captures both the splendor and lyrical beauty of a by-gone age” (302). As you watch the film, compare / contrast it with the other films about Tudor / Elizabethan England we have watched. How does the “realism” of this 1966 film compare to the “realism” of Elizabeth (1998) and Elizabeth: The Golden Age (2007), for example?

1. What does Anderegg means when he writes that “More does not die for a new

idea but for an old idea” (304)?