

*On Screenwriting
And Love And Politics:
The Screenplay “Blue Mist”*



Aviva Butt

Introduction by Gaetano Nino Martinetti (ACS)

On Screenwriting and
Love and Politics:
The Screenplay “Blue Mist”

By
Aviva Butt

Introduction

By
Gaetano Nino Martinetti (ACS)



Strategic Book Publishing and Rights Co.

Copyright © 2013

All rights reserved—Aviva Butt

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, or by any information storage retrieval system, without the permission, in writing, from the publisher.

Strategic Book Publishing and Rights Co.
12620 FM 1960, Suite A4-507
Houston, TX 77065
www.sbpra.com

ISBN: 978-1-62857-484-5

Design: Dedicated Book Services (www.netdb.com)

For Gad Ben-Meir

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	
by Gaetano Nino Martinetti (ACS)	vi
PREFACE	x
CHAPTER ONE:	
<i>The Impetus to Write, and Translation as</i>	
<i>The Starting Point</i>	1
CHAPTER TWO:	
<i>On modernity in Literature and The Writing</i>	
<i>of Screenplays</i>	8
NOTES	14
APPENDIX	
“ <i>Blue Mist</i> ”—An Original Screenplay	18

INTRODUCTION

By

Gaetano Nino Martinetti (ACS)

From the perspective of a cinematographer—

Of late, there have been infinite possibilities in film-making using the new and available technical equipment. With, for example, small and affordable digital cameras, HD broadcast quality, you can shoot the film. Combined with a Mac Book Pro with Final Cut to complete the post-production process—voilà, you have a film!

Directors and cinematographers do not regard a screenwriter's screenplay as the be-all-and-end-all. Since ultimately the spectacle is in the hands of the cinematographer, cinematographers may even go a step further and decide that they do not need "outsider" directions. To quote the *American Society of Cinematographers, May 2000*:

Cinematography is the art and craft of the authorship of visual images for the cinema extending from conception and pre-production through post-production to the ultimate presentation of these images. All and any processes, which may affect these images, are the direct responsibility and interest of the cinematographer. Cinematography is not a subcategory of photography. Rather, photography is but one craft, which the cinematographer uses in addition to other physical, organizational, managerial, interpretive, and image manipulating techniques to affect one coherent process.

Cinematography is a creative and interpretative process, which culminates in the authorship of an original work rather than the simple recording of a physical event. The images which the cinematographer brings to the screen come from the artistic vision, imagination, and skill of the cinematographer working within a collaborative relationship with fellow artists.¹

Thus, cinematography visualises and recreates the story in the screenplay, bringing images to the screen. Moreover, the cinematographer must understand the connection of our inner light or divine light with the physics of the visible spectrum and the branch of optics, since each frame deals with the nature of light. The spectacle may thus be regarded as experimentation in sound, color and rhythm, and from the perspective of the cinematographer, an artistic and innovative use of light.

The screenplay provides a basic structure, which must be solid enough to bear the input of creativity during the production. It still remains to be asked what the screenplay may actually contribute to the “story” over and beyond structure. If the screenplay is indeed a literary creation, it will go far beyond being mere entertainment. With the screenplay *Blue Mist*, the screenwriter uses a poetic style uniting current political facts with carefully researched historical events, blurred by reality and religions. The book, *On Screenwriting and Love and Politics: The Screenplay “Blue Mist,”* describes the author’s approach to creative writing, including screenwriting. This book is a sort of manifesto, since it throws light on the writing technique Butt uses and how that technique came into being. She sees screenwriting as a branch of literature, and a development of theater. Her screenplays, all of which are original, are experimental in content and use variations on conventional structure. Her screenplay *Blue Mist* (first draft 2011), as yet unproduced, is included in the book as Appendix. This screenplay is set in New Zealand, the main episode being characteristically on a Middle Eastern subject. It is about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. A Mossad agent is sent on a mission. Unaware, New Zealanders are not on guard. An all encompassing view of New Zealand society—from their culture and art to survival in the commercial fishing industry—provides space for the intrusion of various points of view in this multi-layered screenplay.

The structure of *Blue Mist* is highly experimental in that it presents a three-fold point-of-view (POV). Butt explains that this is similar to techniques of soap opera such as *The Bold and the Beautiful*. Thus, the plot is multi-layered, in fact,

three-fold. The main story line is: A hardened soldier, Nissim, methodically plans and implements his escape from the mission the Mossad has entrusted him with. Ironically, it is his training and expertise as a soldier that enables him to do this. Interwoven with this action plot is the story of Nissim's miraculous rehabilitation—his internal struggle. It would be highly unusual, almost impossible, for a soldier with twenty years service behind him to be rehabilitated to a civilian way of life and outlook. Nissim's inward war stresses him to the point where he nearly loses his sanity. In fact, even on the way to warn his Palestinian target, Isma'il, we do not know whether or not he will warn him or attempt to kill him thus fulfilling his duty as a soldier.

The story of Nissim's mental progress is told using symbolism (in the gallery scenes), in monologs throughout, and in imagery (especially on the way to warn Isma'il). His rehabilitation is confirmed when he again has a choice towards the end in a scene in front of Rehab. He chooses to go with Adina, ignoring his Israeli friends. Also in front of Rehab, we see Adina's triumph. As a social worker, she manages to rehabilitate drug addicts.

The main plot is interwoven with Adina's story. Adina is drawn to Nissim due to a need to find her identity as a Jew. Both Adina and Nissim are drawn to Isma'il due to a need to find their identity in the Middle East as Sephardic (Arab) Jews. When finally Adina understands that Nissim is a Mossad agent, she needs to make a choice between "better judgment" and her love for him. She has no choice. She loves him and thus must forgive him. However, it is clear that if for the sake of practicalities, Nissim had carried out his mission, he would have lost Adina. She has a deeply rooted humanitarian outlook, and could not have tolerated Isma'il's death at his hands. She would have seen this as "murder." With the Mossad after Adina, she is loyal, totally loyal, only asking her deceased parents to forgive her.

Isma'il, a Palestinian, too must make a choice. His humanity and nobility of character do not desert him. His friendship for Nissim, and in keeping with Arab ethics, his loyalty to a friend and his regard for his friend's woman, rule out

his capabilities as a warrior. We are shown how he defends Adina against the drug addicts completely effortlessly. The Mossad want him because he has kidnapped Israeli soldiers. He is thus “dangerous.” Nissim and Adina trust him, and rightly so. Again this is ironic, since Nissim cannot trust his Israeli friends, and it seems that Adina is alone in New Zealand and has no one else she can trust except Isma’il.

As Butt writes on up-to-date topics and using the techniques of “love and politics,” there is always the open question as to whether or not at completion of the writing and the fleeting moment gone by the screenplay will be relevant. The answer may be in the recurring nature of history itself. For example, with her first screenplay, *Love under an Umbrella* (2002), about an Iraqi refugee who fled to Jordan in the period before the Second Gulf War, this subject has again come to the fore in 2012 with the flight of Syrians to mainly Jordan and Turkey.

Beyond providing the story, Butt is aware of the role of the cinematographer, and anticipates the use of visual effects and the capabilities of cinematography to blur reality with fantasy. The cinematographer is the translator and interpreter of the screenplay. He translates the screenplay into a visual grammar, a process that could be compared to translation from one language to another. Therefore, if you were to give the same screenplay to five different cinematographers, it is most likely that they would all come up with a different visual interpretation—relative to the cinematographer’s own nationality, cultural background and location of the shoot. As with any mode of expression, the cinematographer’s familiarity with the idiom and etymology of the vocabulary of the mother tongue affects the translation into the visual language. This is all-the-more-so as over and beyond the “literal,” there is a subtle abstract finesse to the art of storytelling. Understanding “story” in this light makes apparent the ultimate importance of the conceptual grasp of the story, and the importance of the director.

PREFACE

In the 1960s, Hebrew poet Natan Zach wonders whether he should write on love or politics!² He records the debate and the need for change, and calls for experimentation:

To friends who advised not³

*In the seclusion of the salon
over a cup of Turkish coffee
sits the aesthetic
and worries about me too
perturbed and asks questions
between sugar and cardamom.*

*Of every three or four in the room
one always offers suggestions.
Wearied of mistakes
he smooths his face with his hand
until he reaches the windpipe
shall I drink from this cup or another?*

*That is the question.
And the difficulty in full.
Should one at this critical moment
write a political poem
or perhaps it were better to take respite
and write a poem of love?
Behold that is the question.
And you, go find out!*

*No. Even an ordinary poem—
lyric, sonnet or idyll
is something that marches with time
on condition the time has come
and is sensitive to fire—how strange!—
as if it were of paper*

*and reacted from hurt and bad intention
as if it were hurtful
and afraid for its life—how stupid!—
as if it were human.*

*This bitter truth
cherishers of poetry comprehend
and leave poetry to its foes
who respond to the word and its wisdom
—cursed is their forthright sense—
as if any shade were mountain—a precept.*

*Moreover the poem called poetical
sees only to the end of its time
on condition the time has come.
In this regard there is no disagreement
between a refined Frenchman or Mamluk.
And right is he who sees by feel
that the light of life shines in a sneeze—
when the one who sneezes is one
and not a group united for tribute.*

*But would that all ever written
whether true or false
whether enduring or just fleeting
(and enduring is a readable moment)
responded to the need
with words and not infinitude
and were worthy of the quest
for its essence or its substance.*

More than forty years later this debate is still relevant, so I will conjure up the imaginary poetry group Zach creates in his poem *To friends who advised not*. I will participate in it along with the poet. While he strokes his beard, I will try to recall my own experiments with writing—how I try to “respond to the need”—and what eventually led me to write my screenplay *Blue Mist*.

Aviva Butt

CHAPTER ONE

The Impetus to Write, and Translation as The Starting Point

Literary writing could be said to start from a poem. That is, in the first instance, there is the poem-of-the-writer's-being that Blanchot calls "the work." From this arises the poem that is "a concentration of thought"—the poem that will "become" in the sense that it will come into existence.⁴ In my case, the latter poem may be iterated as a poem, an essay, a short story or screenplay, since those are the genres in which I feel at home.

I eventually came to write screenplays, because of my inclination to go from thought to image rather than from thought to words. This may be because imagination is thought in images, and creativity, in the first instance, comes from the imagination. It is from image that the world around us is created.⁵ That is, we actually create the world we live in through our imagination. Literary creativity reproduces this activity.

For me, there is a sort of process leading up to the creation of a screenplay. I may write an actual poem. Then, I may write a complementary short story that can help me to experiment with characters able to give voice to what I as a writer want to say. My research may then be done as an essay. The research will substantiate the usefulness of the work. The screenplay will tell the story through images, sound and rhythm and as a final embellishment, dialogs. In any case, I will not start writing until an overview of the entire work comes to me. What comes to me as overview, simultaneously with the content, is the form (genre) and structure of the work—as inseparable. Therefore, what I write in one genre

will not be suitable to express in a different genre. As the translation work I have done is of Middle Eastern texts, my screenplay will end up being about the Middle East, and usually have a mystical and multi-layered content.

“Translating” means to present the same content, in the same genre, but in another language. For example, an Arabic poem translated to English, should be a poem in English. A short story in Arabic should be a short story in English, and if the original was good literature it should be translated into literary English, and so forth. Accordingly, as scripture is prophetic writing, it should also be prophetic writing in the language of the translation—and that is impossible. It is impossible because an ordinary person does not have the perception of a prophet. Therefore, neither the Qur’an, nor the Hebrew Bible can be translated. My first “translation” effort was by way of trying to understand scripture and traditional texts. As is known, scripture in a language other than the original language would only be an approximation of the meaning of a text that cannot be translated.

The English version of scripture attempts to convey the meaning. The first step in this attempt at translation is to try to establish the meaning of individual words. Of course, this presents an unlimited range of problems. Words, as we all know, have both a denotative meaning (and sometimes meanings), and connotative meanings, as well. In the case of scripture, the denotative meaning is frequently uncertain, and the range of connotative meanings and implications is dissimilar from English.

One more very conspicuous problem with rendering scripture in English is how to convey the feel of vastly different styles, such as narrative, legalistic writing and so on. Moreover, scripture is poetical and in the case of the Hebrew Bible has actual poems. What I mean by “poetical” is that scripture is rhythmical, and has poetic features such as images. It is also multi-layered. By “multi-layered,” I mean that there is a layer of the more ancient, for example, ancient myth dating back into antiquity, the antiquity of Middle Eastern civilization. This same Middle Eastern civilization, according to the Qur’an, is common to the Hebrew Bible, the

Qur'an which is in Arabic, and also to Christian scripture. In Surah 3:7, the Prophet Mohammed says that his Book (the Qur'an) is a revelation and formulation of an older tradition. With scripture, there are also dimensions by way of contact with other civilizations, and references to other parts of the Book as well. There are even new developments within the Book—layers of interpretative material.

From studying scripture-as-literature, I have learned a lot about literature. I attempt to apply this experience and knowledge when I translate modern Arabic or modern Hebrew literature. The modern texts I have translated are poems and some critical writing, and some short stories. Most of these texts, have been experiments in the development of modern Arabic or modern Hebrew poetics, or in the writing of the modern short story. The modern Arabic poems I translate are a continuation of the pre-Islamic tradition of poetry continued into the medieval period, despite Qur'anic disapproval of the pre-Islamic poets. This may very well be because mysticism spontaneously finds language in the writing of poems. Moreover, the modern Arabic poets, inspired as they are by their medieval antecedents, are aware of, especially of course Sufism, but also of mysticism in a universal context, and even investigate the process of creativity itself.

Creative writing is forever a concentration of experience. It is the experience of living a multi-layered existence that is at the same time cumulative. Therefore, to a great extent, I speak for myself when I try to explain how I have come to write as I do. In general, however, I see progress in writing as achieved through internalizing various skills and techniques, which I have done largely through translating, and through the attaining of professional competence by way of "composure." That is, a professional must be able to "perform" when required. The writer must develop the ability of slipping into what could be called the "creative mood." He must be sufficiently composed so that direct connection to the thought of the subconscious is not obstructed. Another way of expressing this is to say that the writer allows the alert part of his brain to function only as much as is needed

to type, while the creative part of his brain functions from within a state of meditation.

A poem by definition is “a concentration of thought.” Poems, all-the-more-so poems with an extensive use of symbols, that is, multi-layered words, need to be felt and cannot be rationally analyzed since the meaning cannot be pinned down—one reason poems with symbols tend to have an especially profound effect on the listener/reader. The translator, accordingly, needs to be able to feel the poem, he proposes to translate. A translator is called upon to convey the meaning of the poem; he can only do that by understanding the poem, by feeling it. He must feel the rhythm and grasp the structure. Ultimately, he needs to be a poet in his own right.

The first step in translating from Arabic or Hebrew is to establish the dictionary meanings of the words, and possible connotations, and the appropriate word or words that might be selected for the translation. That is sometimes very hard. The text arrived at will be unintelligible to the English speaking reader; for me, it will be mentally reversible back into the original Arabic or Hebrew. The next step is to create an intelligible poem in English. It will obviously be impossible to reproduce conventional meters or if none, even the rhythms of the original poem. Nor can the rhymes be included in the new poem. As meaning is conveyed not only through words but greatly through rhythm, and style is greatly a matter of register, how reliable will the translation be?

The translated poem will have corresponding rhythms and a style and poetic features that correspond to the original—meters and rhymes are set aside. It is in fact a new poem, the original poem re-created, and the translator owns the copyright to his translation.

In translating prose texts, there is often a decision to be made as to whether or not it is legitimate to “improve” on the original so that the translated text lives up to the expectations of sophistication in a corresponding English style. Also, sometimes it is necessary to supply additional information, relying on the knowledge and understanding of the translator, and thus to add text to bring to the notice of the English reader knowledge or subtext that would be understood by

the native reader. This subtext is put into brackets and inserted into the translation as [*filling in the missing understood subtext*].

As described in my Preface above, the poet Natan Zach sits and debates with himself and his imaginary circle of friends about what kind of poetry to write—“a political poem” or “a poem of love.” He wants to know what kind of poetry is “poetical” for the times. I, however, sit and think about what genre I will use when I set out to produce an original work of my own—“genre” in the sense of if it will be a poem, an essay, a short story or a screenplay?

As for the short story I write, it has a simple structure that goes from point A to point B. The climax is usually towards the end and it may have a twist in a final short resolution. Thus, the structure is conventional although it may have variations. Such were the stories in my book *Gifts from an Empty Suitcase and Other Short Stories: And Twenty Poems* (2012).⁶ I first drafted the stories in about 2000-2001, worked on them in 2006 and reworked them in 2012 after I had found a publisher. These short stories are fictionalized accounts of my own experiences, emotional understanding, and what I have to say. It should be no surprise to my reader to find that two of the short stories, *Gifts from an Empty Suitcase* and *An Ethereal Mishap*, bear the title of two of the poems in Part II of the book. Needless-to-say, the content is related. As I have preferred to tell four of the five stories in the first person, it is only with the story “An Ethereal Mishap” (told in the third person) that I had the opportunity to intrude as the “voice of the writer.” I trust that my readers will not confuse the “I” of these stories with me. It is only with the first story “Gifts from an Empty Suitcase” that the persona “Maher” is a mask for the author, that is, myself. Generally speaking, the stories of this book are to a great extent experimentation in creating characters throughout five different decades and in five different locations. They are about love, and the politics of the times and place. They consistently hearken back to the theme of loss of love and loss of country—at the same time preaching the joy of living and infinite possibility for attaining happiness.

The writing of stories, screenplays and essays is always a learning experience. I research both story and essay, but the essay may precede the story and various elements of the essay and my study are then included in the story. I conscientiously check the rhythm of whatever I write. Not only does the rhythm reinforce the structure, but as W.B. Yeats (b. 1863 – d. 1945) says when writing on the French symbolists (his essay “The Symbolism of Poetry”)—trance-inducing rhythms will unlock the power of unconscious associations and spiritual experience. Yeats is talking about a modernity that goes beyond the use of images and sounds to evoke subtle and complex emotions; he hints at a new vision for the external art of the theater.⁷ It is, however, as if he foresaw cinema looming on the horizon! In theater, the story is told primarily in the dialogs—with subtext that leans on the talent of the actors. Yeats’ vision applies “all-the-more-so” to the theatrical feature film, since with cinema, story is presented directly and primarily through image and sound. The symbol may be inherent in the image—or, be a symbol as such. Taking Yeats’ above insights as being accurate, it is obvious that cinema has an extremely powerful potential to penetrate and shape the mentality of its audience. If in the mid nineteenth century, the poet and critic, Charles Baudelaire (b. 1821- d. 1867), could see his times to be “decadent,” and “It was his generation that took the first step toward a substitution of the aesthetic for ‘the lost terrain of social representation’”—it seems that cinema in our times may have an even greater potential to undergo a revolution and be “useful.”⁸ In fact, I think it could be more effective than poetry to bring about a “new beginning”—peace in a war torn world.

Modern acting techniques too have undergone a drastic change. My grandmother, Lillian Meyers, had been a lead Shakespearean actress in her time, from the age of sixteen. When my parents brought me to Australia, she was so very old. Once when I asked her, she recited some lines to me. I never forgot that magnificent flow of verse. With the coming of cinema, there had been a complete breakaway from my grandmother’s declamatory style. Acting had come to be a matter of total immersion in the part, identifying with

the protagonist, and accordingly would appear to be entirely “natural.” Modern concepts regarding acting assist the modern writer. The characters in the story “are” the writer. The writer’s natural acting ability lets the character emerge.⁹

When I wrote, for example, my screenplay *Blue Mist*, a theatrical feature film, I deliberately evoked an atmosphere of existentialist morbidity that together with evocative music should not only engulf the spectators in the spectacle, the externalities, but pitch the audience into the mind and moods of my protagonists. Hopefully an audience will experience the events of the film and in addition feel what I as a writer have to say.

I do not seek to use Brechtian theater and call on my audience to be objective. I, in no way, require an audience to stand back and view theater for what it is. On the other hand, I am careful to research the story and events so that afterwards, and when the film has concluded, there is reason to recall and think about it and discuss the film and what it has to say.

Buy the B&N e-Pub version at:-

<http://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/on-screenwriting-and-love-and-politics-aviva-butt/1113967268>

Buy the Kindle version at:-

<http://www.amazon.com/Screenwriting-Love-Politics-Screenplay-ebook/dp/B00FMI3T08/>