

Breathless, directed by Jean Luc Godard, 1960. Film critics claim this film to be one of the inaugural films of the French New Wave of the 1960's and was innovative in its use of jump cuts and handheld cameras. This is a cops and robbers film, where the crime is revealed early on and the plot is merely the path taken by the chase. It is also a romance, where boy meets girl, boy returns to take girl away, she is indecisive, but finally decides in a dramatic scene. However, our interest in this film lies in the pair of main characters of Michel Poiccard (Jean-Paul Belmondo) and Patricia Franchini (Jean Seberg) as examples of a Nietzschean attitude towards life.

1. Road scene. He steals his first car with the help of a woman who wishes to go with him, but he is in a hurry. (As there is no establishing shot, but rather a series of close-ups, only when you see Michel actually hot-wiring the car do you understand what's going on ... note also the film begins the title but no opening credit.) Behind a newspaper, he appears and then gives what will become his trademark lip wipe. After the theft, he drives to Paris. He talks to himself and occasionally looks strikingly right into the camera. (A) He also reveals his plan to go to Paris, collect his money, and see if Patricia will go with him or not. (B) He can speak seriously: "There is nothing like the countryside, I really like France, the lakes, the shore, the mountains;" however, he quickly adds playfully, "if you don't, then get stuffed!" He jokes about women hitchhikers and plays with a gun he finds in the car. (C) When the traffic slows he bemoans cowardice and claims that one should never break: "cars are meant to run, not stop." When the police are after him for speeding, the scenes get highly edited and as we are trying to catch up to the action, he shoots a policeman and runs off.

2. He hitches a ride to Paris and (B) in a restaurant, he sees that he doesn't have enough money, but orders anyway, then runs out. He finds an ex-girl friend in her room. He first makes his faces in her mirror and does his lip wiping gesture again. (D) On the wall, she began to write our "WHY," but then stops because she switched cigarette brands. (This is a key to why she is not Michel's kind of girl.) (B) He asks to borrow money, and at this point she sees that he has come back only for this, not to see her again and she is disappointed. He rejects a loan from her, but when she is not looking, he steals the money, then offers to buy her breakfast! But she has to go to work, then he leaves. (He will see her briefly near the end of the movie as he drives around in the evening waiting to meet Berutti.)

3. Michel finally finds Patricia as she sells newspaper in the streets. (They had met in Nice in the recent past and now he wishes to continue a relationship with her.) She wonders why he is in Paris because he had told her he dislikes Paris. (C) He claims that he is in danger in Paris. (A) He also buys a newspaper from her, but gives it back because it has no horoscope and he says "I wanna know the future, don't you?" (D) He reveals that he has seen two other girls since her but that they did not jive. He prefers her (e.g., why do you think he prefers Patricia to the ex-girlfriend in the previous scene?). After they part, three things happen fast: (C) he passes the "Live Dangerously" sign; (B) a girl approaches him to support youth and he replies that he prefers the elderly; (B) he crosses his heart in mock reverence to the dead pedestrian.

4. Travel Agency scene. After, he sees the first notice of his crime in the newspaper, he tries to get his money. (In a continuously shot scene, the camera stays on Michel as it swirls around him slowly almost in a 360 degree panorama. This contrasts with the occasionally very choppy editing in some scenes.) (B) While he is calling Berutti, his friend asks if Patricia is pretty, he responds that she is funny (in an odd or crazy way). As he leaves, the cops enter in nearly the same door. As the scene ends, Michel comes across a movie poster of Humphrey Bogard. He stares admiringly and repeats his lip wipe.

5. He begins the next scene almost confessionally: (A) "I saw a guy die," "How? (or why?)" "In an accident." This is how his next meeting with Patricia begins, then she asks about going out to dinner and he realizes that he has gone through all the money that he took from his ex-girl friend and so makes an excuse to leave briefly and executes a mugging in a bathroom to get the needed cash. He returns to her and they begin to walk, he continues with his "confessional." (A) and (D) He tells her about a story of a bus conductor who stole 5 million francs in order to seduce a girl, then he "confesses" to her and tells her that he likes her. The girl says she likes him too and stands by him by helping in his thefts. Soon, however, they are caught and put in jail. Abruptly, she remembers her appointment with her journalist friend and so he takes her to her appointment with yet another stolen car. (Note that in this scene, he broaches two important topics in his life to her, but she changes the conversation both times. In their conversations, each person talks about him/her self, but neither talks with each other. This description will be made in a later important conversation in the movie.) As the scene continues during their drive, the film is edited to almost repeat sequences and angles.) He tries to convince her to go with him and not the journalist, but she refuses. (D) After a brief pause, she asks him why he is sad, he says just because I am, she says that's silly. (B) She then asks if she should use the formal or familiar part of speech in talking to him and he says that it doesn't matter. He then says that he can't do without her. She counters that he can so, he replies maybe but I don't want to. She begins reflectively you're a guy who... then stops. They arrive at her appointment and as she leaves, (C) he claims that she is a coward.

6. Patricia's meeting with the journalist. (A) He gives her a book and says I hope you are different from the protagonist who is a pregnant woman who does not wish to have the child, but dies in an operation (presumably an abortion.) She replies, we'll see. She reflects that she wants to dig a hole and climb into it. He replies to do as elephants do when they are sad, they vanish. (C) She replies (In English): "Am I unhappy because I am not free or am I not free because I am unhappy?" He then tells her a story about his dream when he asks a girl to sleep together. She then asks if he has any work for her and he offers her an interview with Jean Parvulesco. He then suggests that she accompany him as he leaves and she does. (The second part of the conversation certainly seems to be a form of sexual harrassment.) Michel follows them and sees them kiss passionately in his car.

7. Next morning. She returns by bus happily, then she stops to gaze at her image in a store front window (similarly to Michel's reflecting on the Bogie poster) and seems to be concerned about her progressing pregnancy. She returns to her apartment to find Michel, who had spent

the night there. She is not happy to see him. (B) They talk about making faces, then he says that (D) she is crazier than he is – all of this is positive from his point of view, but then he concludes that (E) she is not his type of girl!

At this point, he seems to realize something important about her. This is revealed in the following: (substitute deciding or creating for thinking) (E) She is sad so she tells him “Leave me alone, I’m thinking,” “What about?” “I don’t know,” he says that he knows that she is thinking about last night, but she replies “No, I’m not thinking of anything, I’d like to think of something, but I can’t seem to.” To appreciate this scene, you need to substitute “creating or finding meaning in her life” for “thinking.” This expresses why Michel is attracted to her, i.e. she doesn’t accept “external” assessments or meanings for her life, but also this scene expresses her difference from Michel: she is unable to positively create or find meaning for her life, as he is able to do so effortlessly. This is why Michel calls her a coward!

She asks why he came to see her. He sees that he wants to sleep with her, (D) she says that’s not a reason, he says that it means I love you. She says that she doesn’t know if she loves him or not. (E) He complains that she does things halfway. He asks why she doesn’t sleep with him, she says that she wants to find out what it is that she like about him. (B) She says that she wants them to be like Romeo and Juliet, he says that is just like a girl. She reminds him of saying that he couldn’t live without her and says that is just like a man. (E) At the end of the scene, he calls her a coward. (C) He asks if she ever thinks about death and says that he does all the time. (B) He says he wants to sleep with her because she is beautiful, or because she is ugly, it’s the same thing. She calls him a liar, but (B) and (D) he says that it is better to tell the truth.

She sheds a tear and looks straight at him through a rolled up poster, he does his lip wipe. Perhaps she now realizes the same thing as he does, i.e. that both accept (B) and what it implies, i.e. (D), but that they differ in their acceptance of (D). The scene seems to come to an end, but it goes on with a closeup of a very unpassionate kiss. He says that “When you’re scared or surprised or both, there’s a glint in your eyes.” She seems to be taken by this analysis. At this point, she discloses her pregnancy. He is not happy. He calls and finds out the police are following him, (A) he makes a joke about a condemned man slipping off of some scaffolding and saying that figures! (D) He calls her a Martian and is more sympathetic to her pregnancy “Some idea, having a kid.” (E) She admits that she is scared and says that it is because she wants him to love her, but she also wants him to stop loving her: “I’m very independent, you know.” (C) He says he loves her but not in the way she thinks. He is not able to describe it positively. (C) She says that wants “to know what’s behind your face. I’ve looked at it for 10 minutes now, and I still know nothing, nothing.” He seems to reflect on that question, but only does his lip wipe. (B) He caresses her telling her that she is sweet and gentle, then when she shakes her head, he adds that she is mean and hideous. She then reads the Faulkner quote: “grief or nothing?” (C) He picks nothing, not because it is better but because grief is a compromise, he prefers all or nothing. (They disappear under the sheets to music while you work.) After a cut, she emerges wearing his shirt and prepares to leave for her interview. As he lies playfully on the bed, (A) he says “I’m exhausted, I’m going to die.”

7. He steals another car to take her to the airport. (C) As they are driving, she asks him if he is afraid of aging, he says no, "the worst flaw is cowardice." He drops her off at the newspaper office and he is identified by a passerby who is the director Godard! Michel simply looks at him, then calmly drives off with Patricia. The Jean Parvulesco interview: at the end he says that his greatest ambition is "To become immortal, then to die." This saying may help explain the last scene of the movie.

8. Michel takes the car to a dealer and gets ripped off, but he then steals some cash and takes a cab back to Paris. In the back seat, he yells at the driver to go faster. As they talk, (C) he asks "Why bother writing?" and she says "to make money and be independent of men." (B) He then takes up a challenge and lifts a passerby's dress. He dumps the taxi and takes a secret tunnel. She returns to the story of the girl who stayed with the hood. (D) and (E) He says "She's a normal girl, that's rare!"

9. She returns to the paper where the police find her. After a threat, he finally admits to seeing Michel, but says that she doesn't know anything more. Patricia notifies Michel that she is being tailed, then he dumps the police, meets up with Michel and they see a different film. (They pass by a parade for Eisenhower and DeGaulle, but the film is always cut right before they come into view.) At the film, they have their most passionate kiss. The dialogue is as follows: "Your tale is noble and tragic, like the mask of a tyrant. No drama so perilous or magnetic, no detail can make our love pathetic."

10. They drive around and she reads about his crime. (B) He claims "The cops are stupid to be after me, I'm one of the few people who likes cops." (B) After she reads that he was married, he says "She dumped me or I dumped her, I don't remember." She says "I'm really fond of you and asks about the killing, he says he was scared. (A) When they talk about people informing on them, he says "it's normal, Informers inform, burglars burgle, murderers murder, lovers love. They switch cars in a parking lot and she helps him by stealing a Cadillac. He asks if she is scared, and (E) she says that it is too late to be scared. They finally meet Berutti. He will take care of the money and suggests a place for them to crash for the evening.

11. The hideout. They sit together on a couch, like a couple, and converse. (D) "I was just thinking," "what?" "I'm not sure," "About?" "I don't know. Otherwise I'd be sure." (B) He playfully takes out one of the lens of his shades as she says that went to speak to her journalist friend last night in order "To make sure I didn't love him anymore." Michel says she complicates her life. "Want to go to bed? Sleeping's so sad, we have to separate. You say 'sleep together,' but you don't." The scene closes as she looks revealingly into the camera.

12. Next morning. She goes out to buy milk and a paper and immediately gets the number for the police. She hesitates, but leaves to make the call anyway. (A) On her way, a newspaper seller tells her that it is her lucky day!" She regrettably, but directly makes the call.

After his plan finally seems to come together with money and a car, she confesses to him what she did. He is angry. She tries to explain herself by saying "I just talked about myself, and you,

yourself. You should've talked about me, and me, about you. I don't want to be in love with you, that's why I called the police. I stayed with you to make sure I was in love with you, or that I wasn't. Since I'm being mean to you, it proves that I'm not in love with you. (C) He interjects, "there's no unhappy love." She continues "I just want people to let me be." (C) He claims "I'm independent, but you are not." (A) She continues, "Maybe you loved me, that's why I turned you in. Now you have no choice but to go." (C) He claims "I'm better than you. She urges him to go, but (A) he says "No, I'm in bad shape. I prefer prison." He hears Berutti arrive and runs outside. He urges him to run, but (A) he says "I'm fed up, (and he looks into the camera) I'm tired, I want to sleep. After Berrutti says you're nuts, he abruptly changes his mind and and says "Damn the police, I'll save my neck." But he hesitates, meanwhile the police arrive and his friend throws him a gun that the police use as an excuse to shoot him.

Then the long dying scene as he melodramatically caroms down the street and finally falls. Patricia arrives. He is calm, finishes smoking, (B) makes his typical faces at her, and (C) says that "It makes me want to puke." The police interpret it differently. He covers his own eyes. She looks into the camera, expressionless and for the first time, makes his lip wiping gesture.

Question: Put together all the passages from (A) fate, (B) leveling, (C) vs. cowardice, (D) there are no ultimate reasons (a result of (B)), and (E) two possible personal responses to (A), (B), and (D): one involves (C) and the other does not. Write a brief essay summarizing the film's views on (A) through (D). Begin with (A) and how (B) leads to (D), then develop the two characters of Michel and Patricia as embodying the two options in (E).