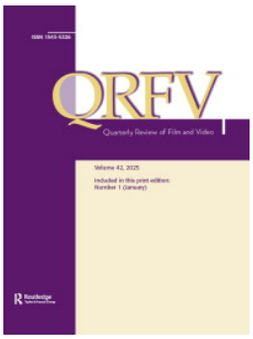

Quarterly Review of Film and Video

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/gqrf20

The Miracle of Morgan's Creek (1944): Three Perspectives on Preston Sturges and the Production Code

John Gibbs, Kathrina Glitre & Douglas Pye

To cite this article: John Gibbs, Kathrina Glitre & Douglas Pye (2025) *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek* (1944): Three Perspectives on Preston Sturges and the Production Code, Quarterly Review of Film and Video, 42:1, 96-123, DOI: 10.1080/10509208.2024.2410530

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/10509208.2024.2410530

Published online: 03 Jan 2025.

QUARTERLY REVIEW OF FILM AND VIDEO
2025, VOL. 42, NO. 1, 96–123
https://doi.org/10.1080/10509208.2024.2410530

The Miracle of Morgan's Creek (1944): Three Perspectives on Preston Sturges and the Production Code

John Gibbs, Kathrina Glitre, and Douglas Pye

John Gibbs, Kathrina Glitre, Douglas Pye

In 1985, Brian Henderson described *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek* (1944) as "perhaps the most outrageous comedy ever made in Hollywood" (1985/1986, 25). The morning after a military party to "kiss the boys goodbye", teenage Trudy Kockenlocker (Betty Hutton) has almost no memory of the night before … but *thinks* she got married to a soldier, possibly named something like Ratzkiwatzki; in the fullness of time, she is definitely pregnant. As Henderson points out, though, by the logic of PCA censorship, "If Trudy is pregnant, she *must* be married" (1995, 565, our italics). In typical Sturges' fashion, the film mocks the very foundations of the Production Code, at the same time as somehow – miraculously – managing to meet its requirements. According to his widow, Sandy Sturges, "What he tried to do was obey the letter of the law for the Production Code, the actual letter, but ignore, in its entirety, the spirit of the law."[1] Drawing on invaluable archival research by Henderson and others, that provides detailed insight into the film's evolution, and on the correspondence between Paramount and the Breen Office, this article considers how Sturges' decisions might be

John Gibbs is Professor of Film and Research Dean for Heritage & Creativity at the University of Reading. He is an editor of *Movie: A Journal of Film Criticism* and series coeditor of Palgrave Close Readings in Film and Television. His publications include *Mise-en-scène: Film Style and Interpretation* (2002), *Style and Meaning: Studies in the Detailed Analysis of Film* (2005), and *The Long Take: Critical Approaches* (2017), the second and third of these co-edited with Douglas Pye. His audiovisual essays have been published in *Alphaville*, *[in]Transition*, *Movie: A Journal of Film Criticism, Music, Sound and the Moving Image* and *NECSUS*.
Kathrina Glitre is Senior Lecturer in Film Studies at the University of the West of England. She is an editor of *Movie: A Journal of Film Criticism*, and author of *Hollywood Romantic Comedy: States of the Union, 1934-1965* (2006). Her recent research on Cary Grant and acting combines close textual analysis with archival research, including the article, "'Sacred intimacies': Sexual Ambiguity and Performance in *My Favorite Wife* (1940)" in this special issue of *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*.
Douglas Pye is Senior Visiting Research Fellow at the University of Reading. He is an editor of *Movie: A Journal of Film Criticism* and series coeditor of Palgrave Close Readings in Film and Television. He edited *V.F. Perkins on Movies*: *Collected Shorter Film Criticism* (2020) and, with John Gibbs, *The Long Take: Critical Approaches* (2017) and *Style and Meaning: Studies in the Detailed Analysis of Film* (2005). His other publications include *100 Film Musicals* (2011), with Jim Hillier; and *Movies and Tone* (2007/2015) now a *Movie* ebook.

understood as parts of a multidimensional dialogue with PCA requirements. In line with Lea Jacobs' claim that the Code "helped to shape film form and narrative" (1997, 23), we take it that, as Sturges explored the implications of his bold central idea, every level of decision making, from the systemic to the most local, became part of that dialogue, often overtly in the PCA correspondence but also internalized in Sturges' day to day engagement in writing and production. Sturges in effect made the Production Code itself, its prohibitions and requirements, the very *raison d'être* of his extraordinary comedy.

The Miracle of Morgan's Creek has already attracted scholarly attention, of course, including work by Henderson, Michael Slowik, Leger Grindon and Matthew H. Bernstein – all of whom combine discussion of the PCA requirements with some closer analysis of specific scenes.[2] Among the things that distinguish this article from its predecessors are the sustained use of close analysis as its primary method, its coauthored structure and its hybrid form. As befits an article on Preston Sturges, our approach is somewhat unconventional, with each writer exploring a different facet of the film's techniques and achievements, utilizing different approaches and formats. After some initial scene-setting to establish the general context of the film's production and plot, the article falls into three parts. Kathrina Glitre explores the intersection of sex, marriage and pregnancy, by focusing on Sturges' creative use of substitution, omission and elision as responses to the PCA's requests to "eliminate" problematic material. She uses close comparative analysis of the PCA correspondence, the script and the finished film to reveal the coordinated ways in which Sturges' screwball intentions outmaneuver the Code's restrictions through script development, performance, framing and editing choices. The article then links to an audiovisual essay by John Gibbs exploring the pervasive use of the long take in *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek*: Gibbs looks at the key features of this approach, capturing the complexity of movement and performance that such takes enable, in a way which is difficult to render on the page. The audiovisual essay reflects on what specific choices mean for performance, addresses the range and consequences of long take shooting, and considers how the practice might relate to the constraints of the Code. The video deliberately includes a number of moments from the film which are discussed in the written part of the article (as well as other sequences), enabling the reader to reflect across the different sections of the argument. In the third part, Douglas Pye discusses the decisions that shape the film's final movements, arguing that Sturges self-consciously embraces decisions that fantastically combine to dissolve the seemingly intractable – and in Code terms unacceptable – situation the plot has reached. He analyses the role and presentation of the miracle birth, Sturges' revival of The Governor (Brian

Donlevy) and The Boss (Akim Tamiroff) from *The Great McGinty* (1940) to act in effect as his surrogates, and the handling of disturbing undercurrents at the very end of the film, in a conclusion that knowingly – and very abruptly – presents the kind of ending we might expect of comedy.

The individual sections offer the unusual opportunity to provide three distinct but mutually informing perspectives on the film. They share a commitment to sustained close reading, paying attention to representational strategies across multiple sequences to elucidate the film as a whole, while aiming to achieve a critical understanding of specific decisions and their ramifications. While being aware of ways in which connections could be profitably made to Sturges' other films, our intention from the outset was to illuminate Sturges' creative choices by focusing on the detail of a single film. The article's origins lie in a workshop session on *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek* at the Hollywood and the Production Code: Criticism and History symposium, hosted by King's College London in July 2018, in which Lea Jacobs, Glitre and Pye presented short responses to selected clips, with Gibbs chairing.[3] The authors found the workshop a particularly engaging format, both for panelists and audience, and sought to retain an element of that conversational style in developing this article. Consequently, there are occasional areas of overlap in the three sections but also intentional shifts in the critical methods of writing – most obviously in Gibbs' use of an audiovisual format but also in Glitre's tendency to draw more systematically on archival evidence. We view this approach as fitting with the Special Issue's interest in the relationships *between* "criticism" and "history" to explore (and even experiment with) the different forms such criticism could take.

Our use of close reading potentially raises questions about interpretation and the status of textual analysis as evidence. Most of the existing work on *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek* combines archival research ("history") with closer analysis of specific scenes ("criticism"), because of the complementary benefits this enables. As Slowik argues, Sturges' status as a writer-director was exceptional in Hollywood at that time, giving him unusual levels of creative freedom in handling the process of completing and revising the script alongside shooting the film (2017, 38-40). This also means that explanations of decision-making are relatively lacking in the archival materials, however, encouraging both critics *and* historians to speculate on Sturges' working practices in relation to the Code by "reading between the lines". For example, Bernstein and Ed Sikov both suggest that Sturges deliberately included material in his scripts which he knew the PCA would want to eliminate, as leverage to retain more important elements; Bernstein also notes examples of dialogue revisions which "were arguably worse than the original" (as potentially more offensive, rather than less).[4] In this

context, close textual analysis provides a form of evidence which the archive alone cannot supply – a way of testing out different versions of the script against the finished film to evaluate the creative process critically. At the same time, Jacobs notes the "extraordinarily fruitful" value of being able to place film analysis into the historical context of the industry's self-regulation, as a way of "delimiting" the process of interpretation (1997, 25). In this respect, our approach is intersubjective, recognizing the interdependence of history and criticism, and the different "voices" contributing to our understandings of the film: Sturges as writer and as director, Breen and the PCA, Henderson's extensive analysis of Sturges' working practices, and other film historians and critics, as well as our own perspectives.[5]

In the case of *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek*, the script's development was particularly unusual. In his excellent account, Henderson describes an extended writing process that began in July 1942 and ended in December: it was "by far the most complicated – and probably the most difficult – of all the films Sturges wrote and directed" (1995, 548). Almost the only two constants during the script's development were the film's title and the central premise: a young woman from a small town gets married after a party for departing soldiers, finds herself pregnant and becomes the source of the miracle promised by the title. Weighing alternatives on 15 July, Sturges outlined what would become the basic situation: as a result of drink, or a bang on the head, the young woman has no memory of the wedding or the name of her husband (Henderson 1995, 529).

What would inevitably prove the central problem for the Production Code was, then, at the heart of the project from the beginning: a pregnancy with no marriage license and no husband in sight. On 15 October, Paramount sent Sequences A-C of the unfinished script to the PCA, quickly followed by revised and additional pages for Sequences D-F, then F-H, and J (with K and L still to come).[6] The detailed response from the Breen Office to these pages was received on 21 October. Predictably, Breen's response was negative: "As we told you yesterday [during a story conference], we can not give you our judgment on this material, inasmuch as the script is incomplete. We can repeat, however, that which we told you yesterday concerning much of the material in the present script, which appears to us to be unacceptable."[7] Despite this reaction, shooting started the very same day, as planned. It was the only time Sturges began shooting with an unfinished script, which he continued to revise and develop for another two months alongside directing the film. According to Henderson, the final script was finished on 10 December, eighteen days before the end of shooting (1995, 548, and 1985/1986, 25). Along the way, the PCA received revised pages in dribs and drabs. Sequences K and L were finally sent to the PCA between 23-27 November – but

withholding the scenes of the "miracle" birth itself until 4 December. In his cover letter, the film's producer, Buddy De Sylva, emphasized that the pages were withheld "to preserve the element of surprise when the picture is finally shown", rather than because the pages "were in some way censorable". He assured Breen that Sturges wished to preserve secrecy for fear that the birth of sextuplets – a "world shaking comedy idea" – might be adopted by some rival producer, and that Breen would see that "the scene is innocuous enough".[8] The explanation would make sense if applied to Sturges' aim of maintaining secrecy for as long as possible during scripting and production; to account for withholding the pages from the PCA for just a matter of days, it sounds absurd. The script was reviewed in such a "piecemeal fashion" that Slowik speculates this may have been a deliberate strategy on Sturges' part to gain "some extra leeway from the PCA" (and Paramount) (2017, 32 and 36). It certainly made it difficult for the PCA to retain a sense of the film's overall tone, structure and representational strategies – which potentially explains how lines that the PCA identified for elimination are still present. When they reviewed the finished film, they requested the elimination of just three lines of dialogue (one of which was changed rather than cut), before granting the Seal of Approval on 19 February 1943.[9]

Before exploring Sturges' creative response to the PCA in detail, a plot synopsis will help frame what follows. The film opens with a prologue, in which the State Governor ("McGinty") receives an excited telephone call relating extraordinary events that have taken place in the small town of Morgan's Creek. Said events center on Trudy Kockenlocker, daughter of the town constable (William Demarest), who sneaks out to a party for the troops, with the reluctant help of her devoted but hapless suitor, Norval Jones (Eddie Bracken). When Trudy finds herself possibly married and definitely pregnant, complications multiply. After some to-and-froing, Trudy and Norval plot a proxy wedding ceremony: Norval attempts to pass as the missing "Ratzkiwatzki" but absent-mindedly signs his own name on the marriage register. He is arrested and jailed for various offenses, including abduction and impersonating a soldier. Trudy confesses to her father that she is having a baby and explains how Norval was trying to help. Mr Kockenlocker stage-manages Norval's escape from jail, aided by Trudy and her sister, Emmy (Diana Lynn), and Norval sets off in search of Ratzkiwatzki. (At this point, the plot returns to the framing device of the Governor, who demands to know if Trudy is married or not.) Months have passed and it is now Christmas Eve: Norval returns from an unsuccessful search and is rearrested. To save him, Trudy vows to reveal all, but her labor intervenes. What follows provides the "miracle" of the film's title and – via a final return to the Governor – its remarkable consequences.

Part 1. "Pro" Creation: Substitution, Omission and Elision

Essentially, *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek* is about sex, pregnancy and childbirth, none of which the Production Code permitted films to show onscreen. Joseph Breen's first response to the unfinished and "unacceptable" script was seven pages long, listing specific examples of problematic content and lines to "eliminate".[10] While some of these requests did result in cuts from the script or film, in most cases Sturges creatively reworked the content through strategies of substitution, omission and elision.[11] These strategies are not only techniques for handling the PCA's objections through script-writing, performance, framing and editing; they also shape the plot itself. "Substitution" involves Sturges replacing forbidden content with an apparently more innocent alternative, including practical changes at the level of script (replacing words and events) and the symbolic substitution of "marriage" for "sex" (through script and performance) but also narrative substitutions such as Trudy pretending to go to the cinema instead of the party, and – of course – Norval ("I feel almost as if it was me marrying you"). "Omission" includes literal cuts from the script and the film, but also content that cannot be shown or said, such as drunken behavior, the first wedding, Trudy's pregnancy, and – of course – Ratzkiwatzki ("He's out of the picture!" "He was never in it!").[12] By "elision", I specifically mean "conflation or merging of concepts […] the blurring of one thing *with* or *into* another" (OED) rather than the more general sense of omission. This kind of elision depends upon the accumulation of repeated patterns of substitution and omission, leading to the conflation of sex/marriage and marriage/pregnancy as synonymous states of being, as if "literally" the only way to get pregnant is to be married.

At the most basic level, substitution operates as a system of replacing one element with another. Sturges' response to the PCA often involved changing an objectionable word or phrase, without necessarily changing the overall meaning or implication. The first scene between Mr Kockenlocker, his youngest daughter Emmy and Trudy provides a perfect example. Breen recommended "the elimination of Emmy's line: 'People aren't as dirty-minded as they used to be when you were a soldier, Papa,' [… and] the words 'Like a sewer'" from another of her lines.[13] Rather than removing the lines entirely, Sturges substitutes the words "evil-minded" for "dirty-minded" and "swamp" for "sewer" (Henderson 1995, 609 (B-3) and 610 (B-4)).[14] The "sex suggestiveness" is downplayed but not eliminated, so that the scene ends with Emmy swanning out declaring, "If you don't mind me mentioning it, Father, I think you have a mind like a swamp."

Emmy's characterization is central to how Sturges handles "sex suggestiveness" as part of the overall dramatic construction. Sturges understood that Trudy needed an "intimate interlocutor and confidante" because

"someone has to ask [Trudy] these questions, not only as an expositional device but also as a stand-in for the audience – itself skeptical and curious" (Henderson 1995, 536, 533). He tried out different options for this character in his initial script notes, at one point using the place-holder name SOMEBODY (Henderson 1995, 536), before settling on Emmy as the solution. At fourteen, she is the youngest character – the sort of impressionable mind the Production Code aimed to protect – yet, paradoxically, she is also the most worldly. While she looks like a bobby-soxer, she sometimes sounds more like a hard-boiled hoodlum than a kid sister, throwing in wise-cracking slang ("corn-fed dope") and risqué double entendres ("He fits like the skin on a wienie"). Her dialogue is indeed peppered with questions, including a distinctive interrogative tendency (shared with her father) to turn statements into queries, as with "He took you out, didn't he? He brought you home, didn't he? At eight o'clock in the morning, didn't he?" and "I've got a right to sit on your lap, haven't I? I'm your daughter, aren't I?"

Such visual and aural incongruities between Emmy's youth and worldliness are fertile sources of comedy but they also create ambiguity about how much a 14-year-old *does* know. When scripting Emmy and Mr Kockenlocker's conversations, Sturges drew attention to this gap:

Emmy:	The dance, Papa … You've got to kiss the boys goodbye … it's a farewell party … a military affair.
Kockenlocker:	Again? … Where is this affair to be unfurled?
Emmy:	I don't know Papa … I'm only fourteen.
Kockenlocker:	What kind of answer is that? (Henderson 1995, 608 (B-4))

The PCA correspondence only comments directly on Kockenlocker's use of the word "affair," (suggesting it is changed to "party").[15] Similarly, when Trudy and Norval get ready to leave, Emmy advises her, "Don't do anything I wouldn't do" – to which her father replies, "What kind of joke is that?" (Henderson 1995, 613 (B-7)). The knowing, self-reflexive quality to Kockenlocker's final questions indicate Sturges' creative thinking about Emmy's function and the kinds of ambiguity it could generate. Of these, only Emmy's line about "a military affair" makes it into the finished film, perhaps because Breen had expressed "apprehension" about Emmy's lines in general: "These […] are, in many instances, likely to be offensive because they come from a 14 year old girl, and all should be carefully reexamined against the possibility that they may be unacceptable."[16]

I have discussed Emmy's characterization at some length, not only because she acts as our "stand-in" (another kind of substitution), but also because these ideas feed into how Sturges sets up a symbolic substitution of "marriage" for "sex." The scene begins with an insert of the *Bugle*

editorial, "Are Military Marriages a Menace?" reading "Our homes, full of lonely young women, are surrounded by camps, full of lonely young men." As the pun on "a military affair" later confirms, we sense that Sturges substitutes "marriage" for "sex" in this headline to stand any chance of PCA approval. On screen, the headline is accompanied by an unseen pianist playing "The Wedding March." Discordant notes cause Kockenlocker to look up from his newspaper: his eyes narrow, a double take mentally connecting the headline to what he sees offscreen. The camera follows as he stands and moves toward the sound, revealing Emmy at the piano. Ostensibly, their ensuing conversation is about marriage – but the question-and-answer rhythm of their dialogue creates space for a double meaning:

Kockenlocker:	[*connecting the headline to Emmy's choice of music*] You wasn't thinkin' about getting married, was you?
Emmy:	[*sarcastically*] At fourteen? I was thinkin' of going down to the corner and having a soda.
Kockenlocker:	[*irritably*] I don't mean what you were thinkin' about right now … I mean generally.
Emmy:	[*demurely*] Generally, yes.
Kockenlocker:	Generally yes, what?
Emmy:	[*rolling eyes, brusque tone*] Generally yes, I think about marriage. [*wide-eyed, more softly*] What else do you think I think about?
Kockenlocker:	Oh, you do, do you?
Emmy:	[*slow blink*] Anybody can think about it, can't they? It doesn't cost anything to think about it. [*sarcastic edge*] It's only when you *do* it that it costs two dollars.
Kockenlocker:	*What* costs two dollars? You seem to know a great deal about a subject far beyond your years.

Kockenlocker's questions – particularly, "Oh you do, do you?" – give us time to ponder "what else" a fourteen-year-old girl might think about, and an alternative to thinking about *marriage* specifically. Diana Lynn's nuanced performance reinforces this ambiguity, switching between impatient sarcasm and (seemingly) demure innocence, in a way that convinces us Kockenlocker is right: Emmy knows a great deal. These comic aspects of dialogue and performance are crucial to enabling the double meaning around "*what* costs two dollars." On the one hand, the film later confirms an innocent meaning since Norval pays two dollars for a marriage license; on the other, the emphasis on paying to "*do* it" evokes a sexual transaction (with or without a marriage license). As Leger Grindon notes, the scene's "implied substitution of the forbidden [sex] with the respectable [marriage …] is a repeated gag that becomes a pivot for humor" (2011, 108). It is

through this *repetition* that substitution moves toward elision, equating marriage and sex as synonymous in a way that becomes essential to Sturges' handling of Trudy's pregnancy.

The rest of this scene juxtaposes Emmy's incongruous worldly knowledge with her older sister's goofy innocence. The relative decorum of "The Wedding March" clashes with Trudy's choice of loud swing music and, while Emmy's quick wits and poise seem grown-up, Trudy's clod-hopping dancing makes her seem like a kid playing dress-up: the script even has her sliding down the banister in her evening dress (Henderson 1995, 609 (B-7)). While Trudy's characterization sometimes involves elements of substitution (we first see her lip-synching to a *basso profundo* record) it is – of course – more systematically associated with strategies of omission: the missing wedding, the gaps in her memory, and her unseen pregnancy. Kockenlocker's interrogation of Trudy illustrates this difference:

Kockenlocker:	What is this military kiss the boys goodbye business and where is it to be transacted?
Trudy:	Ooh just like they always do, in the Church basement and then the Country Club and then kinda … like that.

Where Emmy throws questions straight back at her father, meeting his gaze, Trudy hedges around an answer, only turning to look at him when she says "like that", before giving a nervous chuckle. Significantly, Trudy does tell the truth – but not the *whole* truth, fudging the one detail her father will find most problematic (a "sin of omission" so to speak). The version of the script sent to Breen was more detailed, and his letter advises "the elimination from Trudy's speech of the following: '… and then kinda … out to a road-house somewhere and then you know … like that ….'."[17] As usual, Sturges does not fully comply with Breen's suggestion, cutting the phrase about the random road-house, but retaining "then kinda … like that" and the possibility of at least one more unnamed (potentially disreputable) location.

Of course, Trudy's verbal ellipsis also foreshadows the gaps in her memory (and in the film) about where she *does* go.[18] Sturges structures the military party around a pattern of omission and repetition, condensing events in ways that visually imply things that cannot be expressed directly. Initially, the script lists shots individually but, once the country club member orders champagne, Sturges groups shots C-8 to C-20 under the single heading, "SHOTS OF THE PARTY GETTING HOTTER"; the omission of detail ensures the PCA has nothing concrete to query in the script, especially since the related action specifies, "Several times Trudy refuses champagne" (Henderson 1995, 618 (C-8 to C-20)). Onscreen, the montage sequence exploits these creative gaps

through mise-en-scene and editing. The script describes Trudy dancing with two soldiers and drinking lemonade with another in the Church basement, specifying dissolves between each of these three shots to imply that respectable amounts of time pass between partners; the next mention of dancing is at the roadhouse, where she jitterbugs with someone described as "her partner" (Henderson 1995, 618-619 (C-2 to C-4 and C-22)). Onscreen, though, Trudy dances with *four* soldiers in the basement, switching partners once *during* each shot; temporal continuity is reinforced by the consistent sound of the band's song, and by the use of straight cuts (rather than dissolves) to the band and to the tipsy soldier with a "wunnerful idea". The effect intensifies at the country club, where Trudy dances with another four soldiers.[19] The first three dance with Trudy in *one* 10-second shot, emphasizing their tag-team interchangeability and Trudy's potential promiscuity: the party is "getting hotter". Musical choices and editing pace reinforce the heat, with the roadhouse scene packing thirteen shots into 53 seconds (compared to just two in the script – and in marked contrast to the long take that opens the party sequence, as Gibbs illustrates in Part 2). Strikingly, the roadhouse scene intercuts Trudy jitterbugging with shots of other (mostly female) legs twirling and twisting on the dancefloor, framed from a low height and angle. The frenzied dancing implies sexualized "heat" (also connoted by the stereotypical use of a black jazz band on stage) but the quick switches in height also visually prompt the jitterbug lift which causes Trudy to bang her head on a mirror ball (appropriately knob-shaped in design). In the script, the roadhouse scene ends with a soldier drunkenly suggesting "Lesh all get married" to which Trudy replies, "'Sa funny idea," apparently agreeing; it then specifies a dissolve to Norval at the cinema, checking his watch at 1:15, followed by a dissolve to a *third* shot of the car, "full of soldiers, girls and party hats", before a fade out (Henderson 1995, 619 (C-23 to C-27)). This shot was apparently filmed, including an (unscripted) line of dialogue – "We won't get home until morning" – but was eliminated at the insistence of the War Department, who were also unhappy with the "rollicking drunkenness" of the second car scene as originally shot (Henderson 1995, 590, quoting an undated wire from Russell Holman).[20] The elegant solution of reusing the first car ride, along with the repetitive roundelay of "Row, Row, Row your Boat", nonetheless retains the sense of increasing intoxication, despite the footage being identical.

The issue of drunkenness was also key to the PCA's response: Trudy's inability to remember who she married needed an innocent explanation. While getting black-out drunk would motivate amnesia, it certainly would not meet the Code's requirements for upholding moral standards, "the sanctity of the institution of marriage" and the use of liquor (which "should

never be excessively presented").[21] Breen's response did not explicitly prohibit inebriation, only its onscreen representation:

> We understand from our discussion yesterday that Trudy will, at no time, be *shown to be* drunk, nor will there be any reference to the fact that she was drunk. It is acceptable to indicate that she, along with the others, did drink some champagne, but she should not be *shown* drunk.[22]

Consequently, Sturges uses the kinds of "denial mechanisms" which Lea Jacobs argues the PCA "typically favored" when dealing with screwball comedy (1997, 113). While the party's visualization expresses the *idea* of intoxication, alcohol is largely absent onscreen: when the club member calls for champagne, the sequence dissolves to scenes of dancing, not drinking; and only the soldier with the "wunnerful idea" ("Let's all get married!") is seen with a drink in his hand, propping up the bar at both the country club and the roadhouse.[23] Trudy never interacts with this soldier onscreen, and we only see her drinking lemonade. The visual substitution of lemonade and a head injury for alcohol and drunkenness is a key part of Sturges' creative approach. The sign declaring "Save sugar for Victory" explains why Trudy winces at the taste, and the script describes the lemonade as "so sour they look as if they were whistling" (Henderson, 1995, 618 (C-4)) – a sound evoked onscreen by a harsh blast from the band's brass section. But her reaction also creates an ambiguous space for "sophisticated" viewers to suspect the lemonade has been spiked with alcohol.[24] Thus, although Trudy's dazed reaction after banging her head implies concussion as the explanation for her amnesia and disorientation, even Norval remains unconvinced:

Norval:	You've been drinking!
Trudy:	[*indignantly*] Who's been drinking? I never had a drink in my life! How dare you insinuate I've been drinking?
Norval:	Well, you certainly don't get what you've got on lemonade.
Trudy:	Well, I certainly did!

In terms of what we have *seen*, Trudy is telling the truth but, once again, Sturges flaunts the film's compliance with the Code while simultaneously implying its transgression.[25]

Having provided an innocent explanation for Trudy's amnesia, Sturges' next creative challenge was handling her pregnancy. The legitimacy of the marriage and Trudy's offspring was not the only issue. The PCA considered pregnancy *in itself* to be an inappropriate subject. Thus, while Breen agreed the film could establish Trudy was pregnant for plot purposes, in the draft script, "the point is hit several times, and thus gives out a flavor and atmosphere which, in our judgment, is unacceptable".[26] According to

Thomas Doherty, "The suppression of things of the flesh" was a central tenet of Breen's vision for the PCA: "the corporeal body, both as a vessel of sexual pleasure and an organism with animal functions, must be hidden and denied" (2007, 92). The Code insists that "Scenes of actual childbirth, in fact or in silhouette, are never to be presented" ("The Production Code" 1996 [1930], 140) but the PCA's general approach went further: "scripts could not include any reminders that pregnancy was a biological process. This meant that studios were prevented from visualizing any external physical changes a woman's body went through during pregnancy" (Kirby 2017, 458). In this respect, Norval's (failed) search for Ratzkiwatzki is a helpful plot device, omitting months of time and enabling the majority of Trudy's pregnancy to pass unseen – but, even after he returns, we do not see Trudy's body. Onscreen, the farmhouse sequence uses a medium two-shot of her sitting in an over-sized armchair turned toward the fire (away from the camera) so just her profile and right hand are visible. In the script, Sturges seems to parody the PCA's requirements, repeatedly using the scene heading "BIG HEAD OF TRUDY" (Henderson 1995, 733-737 (K-32-45)). The PCA also suggested that pages 33-37 of the initial script, where Trudy's pregnancy was first revealed, should be "drastically cut down and the matter entirely rewritten", going through "line by line" to suggest specific eliminations.[27] Matthew Bernstein notes that these negotiations included "reducing the number of times the word 'pregnant' was uttered (it appeared on five pages of the initial script)" and posits that Sturges may even have "sprinkled 'pregnant' around the script as a bargaining chip, knowing that the PCA would object" (2015, 100). Thus, the finished film does not use the word pregnant at all: Norval fills in the gap himself ("Trudy! You don't mean … ?"), and Trudy tells her father, "I'm going to have a baby." Sturges' attitude to the PCA can be gauged through the minor adjustments he made to a specific line. Breen's initial letter suggests, "Emmy's line, 'It was a man got you in the [*sic*] trouble' should be eliminated"; instead, Sturges substituted "our friend" for "you". In response, on 28 October and 30 October, Breen "suggests" and then "urges" that the phrase "in the trouble" should be changed, by "substituting […] 'into this'";[28] Sturges eventually switched "trouble" for "soup" – avoiding the more obvious double meaning of being "in trouble" but without changing the tone (or implications) of Emmy's line (Henderson 1995, 636 (D4).

The morning-after scene between Trudy and Emmy draws the threads of my argument together, to show how Sturges' sustained use of substitution and omission builds to the comic elision of marriage/pregnancy. The scene comprises two long takes (as Gibbs discusses in Part 2) connected by an extreme close-up of a curtain ring on Trudy's finger. Using a curtain ring as a substitute wedding ring pokes fun at the symbolic function

of *any* such ring, signifying "marriage" without proving a legal ceremony took place. In responding to the original script, Breen had suggested eliminating "the reference to the curtain ring", presumably because it did not treat the sacred institution with respect.[29] On paper, Sturges complied: there is no mention of a curtain ring in the script pages dated 26 October (Henderson 1995, 627 (C-42)). Onscreen, though, Trudy says, "Can you imagine gettin' hitched up in the middle of the night with a curtain ring to somebody that's going away that you might never ever see again, Emmy?" A sharp intake of breath follows as she catches sight of her left hand, a horrified look on her face. Emmy (sitting immediately behind Trudy) leans forward to ask, "You don't think any of them were dumb enough to" – ending abruptly as she spots Trudy's hand. Non-diegetic strings build tension, as Emmy's gaze homes in: "Trudy! [*pointing*] What's that on your finger?"

At this point, we would conventionally expect a straight cut to the object of their gaze – the ring – maintaining a sense of continuous "real" time. Instead, Sturges emphasizes the transition by using a dissolve, accompanied by a climactic burst of music that includes a phrase from "The Wedding March" (echoing the film's earlier equation of marriage/sex).[30] Before the dissolve, the dialogue focuses on trying to remember what happened the night before (sex/marriage); afterwards, the conversation turns to trying to remember *who* Trudy married and the impossibility of finding out since no one used their real names. As an exasperated Emmy declares, "Then we'll never even know if you *got* married," Trudy (gazing ahead into space) replies, "I hope not." The scene ends with a second dissolve, beginning immediately on the word "not" to reveal a doctor instructing Trudy to come back in about a month. Elliptical dissolves conventionally omit time like this, but they also literally merge two images on screen – so that the question of Trudy's "marriage" and the dreaded answer visually overlap. The doctor cannot *say* Trudy is pregnant, of course, but Trudy's tears confirm the worst. The script handles this transition differently, dissolving from "I hope not" to a shot of wailing babies in "a small sea of about 29 baby carriages", parked outside a church where Reverend Dr Upperman delivers a very long sermon about the moral dangers of war time for young women; Trudy and Emmy are in the congregation. Unsurprisingly, Breen insisted that the scene "be entirely eliminated" – but the scene is *so* excessive in its representation (both in the sheer number of babies and the length of the sermon), that it seems likely Sturges included it as a diversionary tactic, making the scene with the doctor more acceptable, relatively speaking, to the PCA.

Combined, these two dissolves compress events, moving Trudy from a state of amnesia, to dawning realization and actual pregnancy in just three

minutes of screen time. Where the dissolves during the party sequence omitted time to leave things that cannot be shown to our imaginations, here they visually link ideas to confirm things that cannot be said. The elision of marriage/pregnancy is reinforced just after Trudy leaves the doctor's office. Emmy suggests that they now need to see the lawyer, Mr Johnson (Alan Bridge), "to find out if you're really married", to which Trudy replies, "You're kinda hard to convince, aren't you?" While our stand-in, Emmy, knows there is an alternative possibility, in Trudy's mind – and the PCA's – the *only* way to be pregnant is to be married. Producing not one but six babies is, of course, part of Sturges' comic pay-off, taking the absurdity of PCA logic to extremes.

Part 2. Miraculous Long Takes

In this section, and in the spirit of different critical perspectives, the article takes advantage of the hybrid possibilities of digital publication to integrate an audiovisual essay. Written and audiovisual criticism have different strengths, and our hope in combining them is that we will extend our analysis in novel and complementary ways. The video essay also enables us to bring the material under discussion more vividly to the reader/viewer/listener's attention, and keep camera strategies and performances alive in ways that no number of words could manage. Please click on the link and then return for the third section of the article (Figure 1).

Figure 1. *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek*: miraculous long takes, https://vimeo.com/847022628.

Part 3. The Ending: The Miracle and Other Wonders

In this section I want to ask how we should take the film's extraordinary ending. The parochial concerns of the small town are all but overwhelmed by the sheer magnitude of what Sturges unleashes. In scenes that are euphoric and wonderfully funny, the last movements fantastically dissolve the seemingly intractable moral and legal problems of the plot, and with them the PCA's demands. The exuberant comedy and the benign conclusion that the genre seems to promise are also shadowed in various ways. What to make of all this involves intriguing questions of intent and point of view.

It was not an ending that came to Sturges immediately. Apart from the birth of sextuplets – the miracle of the title – how the ending was to be managed emerged after two months of script drafts in which, amongst much else, Sturges explored ways of meeting the Code's demand for a marriage via various ingenious alternatives for the missing soldier's reappearance. By September these ideas had been abandoned and, in the story outline Sturges produced at Paramount's request on 11 September 1942, the search for "Ratzkiwatzki" has failed and the character who evolved during scripting as Norval has become the required husband. A role for the State Governor is also proposed here: flying in after the miraculous births, he conveniently annuls the first marriage and legalizes that to Norval.[31]

On the face of it, even for a comedy, this perfunctory resolution could seem entirely cynical, perhaps a temporary expedient to meet the studio's demands for an outline. In fact, Sturges doubled down on the possibilities the Governor's intervention offered. By the time he had elaborated the idea, he had created a finale that – both dramatically and in its relationship to the Production Code – is in its way as audacious as the multiple births that set it up.

Two mutually informing decisions were decisive in shaping the ending. In a chronological drama of the kind the story outline seemed to indicate, the Governor could only logically appear in the film after the birth. In the final script, completed on 10 December, two weeks before shooting ended, the dates on each section suggest that more complex ideas had been in Sturges' mind for some time. The cast list, dated 14 October, contains "Governor" and "Boss" and the script itself opens with a Prologue (dated 23 and 27 November) that introduces the framing device through which the events of the film are supposedly narrated over the phone to the Governor by the Editor of the Morgan's Creek local newspaper (Victor Potel), accompanied by Mr Rafferty (Julius Tannen) (Henderson 1995, 594). Sturges does very little as the film goes on to disguise the fact that the frame is essentially a convenience to allow accompanying decisions to take effect.

Most significantly, it gives the Governor an immediate but continuing presence, allowing for question, comment and, ultimately, intervention. For Sturges this seems to have been inseparable from the bold and brilliant decision to import characters and actors from his first film as writer-director, *The Great McGinty*, in which McGinty (Brian Donlevy), working in a bar, relates the story of his remarkable political career, masterminded by the criminal Boss (Akim Tamiroff). It is tempting to see their self-referential reappearance here (knowingly trailed in the credits by billing them only as "McGinty and The Boss") and the Governor's eventual actions as the film's second "miracle" in Sturges' subversive negotiation of Code requirements. No gods or fairy godmothers in this secular deus ex machina, but McGinty and The Boss are certainly visitors from another world, revived mischievously by its creator to wield decisive power. Although the Governor later says he intends to visit Morgan's Creek "tomorrow", it seems significant that his power is exerted entirely over the telephone without leaving the office, as though to underscore his curious status.

In the completed film, before the start of the main credits, we see the Editor and Mr Rafferty rush out of a crowd in huge excitement to the newspaper office with what must be stupendous news ("Stop the presses!") and begin to telephone the Governor. The Editor is about to reveal all but we see and hear only the Governor's astounded response. At this point he knows the amazing news, but the editing withholds it from us. The frantic first movement of the film (the final script's Prologue) ends with the Editor's insistence on telling Governor McGinty (accompanied now by The Boss) the whole story from the beginning, and a dissolve takes us to the sights and sounds of Morgan's Creek.

The film unfolds with no further return to the frame until after Norval's "escape" from jail and his departure to look for the missing soldier husband, approximately 73 minutes of screen time later. Sturges then brings it back to launch the last movements of the film, bridging a period of about six months between Norval leaving and his return, unsuccessful, to Morgan's Creek, a gap that very neatly answers both the film's structural need for the birth now to be imminent and the PCA's extreme sensitivity on the subject of pregnancy (as discussed by Glitre in Part 1).[32]

In a context rich with irony, Sturges makes the corrupt Governor McGinty appear the spokesman for probity and moral outrage – in effect for Code values – at the very idea that Trudy might not be married.

The Governor:	Wait a minute, wait a minute, never mind the details: is the girl married or isn't she married? It's a matter of state honour … a matter of public weal.
The Editor:	I'm sorry, Mr Governor, but nobody knows whether she's married or not.

The Governor: Well, she's got to be married, that's all there is to it … we can't have a thing like that hanging over our fair state … besmirching our fair name.

As the Editor goes on to explain how it is that Norval is back in jail, his words continue briefly over the dissolve to Norval's return and the scenes leading up to the miraculous birth, news of which triggered the excitement of the opening and galvanized the Governor. In terms of the developing drama, the leap in time also leaves unseen the events that followed Norval's departure but soon confronts us with their outcome. For all the previous comedy, the bizarre action of the film so far has had consequences which in themselves are far from comic. On his return, Norval finds the family's home seemingly abandoned and for sale, learns that Constable Kockenlocker was dismissed after the "escape" from jail, and that the family are now living somewhere out of town. Just as he is about to be taken to them by Mr. Rafferty, the hapless Norval is arrested again. Trudy, the cause of all this, is still without a husband and shortly to give birth.

The Miracle

There can of course be no question of showing Trudy in labor, given the Code's prohibition: "Scenes of actual childbirth in fact or in silhouette, are never to be presented (The Production Code, 140)." In fact, Sturges appears to have made a virtue of a necessity by not showing Trudy at all between her deciding to save Norval by telling all, and their reunion in the hospital after the births, approximately 9 minutes of screen time later, so avoiding likely PCA sensitivities but also preserving Trudy's very remarkable ignorance of her amazing achievement. Sturges also dispensed with the scripted giveaway opening of the sequence, in which Doctor Meyer (Torben Meyer) in the delivery room prepares to examine the offscreen Trudy: "He places the stethoscope just under the CAMERA and starts to beat time. Now his eyes blink in surprise. His finger comes to a stop. He looks around at someone then starts again. He seems to have trouble catching the beat. [… his] eyes bug out in surprise" (Henderson, 1995, 742 (L-11)). The "bug eyes" moment alone now appears almost at the end of the sequence.

Instead Sturges chose to restrict the sequence almost wholly to the corridor outside so that we share the build-up, filming it with his usual economy largely from a single camera position, often static but with occasional pans, interrupted only by brief cuts as the sequence develops (see Part 2). What he shows is a version of a familiar trope – conventionally it would be the expectant husband, sometimes with others, waiting anxiously, often with a good deal of nervous pacing. But here of course there is no husband present or indeed identified, and it is Kockenlocker who does the pacing.

We stay with the touching unspoken anxiety and concern of Kockenlocker, Mr Rafferty and, notably, Emmy, whose earlier worldly confidence has apparently evaporated. The Editor waits with them but with news on his mind. Nurses repeatedly emerge from a door in the depth of the frame, pass the waiting group, collect items from a storage cupboard in the right foreground, and return. At first, they are brisk but not hurried. Their first two announcements are made quite calmly: "It's a boy" and then "Twins". But their pace quickens, they walk faster, then run; to some consternation one raises four fingers as she rushes past; another skips down the corridor shouting "Whoopee!"; Dr Meyer follows with another "Whoopee!"; and finally, a nurse runs out, arms waving in celebration, with a cry of "Six – all boys!" Kockenlocker passes out dramatically, with another of William Demarest's trademark falls, this time forward and at full length.

This is the central game changer that Sturges had always intended. It is a spectacularly hyperbolic contrivance that transforms the potential social disgrace, and in Code terms the unacceptability, of a baby with no visible husband or proof of marriage, into a demonstration of national potency, validated by the wonderful interpolations of worldwide newspaper headlines. It is the unparalleled event that unlocks the rest of the ending. It will be for Sturges to use the Governor and The Boss, via the framing device, to cut through the tangle of remaining problems that stand in the way of the kind of ending we expect of a comedy.

McGinty Ex Machina

From the birth sequence, the film cuts immediately to the first montage of newspaper headlines – these are all American – ending with: "CANADA PROTESTS: 'Possible not Probable' says Premier", the lovely joke alluding to the widely celebrated Dionne quintuplets born in Ontario in 1934. At this point the frame returns with The Governor's first decisive intervention. On hearing that Norval is still in jail:

The Governor:	Well, get him out.
The Editor:	But how can I, Mr. Governor, with all those charges against him?
The Governor:	By dropping the charges, you dumb cluck.
The Boss:	You weal head.
The Governor:	Now get me that banker on the phone.
The Boss:	His charter is cancelled.
The Governor:	And the Justice of the Peace.
The Boss:	His license is revoked and his motel is condemned.

As to the charges of impersonating a US soldier:

The Governor:	That was a State Guard uniform.
The Boss:	I can see it from here.
The Governor:	As a matter of fact he's a Colonel in it. I'm bringing him his commission tomorrow.
The Boss:	Retroactive as of last year.

A second montage of headlines follows, both American and overseas, ending with a scene of Mussolini receiving the news, exploding with rage, and the front page, "Mussolini Resigns: 'Enough is sufficiency' Screams Il Duce."

The Governor and The Boss now deal as dismissively with the marriage and the soldier husband/father.

The Editor:	There's only one thing more, Mr Governor – the marriage.
The Governor:	What's the matter with the marriage? She's married to Norval Jones. She always has been! The guy married them, didn't he? The boy signed his right name, didn't he?
The Boss:	Sure.
The Editor:	But he gave his name as Ratzkiwatzki.
The Governor:	He was trying to say Jones, he stuttered.
The Boss:	What are you looking for, needles in a haystack?
The Editor:	Then how about the first Ratzkiwatzki?
The Governor:	He's annulled.

The final script had continued:

The Editor:	Who annulled him?
The Governor:	I did.
The Boss:	Retroactive. (Henderson, 1995, 749 (L-44-45))

This drew the rather plaintive sentence in Breen's letter of 3 December: "We again call to your attention to the fact that it is our understanding that a Governor has not got the legal right to annul a marriage."[33] The comment is ploddingly literal in the context and yet, presumably, their understanding was accurate – something undesirable was going on that in Code terms should be put right. Sturges' response was to provide a correction as literal as Breen could have required:

The Editor:	Who annulled?
The Governor:	The Judge, who do you suppose?
The Boss:	Retroactive.

But, in another example of Sturges observing the letter of a PCA request without, as Glitre writes, "necessarily changing the overall meaning or implication" (see Part 1), in the rapid-fire dialogue we are still left in little doubt as to who is taking the decision. Then, with what are almost throw-away lines, Ratzkiwatzki is definitively excised in perhaps the best joke in the film:

The Governor: He's out of the picture.

The Boss: He was never in it.

The third interpolation of news begins with just a single German front page, before giving way to a diminutive Hitler in his tent, surrounded by burly generals, ranting as he receives the news, followed by a dissolve to *The New York Dispatcher* headline: "HITLER DEMANDS RECOUNT." Sextuplets even demoralize the enemy.

All this is joyously blatant farce, made possible by the genius of Sturges' decision to import McGinty and the Boss as his surrogates to bring about the necessary outcome. Central to Sturges' mischief here, is that his corrupt pair from *The Great McGinty* become the unlikely saviors of both the situation in the film and that outside it. The two crooks produce the husband demanded by the Code, while making a mockery of all restraint – but the significance of Sturges' intertextual play seems to have attracted no direct comment from the Breen office. Caught up in the exhilaration and hectic pace of these exchanges, as Sturges surely intends, we hear the pair use the power of the Governor's office to trash due process, dismiss banker and justice of the peace, annul a marriage, and promote the gormless Norval to Colonel. From that perspective, perhaps the juxtaposition with Mussolini and Hitler isn't purely comic.

The Sense (or Non-Sense) of an Ending

An uncomprehending Norval is freed from jail, now dressed in an elaborate uniform complete with dress sword and swept through an excited crowd of well-wishers to the hospital. It is crucial to what follows that he is the only person in the crowd – indeed, after the international headlines, possibly one of few in the world – not to know about the sextuplets. What we will discover, though, is that he is not alone. In the quiet of Trudy's room, he is greeted almost shyly by the uncharacteristically restrained Emmy before approaching Trudy's bed. In what is the most touching moment in the whole film, Sturges now isolates the couple visually: as Norval leans over and looks down adoringly at Trudy, she wakes and strokes his cheek, he kisses her palm. As they talk, we find that Trudy is equally ignorant of her momentous achievement – she asks whether the

baby is a girl or a boy. The childlike qualities that make the characters seem almost cases of arrested development throughout the film are still very much present – and the rigors of a multiple birth are nowhere in evidence (this is after all a miracle) – but Sturges creates a tender interlude for the couple (now miraculously husband and wife) amidst the mayhem.

This briefest of idyls is rapidly overtaken by events yet Sturges seems to want it to carry significant value, even as he makes his touching moment dependent on the couple remaining completely in the dark. Wholly unprepared for what is about to hit them, Trudy and Norval are more like victims than the heroine and hero they are unwittingly about to become. The complication, for us as well as for Sturges, is that they are also still players in the unfolding comedy, the two perspectives simultaneously in play. Questions of tone, of the film's attitudes to its characters and spectators, continue as the juggernaut of Sturges' ending rolls on.

Our access to dialogue is now restricted as Emmy takes Norval to see the baby, the restriction naturalized as the camera draws back and we watch them across the six cots, looking in at the babies from behind the glass screen. As Norval coos over one after the other, slight pans to right and left follow his gaze, while Emmy, who is in the know, watches him nervously. His question of which baby is the one, and her reply, indicating all of them, are unmistakable, as is Norval's appalled response, and his scream is loud enough to carry through the glass. He rushes away, Sturges cuts back to Trudy's room, her bed in the foreground, as Norval slips and then slides right across the room. Although we can't make out his words as he gets up, the meaning of his gestures to Trudy is very clear. He knows that he is the fall guy again and his response is total panic and refusal. The scene is played as broad physical comedy, but the comedy is also uncomfortable. Norval's distress here is very clear. Meanwhile, responding to the noise, Kockenlocker and others have crowded in, cramming the frame.

If the whole of the film's ending could be considered a kind of emergency exit, a calculatedly extravagant solution to the dilemmas of the plot and PCA requirements, the term seems particularly applicable to the very end. It comes very rapidly and some of the detail is easily missed. Protesting vigorously, it is then just possible to make out Norval's cry of "The spots" as he collapses onto Trudy's bed. Circular patches of the image seem to blur, Emmy empties a flask of water over poor Norval's head in a futile attempt to calm him, and in a very short dissolve the final caption appears, resolving into clear focus backed by a screen of hazy, pulsing circular shapes of various sizes. These blurs and pulsing circles can only be a manifestation of "the spots, the spots!" that have plagued Norval at other moments of distress or anxiety. Visualizing them for the first time here, to cloud the spectator's view and back the caption, is wholly unexpected and

enigmatic. Such optical effects are absent elsewhere in the film, so why choose to include one here, and so briefly? Recognizing them can be fun ("It's the spots!"). Linking to earlier moments, they might reassure in the mayhem of the scene that Norval will soon recover. I am conscious here of V.F. Perkins' warning that our ability to stop and endlessly replay moments of film can distort as well as illuminate interpretation (2020, 491-92), but I wonder whether in momentarily appropriating the spots for the film Sturges is not just making visible Norval's crisis, but acknowledging his own? Immediately, with the rapid dissolve Sturges makes the decisive intervention that seals off the world of the film: "But Norval recovered and became increasingly happy. For, as Shakespeare said, 'Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them.'"

It is flagrantly and self-consciously abrupt. Sturges gives us "happy ending" in its baldest form – no dramatized resolution, just a sudden and overtly editorial act to assert "happily ever after". He seems to want us to experience the urgency. In effect, it is as though he just presents the positive ending that is expected of a comedy, all its elements – the spots, the language (including the sententious resort to Shakespeare), the rush to 'The End' – combining comedically to thrust the expected benign future at us, but with it, perhaps, an implied smile (if there could be such a thing) and question: "Well, how else would you get out of this?" (Figure 2).

In withdrawing from the scene when he does, Sturges well knows what he has left behind and why it must be left suspended. Trudy still has no idea that she has given birth to more than one baby, let alone six. Norval,

Figure 2. The miraculous ending: 'The spots! The spots!'.

in frenzied refusal, certainly knows the part he has been allotted. He will be celebrated as father of the sextuplets. To invoke John Ford's much later film, Norval is doomed as a kind of comedic "Man Who Shot Liberty Valance" – he didn't do the deed but must live with the legend. For Norval this is terrible. From these perspectives, it is a terrifying ending. For Sturges, in his knowing play with PCA demands, it is the ironic outcome of satisfying the requirement that where there is a baby there must be a marriage. To stay in the scene any longer, however, would involve having somehow to dramatize what comes next, with attendant risks to the already precarious tone. To observe the rules of the generic game, pain and distress – and even tender interludes – must have their limits. The emergency exit ensures that they may be registered but – breathlessly, as it were – the balance can be held.

In his brilliant contemporary review, James Agee wrote of the miracle birth that it "entails its own cynical comments on the sanctity of law, order, parenthood, and the American home – to say nothing of a number of cherished pseudo-folk beliefs about bright-lipped youth, childhood sweethearts, Mister Right, and the glamor of war" (1944, 57). It is tempting to extend Agee's words and include Sturges' inspired decision to give The Governor and The Boss the task of demolishing the remaining obstacles. Each is a fantastical intrusion into a world of small-town comedy in which already, as Agee wrote, "the wildly factitious story makes comic virtues of every censor-dodging necessity" (1944, 57). With Sturges' remarkable conclusion, the less fantastical but shameless emergency exit, we can leave the screening with a smile that might well embrace a final example of his audacity.

Conclusions

This article sought to illuminate Sturges' creative process by exploring how *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek* negotiates the demands of the Production Code. In Part 1, Glitre's comparative analysis of Sturges' script, PCA correspondence and the finished film reinforced our sense that, while Sturges conforms to the letter of the Code's "law", he mocks its spirit: his scripting and directing choices achieve their comedic force through interwoven patterns of substitution, omission and elision in playfully knowing ways, across key aspects of filmmaking (from narrative structure and dialogue to mise-en-scene and editing). In Part 2, Gibbs' exploration of long takes visualized the importance of performance and movement to the film's comedic treatment of potentially melodramatic (or illicit) events. The hybrid format enabled us to dynamically present the spectrum of long take techniques used by Sturges, from static shots framing chaotic groups to complex traveling shots. Indeed, being able to compare takes side-by-side – such as

the two sequences of Trudy and Norval walking through town – vividly demonstrated Sturges' creative abilities as a writer-director, combining the wit of his scripts with nuanced visualization to indicate Trudy's increasingly precarious situation. The prevalence of long takes throughout the film suggests that their use may equally have been a deliberate strategy on Sturges' part to discourage post-production cuts by censorship boards.[34] In Part 3, Pye considered the highly self-conscious strategies of the film's final hectic movements, notably the ironic deployment, via the narrative frame, of The Governor/McGinty and The Boss to wield arbitrary power, expunge the missing father, and declare Norval and Trudy's marriage valid – Sturges simultaneously paying lip service to, and subverting, PCA requirements. In his analysis of the final sequence, Pye celebrated the complex tone (bordering at times on the hysterical, in both senses) that Sturges achieves as he strives to juggle the couple's touching reunion, Trudy's continuing ignorance, and the terrifying consequences for Norval as he realizes his fate, while maintaining the overriding imperative to produce an ending fit for a comedy – the ending achieved only by the desperate and wonderfully knowing expedient of the emergency exit.

Across the three parts, what is striking is the importance of irony and pace to both the comedic effect and the film's successful negotiations of the Code. Sturges' ironic tone maintains a critical distance from the narrative events, a worldly knowingness embodied on screen by Emmy but also crucial to our experience of the film's use of parallel scenes (Part 2) and the intertextual framing device of The Governor/McGinty and The Boss (Part 3). The speed with which Trudy and Norval's lives are turned upside down (from sex/marriage/pregnancy to six baby boys, from 4 F to Colonel in the State Guard) is emphasized on screen by fast-talking dialogue, jitterbugging intoxication and hectic chaos – finely balanced by long takes and stuttering pauses, allowing us time to reach our own conclusions. This potentially explains why Sturges entirely ignored the PCA's suggestion that the script's use of stuttering should be rethought, as likely to cause offense for "seeking to make fun of one's personal afflictions";[35] the stuttering serves an essential dramatic purpose as a space for omission, where forbidden things can be left unsaid.

What emerges through these three perspectives is an over-riding sense of Sturges' mischievous ability to run rings around the PCA. Reading the screenplay is a delight in itself, with some elements seeming to function partly for Sturges' own amusement (such as the lines about Emmy's age, and the "BIG HEAD OF TRUDY", discussed in Part 1). In addition to the ways in which he re-shaped problematic content through substitution – champagne from sour lemonade, so to speak – there are places where material eliminated from the script at the PCA's request (such as the

curtain ring) reappears in the finished film without comment. Combining sustained close reading with archival research thus demonstrates the intrinsically *dynamic* process that underpinned the PCA's regulation of content, as they responded to unfinished scripts and multiple re-writes. *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek* is, perhaps, an exceptional case in this respect but it is not unique: the Code provided a regulatory framework open to negotiation, rather than absolutes.

Notes

1. Sandy Sturges interviewed in "Censorship," (2005, 04:47). Phrases about obeying the letter, rather than the spirit, of the law crop up repeatedly in work on Sturges: for example, see Greene (2011, 46); and Bernstein (2015, 87).
2. Slowik's analysis includes a couple of scenes which we do not discuss in detail (2017, 39-45). See also: Henderson (1995, 561–564); Grindon (2011, 109–113); and Bernstein (2015, 98–101).
3. Although Jacobs did not contribute directly to this article, we are indebted to her insightful analysis of the military party and key scenes on either side of that sequence, which helped shape our understanding of the film's audacious approach to the Code.
4. Bernstein (2015, 93; see also 90 and 100); Sikov interviewed in "Censorship" (2005, 04:15).
5. For more on film criticism as an intersubjective form of interpretation, see Clayton and Klevan (2011, 3).
6. "PCA File: *Miracle*," Luraschi to Breen, 15-20 October 1942. A previous draft had been withdrawn by Paramount in September: "PCA File: *Miracle,*" Luraschi to Breen, 11 September 1942.
7. Ibid., Breen to Luraschi, 21 October 1942.
8. Ibid., De Sylva to Breen, 4 December 1942.
9. Ibid., Luraschi to Breen, 12 February 1943; and PCA to Luraschi, 19 February 1943. The line in question was "So your mother told me", which was changed to "That's what they tell me".
10. Ibid., Breen to Luraschi, 21 October 1942.
11. "Substitution," "omission" and "elision" are my terms to describe distinct strategies, rather than words Sturges himself used to describe his approach. The PCA correspondence typically uses the verb "eliminate" rather than "omit" or "cut"; it occasionally uses the phrase "suggest the substitution of" when recommending changes to the script.
12. During the early stages of script development, Sturges did explore the possibility of Trudy's husband reappearing: July script notes and scenes refer to this figure as THE CHARACTER X, GUEST, and BENNY – but these three versions are distinctly different from each other, and none correspond exactly to Ratzkiwatzki. See Henderson (1995, 536–539).
13. "PCA File: *Miracle*," Breen to Luraschi, 21 October 1942.
14. All script quotations use this version: page numbers refers to Henderson's book (the letter-number refers to the script's sequence-scene numbers). Where dialogue is not referenced, the quotation is taken from the finished film.
15. "PCA File: *Miracle*," Breen to Luraschi, 23 October 1942.
16. Ibid.

17. Ibid., Breen to Luraschi, 21 October 1942.
18. On the party sequence, see also Henderson (1995, 559–564) and Grindon (2011, 109–111).
19. The second of these soldiers has a distinct curl in his hair (like the hypothetically "curly-haired" Ratziwatzki) and is also Trudy's dance partner at the roadhouse.
20. For more on the War Department and Office of War Information's (OWI) demands, see Slowik (2017, 45–648).
21. "The Production Code," reprinted in Belton (1996 [1930], 139 and 147).
22. "PCA File: *Miracle*," Breen to Luraschi, 21 October 1942 (my italics). It was De Sylva who insisted Trudy "refuses champagne – she never drinks" (quoted by Henderson 1995, 560); see also Slowik (2017, 40–42).
23. Sturges ignored the PCA's suggestion that this soldier should not be shown drunk. "PCA File: *Miracle*," Breen to Luraschi, 28 October 1942).
24. Indeed, Slowik notes that "Many reviewers simply stated that Trudy was drunk without even acknowledging that they were making an inference. *Daily Variety* wrote that Trudy 'consumes too much spiked lemonade'" (2017, 44).
25. Slowik analyses Trudy's "morning-after" scene with Norval in detail, arguing that Sturges slipped the scene past the PCA and Paramount by shooting the sequence on 27 October, *before* Breen's office had approved the revised dialogue (on 28 October), supporting his argument about the "piecemeal" reviewing process (2017, 42–44).
26. "PCA File: *Miracle*," Breen to Luraschi, 21 October 1942.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid., 21 October 1942, 28 October 1942, and 30 October 1942.
29. Ibid., Breen to Luraschi, 21 October 1942.
30. There is also a practical explanation. The script includes a short scene of Norval arriving home at this point, where his neighbours see the "Just Married" sign on his car; onscreen, the "Just Married" sign falls off outside the cinema, and the neighbours talk to Norval outside the Kockenlockers instead. Moving Norval's scene potentially created the need for a dissolve to cover the gap in continuity between two separate takes of Trudy and Emmy.
31. The story outline is included in Henderson (1995, 545-47).
32. It seems appropriate here to quote the handbook written by Olga J. Martin, former secretary to Joseph Breen: "Pregnancy, or expected blessed events, should never be discussed as such in screen stories. Most censor boards not only frown upon, but almost always delete any such references. Any direct or crude reference to pregnancy in films is considered out of place exactly as it would be in any normal society where children are present. It is entirely acceptable of course to refer to the baby that is expected, but any reference to conception, childbearing, and childbirth is considered improper for public discussion" (1937, 178).
33. "PCA File: *Miracle*," Breen to Luraschi, 3 December 1942.
34. There was, nevertheless, at least one of these: the PCA files include censorship reports for different territories, and the line "some kind of fun lasts longer than others" was "eliminated" by the local censor board in Kansas. "PCA File: *Miracle*," Breen, Confidential Report, 18 February 194.
35. Ibid., Breen to Luraschi, 23 October 1942; see also 21 October 1942.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their gratitude to the participants in the workshop discussion at the Production Code: Criticism and History symposium, to the members of the

Sewing Circle (the close reading seminar at the University of Reading), and to Tom Brown and the journal's anonymous reviewer for their insightful feedback on earlier drafts of the article.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

Not applicable.

ORCID

John Gibbs http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0876-1798

Works Cited

Agee, James. 5 February 1944. "*The Miracle of Morgan's Creek*." *The Nation* Reprinted in *Agee on Film: Criticism and Comment on the Movies* Series Editor: Martin Scorsese, Introduced by David Denby. New York: Modern Library Paperback Edition, 2000, 57–60. Page references are to the 2000 edition.

Bernstein, Matthew H. 2015. "The Edge of Unacceptability': Preston Sturges and the PCA." In *Re-Focus: The Films of Preston Sturges*, edited by Jeff Jaeckle and Sarah Kozloff, 83–106. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

"Censorship: *Morgan's Creek* vs. the PCA." 2005. "*The Miracle of Morgan's Creek*." DVD. Directed by Preston Sturges. Hollywood: Paramount,

Clayton, Alex, and Andrew Klevan. 2011. "Introduction: The Language and Style of Film Criticism." In *The Language and Style of Film Criticism*, edited by Alex Clayton and Andrew Klevan, 1–26. London: Routledge.

Doherty, Thomas. 2007. *Hollywood's Censor: Joseph I. Breen & the Production Code Administration*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Greene, Jane M. Fall 2011. "A Proper Dash of Spice: Screwball Comedy and the Production Code." *Journal of Film and Video* 63 (3): 45–63. doi:10.5406/jfilmvideo.63.3.0045

Grindon, Leger. 2011. *The Hollywood Romantic Comedy: Conventions, History, Controversies*. Wiley-Blackwell.

Henderson, Brian. 1995. *Four More Screenplays by Preston Sturges*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Henderson, Brian. Winter 1985/1986. "Sturges at Work." *Film Quarterly* 39 (2): 16–28. doi: 10.1525/fq.1985.39.2.04a00050

Jacobs, Lea. 1997. *The Wages of Sin: Censorship and the Fallen Woman Film, 1928-1942*. Berkeley CA: University of California Press.

Kirby, David A. September 2017. "Regulating Cinematic Stories about Reproduction: Pregnancy, Childbirth, Abortion and Movie Censorship in the US, 1930–1958." *British Journal for the History of Science* 50 (3): 451–472. doi:10.1017/S0007087417000814

Maltby, Richard. 2003. *Hollywood Cinema*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Blackwells.

Martin, Olga J. 1937. *Hollywood's Movie Commandments: A Handbook for Motion Picture Writers and Reviewers*. New York: The H.W. Wilson Company.

"PCA File: 2012. "*The Miracle of Morgan's Creek*." Digitised in Leonard J. Leff, *Hollywood*. In *Moral Censorship, and the Motion Picture Production Code, 1927-1968*. Farmington Hills, MI: Gale Primary Sources.

Perkins, V. F. 2020. "Omission and Oversight in Close Reading: The Final Moments of Frederick Wiseman's *High School* (2017)." In *V.F. Perkins on Movies: Collected Shorter Film Criticism*, edited by Douglas Pye, 477–494. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

Slowik, Michael. Winter 2017. "On Deadline and Reviewed in Pieces: *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek* and the Production Code Administration." *Film History*." *An International Journal* 29 (4): 32–58. doi:10.2979/filmhistory.29.4.02

"The Production Code." 1996 [1930]. Reprinted with an Introduction by John Belton, ed. *Movies and Mass Culture*, 135–149. London: Athlone.