

Part II

**THE LITERARY
EXPERIENCE IN
VISUAL CULTURES**

THE MOVIE WAS BETTER

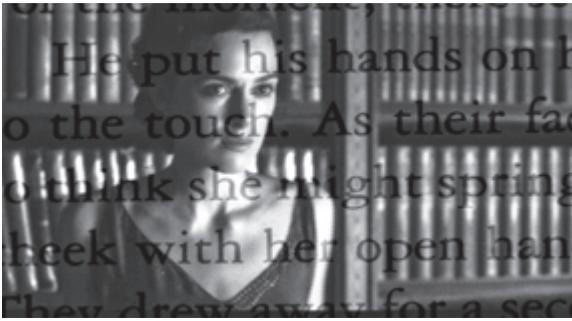
The Rise of the Cine-Literary

One of the most visible forms of both the popularization and relocation of literary culture has been the high-profile adaptation films produced by Miramax, Sony Pictures Classics, Fine Line, and Focus Features. Harvey Weinstein's explanation of the success of Miramax in a Hollywood dominated by high-concept blockbusters—"our special effects are *words*"—suggests just how important literary values were in that success story. But why do *literary* words function as successful special effects within what are alleged to be image cultures? Evidently, the literary creative process must hold some fascination for quality-film viewers. It's one thing for Shakespeare to be in love, but when the print advertisements for the film in which he does all this loving promise the viewer, "A celebration of life, language, and the creative process that has critics and audiences across America laughing and crying, standing and cheering," and then that "celebration" brings in over \$100 million, domestic box, it's abundantly clear that cinematic literary experiences of a very particular variety are being enjoyed on an unprecedented scale. A "Stand Up and Cheer" movie about the creative process?

This would seem, on the face of it, to be an unusual development, given the persistent demonization of the film industry by novelists and literary critics throughout the twentieth century. Hollywood was allegedly the pure distillation of the vulgarity of American culture, endlessly cast as the mass-cultural villain whose popular appeal and utter lack of artistic standards threatened to eliminate the audience for all things literary. Literary adaptations have been around for over a century, so why have they become so popular within the past decade? In its annual "Power Issue" in 1996, *Entertainment Weekly* named Jane Austen one of the Ten Most Powerful people in Hollywood, featuring a photograph of the author, pool-side, complete with cell phone and fax machine at the ready. A decade later, in spring 2006, the

adaptation film and the literary author appeared to be even more prominent. The film version of Annie Proulx's story "Brokeback Mountain," which had originally appeared in *The New Yorker*, garnered more Academy Award nominations than any other film, in addition to winning the Producers Guild Award, the Directors Guild Award, the Writers Guild Award, the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival; it was also named Best Picture by dozens of critics associations throughout the United States and earned more British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) nominations than any other film. Kiera Knightly was nominated for Best Actress for her performance in *Pride and Prejudice*, and Phillip Seymour Hoffman was the runaway winner of all of the acting awards for his role in *Capote*, a film whose very title obviously bore witness to the status of the author within the category of the prestige picture. In 2008 the allure of literary adaptations hit a new level, with the high-profile releases of *The Jane Austen Book Club*, *Becoming Jane*, and *The Kite Runner*, culminating in the Academy Awards, when adaptations of novels by the Great American Literary Novelist (Cormac McCarthy) and the Great British Literary Novelist (Ian McEwan) were in head-to-head competition for Best Picture, and *No Country for Old Men* (McCarthy) eventually walked away with the grand prize. The film version of McEwan's *Atonement* may have finished as an also-ran, but even as those awards were being presented, the novel was the bestselling book in North America, sitting comfortably atop both the trade and the mass market paperback lists, with a cover photo featuring Kiera Knightly, now clearly "the face" of choice for *Vogue* magazine and British literary fiction of any vintage. Although McEwan was not in attendance for the Oscar ceremony, Cormac McCarthy was there, and television cameras cut to close-ups of his face every time the adaptation of his novel won an award throughout the evening. The intercutting between Joel and Ethan Cohen at the podium and McCarthy looking on approvingly in the audience was a perfect visualization of *cine*-literary culture—all three authors were copresent at the moment the film was recognized as Best Picture of the Year. The literary genius was no longer in Hollywood via a parody image in *Entertainment Weekly*—he was there on the Red Carpet as the source and guarantee of the film's greatness.

That interdependency of novel and film is secured by far more than an Academy Award program. While I was watching the telecast, I went to Amazon on my laptop to see how the competition was deployed there. The home page for *Atonement* (Wide Screen Edition) directed me to the "*Atonement* Movie Page," where I encountered a Related Video ready for viewing,



7. Kiera Knightly and “the Words,” in the featurette “From Novel to Screen: Adapting a Classic,” from the DVD edition of *Atonement* (2008)

a list of links to the trailer and behind-the-scenes featurettes, and images of the cover of the paperback edition of the novel, with Kiera Knightly and James McAvoy in vivid color. There I also found an extended interview with the screenwriter Christopher Hampton about the adaptation of McEwan’s novel, and another feature, “From Book to Script to Screen,” detailing Hampton’s favorite adaptation films. The text above the paperback edition covers epitomized not just the interdependency of novel and film but their virtual interchangeability: “Read the Book, Then See the Movie, or Vice Versa.” I then clicked to the paperback homepage of the book, where I found another special message box urging me, “Start reading *Atonement* on your Kindle in under a minute. Don’t have a Kindle? Get yours here.” And while McEwan may not have been in attendance at the Academy Awards, he was the featured player in the “From Novel to Screen: Adapting a Classic” featurette in the DVD edition of the film, where he was joined by the film’s director, Joe Wright, along with Christopher Hampton and Kiera Knightly, talking about how the novel was adapted. Throughout this featurette there were several extreme close-ups of passages from the novel and, at one point, the long dissolves between faces and text resulted in a momentary superimposition that is the very essence of cine-literary culture. Here literary prose and movie star face were completely imbedded one within the other, each elevating the other in a hybrid cultural entertainment that was as dependent on the words as it was on the glamorous image, each functioning as the “special effects” for the other. The seamless, simultaneous, interconnection of novel, film, featurette, Web site, and digital reading device is the foundation of cine-literary culture, and within this culture, reading the book has become only one of a host of interlocking literary experiences.

How did all this become standard operating procedure? We can begin to answer that question only by situating the recent evolution of the adaptation film in reference to the increasing convergence of literary and visual cultures. Their interdependency is attributable, to a great extent, to infrastructural changes within the entertainment industry. Miramax, itself a division of the media conglomerate Disney, produces films, but it also publishes Miramax Books and issues soundtrack albums, just like any media conglomerate; and Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and Borders provide all of the above at one location. Yet this realignment between the film and publishing industries does not entirely explain why cinephilia and bibliophilia have grown together, rather than keeping their usual distance. The adaptation mania that exploded in the nineties, and that appears to be only intensifying a decade or more later, depends on the reconfiguration of those pleasures in an expansive “cine-bibliophilia” that could be “authorized” only by realignments in taste cultures that suggest profound changes in the relative status of both reading and watching.

Within this cine-bibliophilia not all adaptations are created equal. Some are merely film versions of literary texts, and others are products of a particular reading/viewing culture, where they circulate as a singular kind of cultural experience that provides equal measures of literary and cinematic pleasure. Consider the profound differences between *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008) and *The Reader* (2008) as adaptation films in this regard. Both were among the most prestigious films of the year; both were nominated for Best Picture in the 2009 Academy Awards, as well as for Best Adapted Screenplay, Best Director, and Best Cinematography; and both films won major acting awards at the Screen Actors Guild and the Golden Globes. On the face of it, those nominations and awards might make them seem roughly comparable as adaptation films, since they were grouped together in the same category so many times. Yet as adaptations they were circulated in vastly different ways. *Slumdog Millionaire* was based on a little-known novel by Vikas Swarup entitled *Q & A* (2005), which was retitled *Slumdog Millionaire* for its movie tie-in edition. The movie tie-in edition of *The Reader* on the other hand, sported a “#1 National Bestseller” sticker and needed no title change, which is not surprising, given the fact that the novel version of *The Reader* had already been a national phenomenon as an Oprah Book Club selection. It was a quality pre-sold concept for a massive, yet very particular reading/viewing community carefully cultivated and maintained by Oprah, Weinstein Pictures, Barnes & Noble, and Amazon, where two

paperback editions of the novel were available during the film's theatrical release: the movie tie-in edition featuring Kate Winslet and the Oprah Book Club edition. But there was another essential difference between these two adaptations—their respective attitudes toward literary reading. In the case of *Slumdog Millionaire*, everything that counts for meaningful knowledge is gained through the main character's experience in the streets of Mumbai. *The Three Musketeers* is a key point of reference, but none of the main characters ever reads Dumas or any other novelist—genuine learning is not to be found in books. In *The Reader*, on the other hand, the narrator's relationship with Hanna is defined largely in terms of the books he reads to her so lovingly, first aloud and then on tape, with each and every title duly catalogued. In *Slumdog Millionaire*, the literary is irrelevant; in *The Reader* it represents a thoroughly transcendent realm. As an Oprah Book Club novel that details how an illiterate woman eventually learns about the transformative power of reading, it was a Miramax-Weinstein Picture waiting to be adapted, in this case by the usual Miramax subjects—the producer Anthony Minghella, the director Stephen Daldry, and the screenwriter David Hare.

Given the sheer volume of adaptations that have appeared over the past two decades, there is obviously no way one could do justice to their diversity except in an entire series of books. In these next two chapters I want to provide a framework for understanding the adaptation film as more than well-upholstered, pseudo-literariness for a niche audience. I will begin by charting the evolution of the adaptation, paying particular attention to how it was transformed from the *Masterpiece Theatre* public television phenomenon in the seventies, to the high-profile Merchant and Ivory films of the eighties, to the Miramax juggernaut of the nineties, which established an entirely new way of making and marketing adaptations that is still solidly in place and winning Academy Awards, year in, year out.

In order to identify the most significant changes that have occurred over the past two decades in a manageable way, I will look first at Merchant and Ivory's *A Room with a View* (1985) and then analyze the “Miramaxing” of the adaptation, placing special emphasis on three of the most high-profile successes, *The English Patient* (1997), *Shakespeare in Love* (1999), and *The Hours* (2002). I have chosen these particular films because they exemplify the main categories of the recent adaptation film—the canonical British novel, the “Shakespeare project,” and the contemporary prize-winning British and American novels—and it is only through a close comparative analysis of the interplay between the aesthetic and commercial aspects of these adap-

tations that both recurring patterns and significant variations come into sharp relief. My goal is to delineate through close readings of these films what Merchant-Ivory and then Miramax came to mean as quality brand names, but I also explore how their success depended on the fashioning of a new *cine*-literary culture in which those films could resonate as “literary experience” and “prestige film” simultaneously.

In this chapter I also consider why academic film study in the United States has, until quite recently, been unable to come to terms with the proliferation of adaptations as a widespread popular phenomenon, except in terms of articles devoted to specific adaptations, most often written by professors of English and almost universally consumed with questions about the fidelity of particular adaptations that are judged, almost as universally, as inevitably inferior to the original. For all their apparent refinement in terms of stylistic analysis, far too many of these fidelity-based analyses have all the subtlety of a professional wrestling match in which Jane Austen battles Vulgar Adaptation in a steel-cage death match, and we all know it’s going to be Jane who will be spinning her opponent around over her head before she slams him to the mat of legitimate literary culture. The main limitation of this approach is that it conceives of the adaptation process so one-dimensionally, as a direct transposition from page to screen. Between that page and the screen comes a host of intertextual networks — Web sites, television interviews, soundtrack albums, magazine feature stories, reading clubs, bookstore chains — which embody the increasing interpenetration of literary and visual cultures in terms of both delivery systems and the production of taste. Where the fidelity approach makes the intentions of the author the foundation of the adaptation process, I will examine how the author is used to *authorize* a host of pleasures that complicate the simple transfer from page to screen. This is not to suggest that the sort of stylistic concerns that have been paradigmatic within the fidelity approach (point of view, characterization, etc.) are not worth pursuing, but rather that they should be recontextualized in terms of what now shapes that adaptation process, especially now that literary classics are being “refunctioned” by film companies that lay claim to their own version of a genuine literary experience by asserting their own love of literature.

This inevitably involves matters of taste, and if there is anything academic film study has avoided more strenuously than the adaptation film it is the entire category of taste. This was an inevitable development in the sixties, when film studies as a discipline had to distance itself from the world of

journalistic film reviewing with its stars, popcorn boxes, hankies, which made taste—who had it, who didn’t—something that had to be checked at the door of the academy if film was to become an object of serious study. By making taste a category akin to alchemy or some kind of black magic outside the discipline (or more specifically, the discursive formation that became a university education in film), the war of legitimation was won, but the vestiges of that victory have come to haunt the discipline in the form of intellectual class prejudices that foreclose certain ways of making sense of film as popular culture. Coming to terms with the adaptation film is a difficult task, because these films represent such a significant challenge to the way film study is supposed to be conducted, largely because they are best understood as part of a broader countereducation project being offered within the realm of popular culture that stands in direct opposition to the academy.

*Adaptation as Counterattraction:
From Anglophilia to Cinephilia (and Back Again)*

Providing an adequate back story for the adaptation film since 1985 is a daunting undertaking, given that adaptations are virtually as old as the medium itself and have enjoyed global popularity throughout its history, as is evident from their recurring appearance within virtually every national cinema throughout the past century. One could argue, even more pointedly, that the medium, both as industry and as moviegoing experience, was massively shaped by the move toward adaptation films in the pivotal transitional period of 1908–14. In their masterful study of this period, *Reframing Culture* (1993), William Urrichio and Roberta Pearson analyze the changing profile of what going to the movies meant during this period of cultural instability, which had resulted from massive immigration and the burgeoning popular entertainment industry. The maturation of the industry from sideshow curiosity to solid middle-class entertainment was to a great extent accomplished through a series of artistic and exhibition strategies spearheaded by the adaptation film. Characterized by social reformers as a “moral contagion,” nickelodeons had been placed in the category of enfeebling cheap amusements, along with sensational dime novels, dance halls, amusement parks, and so on. Uplift organizations such as The People’s Institute, the Educational Alliance, and the Bureau of Lectures attempted to combat this moral turpitude by culturalizing the masses through a series of “counterattractions.” The most visible form of counterattraction was the

public lecture, dedicated to bringing the best that had been thought and said to an audience who, according to Henry M. Leipziger, director of the Bureau of Lectures, “responded to the yearning call for the higher life, who trudged willingly as pilgrims to the fountain of truth” (*Reframing Culture*, 36). When the New York mayor Frank McClellan bowed to public pressure and revoked the licenses of over five hundred nickelodeons in 1908, it became imperative for the industry to redefine itself in the public imagination, primarily by repositioning moving pictures, or at least a certain kind of picture, as a counterattraction.

This need to make “high-class educational pictures” inevitably depended on literary adaptations, because their cultural pedigree brought instant legitimacy. French and Italian film companies such as Pathé, Gaumont, Ambrosio, and Milano had already begun to produce literary-based quality films, commonly referred to as “film d’art,” which were exported to the United States beginning in 1908 to exploit this need for uplifting subject matter. Vitagraph became the first American film company to produce this sort of quality film and, even though they represented a relatively small percentage of its overall production, they were skillfully promoted by the studio to give Vitagraph a distinctive profile, making *quality* a matter of brand recognition. Urrichio and Pearson detail Vitagraph’s adaptations, particularly its ambitious Shakespeare productions such as *Julius Caesar* (1911), but perhaps their most significant point is that the move to adaptations was highly overdetermined. These films may have been promoted in terms of the industry’s drive for respectability (the moving pictures could bring *culture* to the people just as well as the public lecturers), but this apparently altruistic, uplifting mission was also a matter of studio product differentiation for domestic and foreign distribution, made even more profitable by the fact that Shakespeare was a pre-sold concept whose works were in the public domain—“Shakespeare was not only respectable but free” (69).

The promotion of the adaptation during this period reflects a complicated interplay between financial and cultural capital. During this period, “high culture” was being marked off as such by cultural entrepreneurs who were determined to preserve it by moving it out of the realm of the marketplace. Paul Dimaggio’s work on the Boston Brahmins and their attempts to exercise hegemonic control over a cultural life threatened by the onslaught of Irish immigration beginning in the middle of the nineteenth century is especially relevant here. In an essay published in 1991, he recounts how their success in framing culture in terms of a nonprofit profile, over and against

the commodified pulp entertainments, was widely imitated throughout American cities, making the nickelodeon the seemingly natural enemy of genuine culture because it was so relentlessly for profit. The Brahmins' use of Shakespeare, Dickens, and company—all once unashamedly caught up in the concerns of the marketplace and only recently shorn of that taint through their relocation within the realm of Carnegie libraries, the legitimate theater, and the public lecture—led to a series of elaborate maneuvers by film companies and nickelodeon operators who wanted to pack the audience in with the sort of culture that wasn't supposed to be paid for at all, or at least not in those sorts of illegitimate venues.

Once the film industry's legitimation crisis subsided during the First World War, the rush to make adaptations cooled as well, but they retained the status of prestige picture during the classic Hollywood studio era, long after the battle to prove that movie going was an acceptable middle-class entertainment had been not only won but largely forgotten. If the Brahmins did not accept "the pictures" as legitimate culture, who cared, as far as Hollywood was concerned; movie going was a hugely successful entertainment for mass audiences that didn't subscribe to such taste distinctions, and the industry was happy to reign triumphant within the entertainment marketplace. When Hollywood faced another sort of image crisis in the early thirties, for its alleged sensationalizing of crime and sexuality, it responded with internal censorship in the form of the Hays Office, but also with a renewed emphasis on literary adaptations. The film education campaign undertaken by the industry, complete with direct appeals to teachers and film guides for movies such as *Little Women* (1934), has been carefully documented by Lea Jacobs (in an article in *Camera Obscura*, 1990) and Haidee Wasson (*Museum Movies*, 2005). The latter argues that during this crisis, "teachers became a regular aspect of marketing the rising number of classic literary adaptations and historical biographies that emerged during this period. Further, the names of Dante, Shakespeare, Dickens, and Tolstoy were used by industry spokespeople as transparent indices to industry goodwill in press releases and advertising campaigns" (12). In his study, published in 2000, of David Selznick's 1935 version of *David Copperfield*, Geurric DeBona details just how complicated, and internally conflicted, this campaign could become. He argues that, during the thirties, "prestige pictures played a crucial role in defining the public image of a company. Such films were especially important to the career of David O. Selznick, who was able to reap financial rewards and aesthetic dividends from overtly literary capital." The

fact that MGM at first resisted the project as a “highbrow period piece [that was] . . . not only costly but a bit too much for the average viewer” (III) reveals how far the industry had moved away from the legitimization crisis of the Vitagraph period. Culture was expensive and probably over the heads of the middle-class audience Hollywood now considered its own. Selznick prevailed, but only by convincing MGM of the lucrative potential of adaptation films in terms of product differentiation and the expansion of domestic and foreign markets. In a telegram he sent to Arthur Loew in the Metro New York office in 1934, Selznick argued that *David Copperfield* would “add hundreds of thousands of dollars to British Empire gross while still giving us a picture that would be as good for this country, and at the same time do wonders for the entire *standing* of our British company” (III, italics mine).

Once the censorship crisis subsided, adaptation mania cooled once again, yet the adaptation continued to enjoy a vestigial force within the category of prestige picture, even when the Arnoldian social uplift mission had been finally abandoned by the film industry. The marketability of that still vibrant anglophilia has remained an enduring feature of the Hollywood prestige picture. In her appraisal of the evaluative criteria used by the Academy Awards since their inception, Molly Haskell cites Hollywood’s love of “spectacle, epic and uplift” but also traces another current running alongside it, namely,

the all-important genuflection at the shrine of Britannia. Anglophilia runs like a low-grade fever through seven decades of Academy Awards, testifying to a chronic American crush on England. In the early days, this hero worship reflected a touching display of aspiration on the part of moguls anxious to improve their immigrant audiences, if not themselves. But what was our excuse in the second half of what has been called the American century, when we were still fawning over the British?” (“When Oscar Is Bad,” sec. 2, 1)

Haskell’s question is well put, but she poses it rhetorically without offering any explanation of what might explain that enduring fascination, long after legitimacy of the industry had been secured. Indeed, since the vast majority of prestige adaptation films that have been nominated for Academy Awards have been based on British novels, what explains the persistence of anglophilia that appears to be inseparable from the adaptation film?

We can begin to answer that question only by examining in greater detail

just when, and why that anglophilia has waxed and waned, particularly in regard to the evolution of another obsessive love—cinophilia. Haskell cites a number of representative examples of anglophilic fever, but she doesn't acknowledge the gradual diminishing of that fever in the sixties, and its virtual disappearance in the seventies—exactly at the same time that a cinephilic fever was rapidly spreading throughout Europe and North America. According to Susan Sontag (“The Decay of Cinema,” 1997) cinophilia was

a very specific kind of love that cinema inspired. Each art breeds its fanatics. The love that the cinema inspired, however, was special. It was born of the conviction that cinema was an art unlike any other: quintessentially modern; distinctly accessible; poetic and mysterious and erotic and moral—all at the same time. Cinema had apostles. (It was like religion.) Cinema was a crusade. For cinephiles, the movies encapsulated everything. Cinema was both the book of art and the book of life. (60)

Sontag's choice of words here is especially revealing. That films could be considered the *book* of life suggests that the power that books once had to instruct and inspire was now being taken on by cinema. Every religion needs its rituals, its sacred places, and its own specialized discourse. The cinephile experience at art house theaters, then, was not just a matter of going to movies at a different location but also the consecration of an emergent taste community. For Sontag, cinophilia meant that

going to the movies, talking about movies, became a passion among university students and other young people. You fell in love not just with actors but with the cinema itself. . . . Its temples, as it spread throughout Europe and the Americas, were the many *cinémathèques* and clubs specializing in films from the past and director's retrospectives that sprang up. The 1960's and the early 1970's was the age of feverish movie-going, with a full-time cinephile always hoping to find a seat as close as possible to the big screen, ideally third row center. “One can't live without Rossellini,” declares a character in Bertolucci's *Before the Revolution* (1964)—and means it. (61)

This exuberant cinophilia was profoundly anglophobic, because the formation of new taste hierarchies depended, to a very great extent, on the devaluation of British literary culture as a kind of international gold standard of educated taste. Among the university students Sontag refers to was a group of second-generation immigrants such as Francis Ford Coppola

and Martin Scorsese, who formed the “film school generation,” a group of directors who felt they needed to make no apologies for this medium and for whom the notion of culture installed by the Boston Brahmins to contain their ancestors was now there only to be challenged. Their cinephilia was defined in terms of the French New Wave; Italian directors such as Rossellini, Fellini, and Antonioni; and American genre auteurs—anything but the British adaptations, which were judged the antithesis of cinematic. While Coppola and company may have expressed admiration for Michael Powell or David Lean, cinephilia was dismissive of British film because, with very few exceptions, it appeared to be so dominated by a literary/theatrical cultural hegemony. This rejection of British film as somehow aggressively *un*-cinematic was neatly summed up by Truffaut’s often-quoted formulation, “British cinema, that’s oxymoronic, isn’t it?” It is hardly surprising then that as this generation rose to prominence, anglophilic fever was virtually eradicated in terms of Academy Awards. After *Women in Love* was nominated in 1970 in the Best Director and Best Actress categories, no adaptations of British novels receive nominations in the major categories for a decade, except *Barry Lyndon* (1975), a film promoted heavily as a lavish historical film by the American director Stanley Kubrick, rather than as adapted from a novel by William Thackeray. The taste hierarchies of cinephilia were shaped by a fascination with European art cinema and Hollywood movies, including even pulp Hollywood auteurs such as Sam Fuller and Edgar G. Ulmer, who came to define the truly cinematic. Within this cinephile taste cartography, Jane Austen, E. M. Forster, and company exemplified the sort of antiquated social and intellectual class distinctions that had to be rejected in order for a popular, visual medium to gain ascendancy as a medium of genuine culture; at this point, *Kiss Me Deadly* trumped *Pride and Prejudice* any day of the week.

This declaration of independence from the literary, specifically the rejection of anything that suggested that film needed to go to literature to acquire prestige, was also a vital component of the professionalization of film studies within the academy. Adaptation was a central concern of the film classes offered in American universities during the fifties and early sixties, but these were taught primarily within English departments rather than in the relatively limited number of film or communication departments then available, at a handful of universities. As film studies evolved into a free-standing discipline, complete with its own departments, professional societies, conferences, and journals, the adaptation-based course became

a vestige of an earlier prehistory, and as such was abandoned to English professors still keen to discuss whether Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* or Welles's *Macbeth* was more faithful to Shakespeare, a scholarly game in which fidelity was the preeminent concern and the superiority of the literary host text was indisputable. As film theory began to pursue increasingly rigorous approaches to the study of "the film language" through semiotic, psychoanalytic, and ideological analysis in the seventies, the adaptation-based course became a cottage industry within English departments, particularly as the need to show students at least some film or television version of English classics became one of the taken-for-granted of the profession, reflecting an instrumentality that only further diminished the allure of adaptation as an area of serious theoretical inquiry. Ginette Vincendeau summarizes the situation succinctly:

Although auteurism has been challenged, there has been a continued drive, in film studies, to explore the specificity of film art and language. This explains, then, the conspicuous gap that exists between the abundant production of books and articles on film and literature — which derive mostly from a literary perspective and the low profile of the topic in film studies. Though we find an interest in film and literature reflected in journals like *Literature/Film Quarterly* and in a few manuals, the fact remains that the key textbooks ignore it. (*Film, Literature, Heritage*, xv)

In short, at no time in film history has the adaptation been more ubiquitous, and at no time has American film studies been so poorly prepared to make sense of the causes, functions, or ramifications of this phenomenon. In his introduction to his seminal collection, *Film Adaptation* (2000), James Naremore argues compellingly that, as long as adaptations continue to be such a significant aspect of global film production, they can no longer be ignored; but they can be productively revisited only if we can escape the tyranny of fidelity: "what we need instead is a broader definition of adaptation and a sociology that takes into account the commercial apparatus, the audience, and the academic culture industry" (10). The recently published collections by Robert Stam and Alessandra Raengo, *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Adaptation* (2004) and *A Companion to Literature and Film* (2007), have addressed this problem by vastly expanding the range of approaches employed in the discussion of adaptation films. The notion of a sociology of adaptation was first advanced by Dudley Andrew as a way of escaping the limited confines of fidelity analysis (1984). Andrew laid out the

pivotal questions that are rarely posed, let alone answered, in adaptation analysis in American film studies: “How does adaptation serve the cinema? What conditions exist in film style and film culture to warrant or demand the use of literary prototypes? Although adaptation may be calculated as a relatively constant volume in the history of cinema, its particular function in any given moment is far from constant. The choices of the mode of adaptation and of prototypes suggest a great deal about the cinema’s sense of its role and aspirations from decade to decade” (*Concepts in Film Theory*, 458).

To situate Andrew’s questions within the historical context they demand: How has the adaptation served British and Hollywood cinema since the mid-eighties, first as a niche audience alternative to the high-concept blockbuster and, more recently, as a dominant force within the “great bifurcation” of American film production, in which major studios now specialize in high-concept franchises but the specialty divisions within major studios now appear to *own* the Academy Awards? What has occurred within American film culture, in terms of industry infrastructure and in terms of broader shifts in popular taste, for the adaptation to experience this unprecedented level of popularity? What has led to not just the use, but the near domination of literary prototypes with the category of the prestige picture? What happens, at the most fundamental level, to the relationship between film culture and literary culture when that occurs?

A meaningful sociology of adaptation should be able to at least begin to answer those questions, but it demands a theoretical framework that can incorporate textual as well as industry analysis, and place those issues within the wider context of the history of popular taste. In his essay “The Dialogics of Adaptation,” Robert Stam lays out the foundation for an alternative approach to adaptation:

Film adaptations can be seen as a kind of multi-leveled negotiation of intertexts. . . . The source text forms a dense informational network, a series of verbal cues that the adapting film text can then take up, amplify, ignore, subvert, or transform. The film adaptation of a novel performs these transformations according to the protocols of a distinct medium, absorbing and altering the genres and intertexts available through the grids of ambient discourses and ideologies and as mediated by a series of filters: studio style, ideological fashion, political constraints, charismatic stars, auteurist predilections, economic advantage or disadvantage, and evolving technology. (67–68)

The great advantage of Stam's intertextual approach is that it situates the adaptation within a specific set of contingent circumstances but, at the same time, opens adaptation analysis to a wide range of formal and cultural concerns. Most important, it allows for the consideration of the multiple determinations that shape adaptations and the multiple pleasures they provide, even for viewers who may be unfamiliar with the source text. In other words, Jane Austen would not have been a key figure in *Entertainment Weekly's* "Power" issue if the audience for Austen films were limited to viewers eager to see just how faithful those adaptations of *Emma*, *Sense and Sensibility*, or *Mansfield Park* really were. Austen's celebrity cannot be even addressed by the old fidelity discourse because her popularity involves industry, audience, and taste considerations that have no place within that old interpretive game. The "mass audience" popularity enjoyed by such genteel literary figures as Austen, Henry James, and Forster can be explained only by exploring the other pleasures these films afford and the other uses they may be put to by both studios and audiences, many if not most of whom have not read the source texts in question and therefore find fidelity a non-issue.

The Merchant-Ivory Adaptation: Popular Culture as Finishing School

The culturalist, intertextual approach to adaptation study has been developed in sophisticated ways by British film scholars in the debates that have revolved around the "heritage film." Richard Dyer (2000), Andrew Higson (1996), John Hill (1999), Claire Monk (1995 and 2001), and Ginette Vincendeau (2001) have all examined the adaptations of British literature epitomized by the Merchant-Ivory films *A Room with a View* (1985), *Maurice* (1987), *Howards End* (1992), and *The Remains of the Day* (1992) in reference to the heritage industry that emerged in the United Kingdom in the 1980s. The number of museums in the United Kingdom doubled between 1960 and 1987, and a vital part of this expansion was the opening of country houses and estates through the National Trust and English Heritage foundations. Hill and Higson contend that adaptation film needs to be considered as part of a broader "museum aesthetic," embodying a fascination with uniquely British culture emanating from particularly glorious historical periods. Hill draws the parallel very precisely: "Just as the heritage culture permits Britain to carve out a niche for itself within the global tourist economy so heritage films may be seen to provide the British cinema with a distinctive

product in the international media market-place. Heritage films, in this respect, have held a particular attraction for US audiences where they have often performed much better financially than they have in the UK. . . . *A Room with a View*, for example, earned \$23.7 million in the United States and Canada while *Howards End* took in three times as much in the US (12.2 million pounds) as it did in the United Kingdom (where its gross was 3.7 million)” (79).

For Hill and Higson, the primary appeal of these cinematic adaptations depends on the visualization of a particular worldview that may be revisited touristically. As such, the style of these films is shaped by ideological factors that cannot be restricted to the intentions of Merchant-Ivory and others mining the same vein. According to Higson, the heritage films “offer apparently more settled and visually splendid manifestations of an essentially pastoral national identity and authentic culture: ‘Englishness’ as an ancient and natural inheritance, *Great Britain, The United Kingdom*.” This nostalgic vision produces a singular type of *mise-en-scène*:

Heritage culture appears petrified, frozen in moments that virtually fall out of the narrative, existing only as adornments for the staging of the love story. Thus the historical narrative is transformed into spectacle: heritage becomes excess, not functional, something not to be used, but something to be admired. . . . The effect is the creation of heritage space, rather than narrative space: that is, a space for the display of heritage properties rather than the enactment of dramas. In many respects, therefore, this is not a narrative cinema, a cinema of storytelling, but something more akin to that mode of early filmmaking that Tom Gunning calls the cinema of attractions. In this case, the heritage films display their self-conscious artistry, their landscapes, their properties, their actors and their performance qualities, their clothes, and often their archaic dialogue. The gaze, therefore is organized around props and settings—the look of the observer at the tableau image—as much as it is around a character point of view. (“Heritage Film,” 1996, 118)

While Higson’s opposition between narrative and heritage space is a compelling formulation, that relationship does not necessarily need to be cast as an either/or dichotomy. Martin Scorsese, a cinematic director normally thought to exemplify the opposite of the Merchant and Ivory picturesque style, has acknowledged the intensely visual nature of the latter’s films: “I like the beautiful detail in a lot of Merchant-Ivory films that use

English settings. One wide shot says it all. When Jim Ivory shoots a period room, the eye is there. Perhaps it's more in his cultural make-up to understand the décor, so that when he places the camera, it's right for that room, you really see that room and all its detail. I feel more comfortable placing the camera in an Italian restaurant, or a church or club, or a Lower East side tenement" (Ian Christie interview, 2001, 67). Scorsese's contention that cultural makeup determines the eye is crucially important, because it suggests that the cinematic is not an abstract set of stylistic predilections but a way of seeing that can take a number of different norms. Using Gunning's distinction between narrative cinema and a cinema of attractions, one could argue that virtually every film style that has managed to distinguish itself within global film cultures of the past two decades depends on a comparable excess, a *mise-en-scène* that distinguishes it from the Hollywood high-concept, whether it be British adaptations, Danish Dogme films, or Bollywood extravaganzas. But what is especially distinctive about the interplay between narrative and spectacle in the adaptation film is that the attractions function as a new form of counterattractions, forming an entire taste culture that depends on a way of seeing that also includes the eyes of viewers with a very particular cultural makeup, or to put it more precisely, eyes in search of a cultural makeover that is no longer shaped by a traditional cinephile sensibility.

Within the excessive *mise-en-scène* of the adaptation film, the organization of space exceeds any one character's psychological space, because these films assume a shared psychological space in which characters and audiences converge in the same taste community, at which point culture becomes spectacularized, forming the set of special effects required for the proper delivery of all those words—rather an unexpected development in films normally thought to be so dependent on their literary sources. To return to Stam, here the literary adaptation exists in a dialogic relationship not just to the source novel but to a host of bestselling opera recordings, travel books, shelter magazines, and even cookbooks. Viewing pleasure in this case is not limited to traditional notions of character identification; the gaze of the touristic viewer appreciates the subtleties of character psychology à la Forster, but only as one of a number of interdependent pleasures within the tableau. The scene in *A Room with a View* in which Lucy goes in search of George during the picnic outing is a perfect case in point.

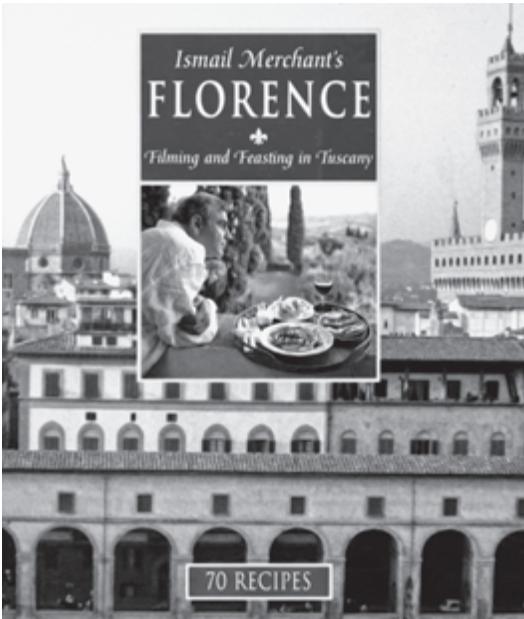
Here is the breath-taking star Helena Bonham Carter, wearing the exquisite costume, walking through the ever-popular Tuscan landscapes featured



8. Smorgasbord of cultural delights: Lucy Honeychurch (played by Helena Bonham Carter) in Tuscany, from the film *A Room with a View* (1985)

in bestselling travel books such as *Under the Tuscan Sun*, accompanied by a Puccini aria sung by Kiri Te Kanawa, from the singer's hugely successful recital disk of arias by Verdi and Puccini (a CD that will eventually sport the sticker "Featuring 'O Mio Babbino Caro' from *A Room with a View*"). Forster created the narrative situation, but he is in effect only one entry in the primer of tasteful living. The gastronomic delights that come with the Merchant-Ivory tour package have been promoted by Merchant himself in the companion cookbook, *Ismail Merchant's Florence: Filming and Feasting in Tuscany*, which includes his account of making the film, with behind-the-scenes photos alongside shots of Merchant in the local markets and lush still-life compositions featuring plates of Tuscan specialties and bottles of Tignanello deployed against the same breath-taking landscapes used in the film, the whole capped off by a recipe section with entries such as "Ismail's Explosive Pasta Sauce."

This simultaneous appeal to a number of rarefied tastes in which the literary and the cinematic become only two of a host of interdependent pleasures is the basis of this excessive mise-en-scène—but why is this particular excess, composed of what are seemingly such antiquated pleasures, so popular with contemporary audiences, especially in the United States, where the Merchant-Ivory films enjoyed their greatest box office success? In his essay "Anglophil(m)ia: Why Does America Watch Merchant-Ivory Movies?" Martin Hipsky argues: "What effectively allows one admittance to these movies is the proper accretion of what Bourdieu has called 'cultural capital'—the long-term social and educational investments that form the



9. Cover of Ismail Merchant's cookbook, from *Ismail Merchant's Florence: Filming and Feasting in Tuscany* (1994)

contours of one's cultural life and that, in accordance with their class affiliations, may concretely confer degrees of social status." What makes these films popular with an American audience, he continues, is a crisis in that system:

For these films are the undergraduate literature or art history major's dream; they constitute a veritable survey course in the art of high cultural allusion. *Room with a View* alone features references to Dante, Giotto, Michelangelo, R. W. Emerson, Beethoven, Greek myth, Goethe, and Byron. . . . In short, I want to suggest that the act of viewing an Anglophilic film may reaffirm one's accumulation of this type of cultural capital, at a time when the professional-managerial class and its aspirants feel the need of that reassurance. These movies appeal to people who want their increasingly expensive college educations to pay some cultural dividends. (103)

Hipsky is correct in asserting that these films do involve elaborate transactions in cultural capital, but the currency of that college education has

undergone a significant devaluation. The appeal of these films for an American audience can be attributed to another crisis—the realization that their expensive college educations have failed to provide the lessons in taste that they need to pursue upward mobility.

In other words, the popularity of the Merchant-Ivory films can also be attributed to what this audience didn't learn in college and now has to look for in the finishing school of quality popular culture. An American university education may provide a knowledge of canonical literature but no sense at all of how to express one's taste in terms of a lifestyle, a widespread cultural anxiety that has been stoked and gleefully tended to by taste merchants available through a variety of different delivery systems.

This crisis in terms of just what that expensive college education fails to provide, and which therefore must be sought elsewhere, is articulated very succinctly by Dominique Browning, editor of *House and Garden* magazine, in a letter to her readers: “Okay, I'm ready to sign myself up, and eager to enroll about 50 people I can think of just off the top of my head. I think it is time to admit we got a little confused, a few decades back, when we decided that higher education should not include instructions in, well, what do we even call it? How to appreciate the finer things in life? How to behave like one of the finer things in life? It's time to bring back finishing school” (20). She condemns the vulgarity of the beneficiaries of “big and instant money,” because they fail to appreciate that “the sense of the value of a thing—quite distinct from its cost—does matter. Much of the making of a home has to do with the making of a soul.” Her complaint about the difference between having money and having the proper sensibility sounds remarkably like Forster's position in *Howards End* and, at the same time, exemplifies Bourdieu's distinction between financial and cultural capital—but with a key difference. Browning's diagnosis of the problem identifies the operative assumptions that animate this taste crisis: that the acquisition of taste, unlike money, is a matter of the right education, that no one receives those lessons in how to live tastefully from a secondary or university education anymore, but that knowledge has to be found *elsewhere*, specifically from various forms of popular culture that provide the goods and, just as crucially, the information needed to translate consumer decisions into expressions of one's inner being. The notion that the chief objective of a higher education should be the acquisition of taste has indeed been rejected by an academy that considers any such notion of refinement to be, at best, antique and, at worst, ideologically repugnant, because it carries vestiges

of an educational system intended to maintain the hegemony of the upper-class values. But within this new evaluative dynamic advanced by *House and Garden*, along with a host of taste mavens like Martha Stewart, Terence Conran, and an entire design industry that labors to make décor an intensely personalized fashion statement, a higher education is judged essential but incomplete, in need of the finishing that only high-end popular culture can provide. Most tellingly, Browning locates the origins of this taste crisis “in the eighties,” when everything began to go wrong—exactly the same period when the Merchant-Ivory adaptations began to enjoy the box office success that suggested that their appeal had extended far beyond the old *Masterpiece Theatre* niche audience.

The expansion of that audience depended to a great extent on changes in how canonical literature was to be read, or more specifically how the enjoyment of the classics was fundamentally refunctioned. Just as the bestseller status of Tolstoy and Faulkner novels may be attributed to the ways in which they have been redefined by Oprah Winfrey’s Book Club, the cinematic versions of Austen and James novels represent a comparable reframing that changes the picture quite drastically—they *are* different novels, and not just because they have been transformed into images. They are different experiences now that they’ve been given value and function within a particular taste culture. In her study of how genre romance novels are read by their fans, Janice Radway found that it was not mere escapism that was the key to the success but rather another unforeseen use value: “Their attitude toward language . . . , rather than the text alone, is responsible for one of the most important claims about the worth and function of romance reading. Although the books are works of fiction, the women use them as primers about the world. The romance for them is a kind of encyclopedia, and reading, a process of education” (474). In much the same way, the adaptation film since the mid-eighties has become a kind of encyclopedia for a college-educated audience for whom viewing becomes a process of education in matters not addressed by that university education. The burgeoning popularity of the adaptation films in the eighties, which only continued to gather momentum throughout the nineties, was due to changes in attitude toward literary classics, which could now be read as taste primers in an education in graceful living that was becoming an entertainment industry unto itself outside the walls of the academy. The academy had sidelined itself by defining educated reading in terms of the appreciation of an author’s vision or as a manifestation of a particular set of gender and class relations. Reading as a process of

acquiring lessons in love and quality consumerism was clearly not a move on the board within an academic reading formation, but that sort of education was thriving within the realm of popular culture.

The “sociology of adaptation” called for by James Naremore (for example, in his collection *Film Adaptation*) and Dudley Andrew (*Concepts in Film Theory*) necessitates situating the appeal of the adaptation within this broader crisis in terms of where and how one would acquire the requisite cultural capital, because it reveals so much about the excessiveness of this mise-en-scène and, at the same time, suggests why film scholars from that academy have been unable to come to terms with the cultural forces that have shaped that excess. The avoidance of the literary adaptation is itself a significant part of that sociology. That academic film study was clearly on the “other side” in this taste crisis becomes especially clear when Higson, in his essay “The Heritage Film and British Cinema,” admits his own ambivalence about these films. He acknowledges that he initially wanted to perform an ideological critique of the heritage films:

But I had to take on board the fact that I also rather enjoyed these films, although I’m not sure I felt that I could admit as much, since this would reveal my own class formation, my own cultural inheritance, my attachment to the wrong sort of cinema for a Film Studies Lecturer. For Film Studies, it seemed to me, had established itself as a distinct discipline precisely by breaking away from respectable middle-class English literary culture, by celebrating the central texts of political modernism, by exploring what was seen as the specifically filmic, and by embracing popular culture. (238)

Higson’s admission of this guilty secret is significant in two regards. It provides the historical explanation for why the discipline of film studies had to distance itself from the British literary culture in order to define its borders as a particular discipline with its own conception of “culture.” And, just as important, this admission suggests a great deal about how that discipline was, and continues to be, a taste formation that defines the cinematic in ways that are cut to the measure of notions of cultural value determined in the 1970s, when the different forms of ideological analysis became increasingly prominent within that discipline.

The legitimation of film study, in both the American and the British academies, could not have been accomplished without challenging the literary as the international gold standard of cultural capital. Yet the inevitability

of that challenge should not blind film studies to the fact that its institutionalization as a discipline was to a great extent the result of a taste war, a back story that can no longer be ignored, now that the vestiges of those conflicts have reemerged in the form of the high-profile literary adaptations that have become the dominant form of prestige picture for the past decade. We need to reexamine the entire category of the cinematic, which served as the central taken-for-granted in the dismissal of these adaptations. The hidebound assumptions about what is, and is not, cinematic still to a very large extent depend on distinctions made by *Cahiers du cinema* critics in the 1950s, when battle lines were drawn between the quasi-literary and the truly cinematic. I think it is far more productive to consider how aggressively cinematic these films really are in reference to what film-viewing pleasures might consist of within contemporary image cultures. The alleged lack of a genuinely cinematic quality in adaptation films rests on two interdependent assumptions: first, that the cinematic is a way of seeing formed by an auteur's signature or, more generally, by a type of film practice that is immediately recognizable as art cinema (e.g., *Memento*, 2006, *Requiem for a Dream*); and second, that adaptation film is a picturesque way of seeing, closer to other unauthorized visual regimes associated with interior design and travel. The former is considered a legitimate form of visual spectacle, because it is somehow transformative, where the latter is touristic presenting spectacle solely for the sake of the viewers' pleasure. That dichotomy clearly needs to be reexamined in cultures where the circulation between the two has become increasingly elaborate in the formation of cine-literary culture in which novels, films, museum shows, and style magazines now participate in an intensely intertextual, interlocking visual culture, sharing many of the same pictorial codes and values for the same taste communities.

That interconnectedness represents the popularization of tastefulness on a grand scale, at which point, the adaptation film is clearly no longer a niche audience phenomenon but rather a mass audience, quality viewing experience that is tightly imbricated in a sophisticated visual culture driven by a conglomerate-based entertainment industry. The Merchant-Ivory films of the eighties and early nineties signaled the emergence of a growing audience for quality alternatives to mainstream mass entertainment and a commercial infrastructure to serve that audience in combines like the one that produced *A Room with a View* (Merchant-Ivory Productions, Cinecom, National Film Finance Commission, and Curzon Film Distribution). The Miramax adaptations of the later nineties represent a fundamental transfor-

mation of that relationship between audience and industry as the making of adaptation films moved from the cottage industry of international art cinema into the arena of Hollywood conglomerate. If the Merchant-Ivory films were, so to speak, the cinematic analogues of Sargent paintings in terms of their depiction of a certain class of characters in lush painterly style meant to be appreciated by a right sort of select audience, the Miramax adaptations of the nineties exemplified the massification of both that visual aesthetic and its intended audience. They were the cinematic analogues of John Singer Sargent as blockbuster museum show, an exhibition that drew over 800,000 patrons to the National Gallery and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts in 2001, at which point, Sargent as court painter to the idle rich became something other than coterie painter known primarily by art historians and art history majors. The exhibition of his paintings became the subject of full-page ads in the Sunday *New York Times*, just as ads for the film versions of literary classics by Austen, James, Wilde, Shakespeare, and Woolf had become fixtures there as well. How did the tasteful niche entertainment become an aggressively tasteful entertainment machine?