

“MIRAMAXING”

Beyond Mere Adaptation

Miramax Authors Quiz

Match the author with the writing hand:

(a) Will Shakespeare, (b) Virginia Woolf, (c) James M. Barrie



10. a



b



c

The success that Miramax films enjoyed in garnering Academy Awards from 1993, when it was acquired by Disney, until the Weinstein brothers left Disney in 2005 represents an unprecedented achievement in the history of film prizes—twelve consecutive years of at least one Best Picture nomination and 225 nominations overall. If one adds appearances on annual Ten Best Film lists, industry guild awards, and other critics' association prizes, that record looms even larger. No other production ever accomplished what Miramax did during this period—a virtual monopoly on prestige filmmaking, especially in those years when Miramax films won more nominations than all of the other studios combined. While Miramax made and/or distributed a wide variety of different kinds of films, their success in the awards game depended on the aggressive promotion of adaptations and literary-inspired projects, which came to define the contemporary prestige picture. The three close-ups that you see in figure 10, of hands of the author writing with quill or pen, are the “money shots” in Miramax Academy Award–winning films, in every sense of the term. Just as Amazon listmaniacs and television book clubs insist on their legitimacy within the realm of literary culture through their dedication to the love of literature, Miramax successfully realized a film version of that same passion by making the love of literature into one of its stable products—products paradoxically made profitable through the use of strategies developed within the world of high-concept filmmaking, formerly considered to be the virtual antithesis of all things truly literary. No studio has ever been this adept at transforming literary fiction into a cine-literary experience that transcended the category of mere “adaptation.”

*The Coming of Miramax, or How to Get from Art House
to Multiplex via the Rose*

In chapter 3 I established a context for the evolution of the adaptation film since the 1980s and then explored how the reception of those films inside and outside the discipline of film studies might form the basis for a sociology of adaptation. Here I concentrate exclusively on the Miramax adaptations and literature-inspired pictures that appeared between 1994 and 2004, exemplified by *Il Postino* (1994), *Emma* (1996), *The English Patient* (1996), *The Wings of the Dove* (1997), *Shakespeare in Love* (1998), *The Cider House Rules* (1998), *Mansfield Park* (1999), *Chocolat* (1999), *An Ideal Husband* (1999), *The Importance of Being Earnest* (2002), *The Hours* (2002), *Cold Mountain* (2003), and *Finding Never-*

land (2004). While Merchant-Ivory films like *A Room with a View*, *Howards End*, and *Remains of the Day* could garner multiple nominations and even win prizes in such categories as Screenplay Adaptation and Costume Design, and the occasional Best Actor Oscar, they were never in danger of winning Best Picture or enjoying blockbuster-caliber success at the box office. It was Miramax that made the literary adaptations that took over the category of Best Picture and exceeded the blockbuster threshold of \$100 million domestic box office on a regular basis.

Until its acquisition by Disney in 1993, Miramax was emblematic of the state of foreign and independent film distribution within the United States—a small but savvy distribution company that, with very limited capital, managed quite skillfully to reach its niche audience: a reduced, but still viable art house circuit. As such, they came to represent the quality alternative to high-concept blockbuster filmmaking, a dichotomy that became increasingly visible after the summer of 1989—Miramax was *Sex, Lies and Videotape*, the industry was *Batman*; the former seemingly depended on cinematic genius, festival prizes, and strong word-of-mouth support, while the latter was conglomerate film production, complete with tidal waves of advertising, merchandizing, and ancillary markets. After the acquisition of Miramax by Disney, the relationship between high-concept blockbusters and the world of small, quality films changed profoundly. The “studiofication” of independent production and distribution was becoming a trend by the mid-nineties, and by the end of the decade, major studios had either acquired an “indie” company (Fine Line became part of Turner Entertainment) or developed its own in-house division for “specialty” pictures (Sony Pictures Classics). This diversification of the studio as purveyor of both blockbusters and art films was replicated even within Miramax as it formed Dimension Films (a unit dedicated primarily to exploitation films such as the *Scream* series, *From Dusk till Dawn*, etc.) and began to develop two different types of art films.

In the decade after the acquisition by Disney, Miramax became the preeminent broker of art cinema in the global film market, practically cornering the market in “hipster” films such as *Clerks* (1994), *Pulp Fiction* (1994), *Trainspotting* (1996), *Swingers* (1996), and *Kill Bill Volumes I and II* (2004), which represented a complete rejection of all things literary, at least in terms of traditional taste hierarchies that might privilege Jane Austen over Sonny Chiba. At the same time, they reinvented the adaptation film that came to dominate the category of prestige picture and dominate the Academy

Awards. According to Peter Biskind, “As much as the Weinsteins might love Tarantino, *Pulp Fiction* was never going to win an Oscar; it was just too weird. But *The English Patient* could. The Weinsteins would provide a steady diet of high-toned, Masterpiece Theatre-style, Oscar-grabbing pictures often adapted from prestigious literary works. Miramax mined Jane Austen like a truffle-sniffing pig” (*Down and Dirty Pictures*, 277). While Biskind’s book is useful in terms of how it details the wheeling and dealing that made Miramax so powerful, he does not explore how these films became box office successes by appealing to an exponentially broader audience than the old PBS niche audience and, in the process, redefined the literary adaptation as anything but the stodgy, low production values associated with *Masterpiece Theatre*.

How did “Miramax” become shorthand for a very particular type of literary/film entertainment as well as an identifiable “taste formation,” in the sense that it signifies a successful consolidation of industry product and audience expectation based on a set of shared values regarding the combination of literary and cinematic pleasures? In his study of the formation of the major independent film companies, Justin Wyatt argues that “Miramax films have thrived due to its marketing savvy, particularly the ability to apply ‘exploitation’ techniques to art house product” (83). More pointedly, Tim Corrigan, in his analysis of the Miramax public image, argues that its central distribution strategies are “positioning, platforming, and word of mouth, all of which work to generate a shared loyalty, trust, and faith between viewers and the film” (*Film and Literature*, 173). Alisa Perren, writing in *Film Quarterly* on Miramax’s development of the “quality indie blockbuster,” also stresses the importance of image: “The Weinsteins and their staff grew increasingly adept at selling positive images of themselves and their company along with their films” (31). Despite the proliferation of stories in the press about Harvey Weinstein’s vulgarity and ruthlessness, the aggressive marketing of art house titles went hand in hand with the careful exploitation of a rhetoric of quality for the company itself and its audience, even as it was moving its product out of the one arena where quality cinema was recognized as such. Where Vitagraph positioned its quality literary adaptations as a counterattraction to the pulp cinema produced by the rest of the industry by importing literary classics and thereby giving the legitimacy of nonprofit culture to mere moviegoing, Miramax positioned itself as a counterattraction to the Industry, but only by taking the art house film (which was as close to quality nonprofit culture as cinema could get in

the United States) out of that realm directly into the marketplace, namely, the multiplex. Miramax was able to preserve the vestiges of the art house pedigree while moving its films into the world of wide-release general exhibition, giving the product the aura that once came with the scarcity of availability, yet somehow maintaining it within a realm of ubiquitous access and saturation advertising. The copy in the print ads used for Miramax titles such as *An Ideal Husband* and *The Importance of Being Earnest* boasts that these films are “The Perfect Antidote to the Summer Blockbuster.” Yet, when Steven Soderbergh delivered his trailer for *Sex, Lies and Videotape* to Miramax, it was rejected because it was judged so abstract that it could only result in “art house death” (quoted by Perren, 31).

The creation of this new terrain for quality cinema, between blockbuster movies and the art house cinema, involved more than just product differentiation and brilliant marketing—the success of Miramax depended on the creation of a new film culture in the nineties, in which traditional relationships between art and commerce, and literature and film, were redefined in unprecedented combinations. Miramax’s enormous success in terms of both Academy Awards and box office returns may be attributable to high-concept promotion of art house titles, but that strategy was only part of a broader series of interconnected developments that changed the *location* of quality film in the nineties—location measured in terms of where one went to actually see these films, but also in terms of where these films were situated in the hierarchies of American popular taste. This involved nothing less than the transformation of art house film culture that positioned itself as the only alternative to blockbuster-driven Hollywood, a culture that was still dominated, to a great extent, by the vestigial force of the European art cinema of the sixties and the taste distinctions that circumscribed a quality film experience.

The Weinstein brothers have repeatedly described themselves as products of a sixties art house education, which has served as the foundation for their rhetoric of quality. In an article that appeared in the annual Academy Awards issue of *Vanity Fair* (April 2003), Bob Weinstein begins the Miramax story by saying that he and his brother Harvey founded their company in 1979: “Harvey is the public face of Miramax, a role born out of the necessity to win recognition for the ‘art house’ films we began our careers by distributing—films of high quality, but most of them sorely lacking in bankable stars. Harvey tapped into his inner showman and became the voice these small jewels needed to win the recognition they deserved.” The

combination here of “inner showman” and “jewels,” is the basis of this re-formulation—artistic genius can only be delivered through the agency of marketing genius. That the art house experience, once it was rethought in terms of marketing potential, could become more than a holy place for cinephiles to gather becomes even more explicit in his account of their first “art film” adventure with their father. According to Weinstein, most of their moviegoing consisted of standard genre fare until

Harvey started pressing to go to a foreign film. Being 15 and having been to a few on his own already, he argued that it was educational and cultural and a bunch of other things that made me think my brother had lost his mind. I was 13 and I didn't want to read my movie! Before I could protest too much and ruin the plan, he took me aside and explained: the name of the film was *I Am Curious Yellow*, a specially imported Swedish “art” film. We needed our father in order to get in because it was rated X. Suddenly foreign didn't sound like such a bad idea. . . . I know that Harvey has been quoted in many articles as saying *The 400 Blows* was one of his favorite foreign-language movies ever, but I can tell you what mine was at that moment in time—I was 13 after all! There was no chance of my falling asleep. But Harvey was just older enough to notice something else: a packed audience of “art-lovers” who never would have set foot in a movie with subtitles but for the fact there was a little something extra added. It was a lesson that would come into play years later. (44)

That “art films” were popular with crossover audiences as *adult films* is not in itself a revelation—the widespread perception that art cinema meant sexy cinema has been detailed by Barbara Wilinsky in her study of the art houses of the 1950s (*Sure Seaters*). What is especially significant here is the phrase “a little something extra” that explains the appeal—jewels alone don't pack the house. To return to Sontag's account of the art film experience during this same period, there is no mention of the something extra, and art film is referred to without quotation marks. One could argue that the something extra factor, that “x” which mainstream movies did not offer and art house did (in addition to all that cinematic artistry) has always been responsible for making certain art films appealing to the crossover audiences of non-cinephiles, whether it be sex in the case of *Blow-Up*, stylized violence in *Reservoir Dogs*, or high-toned martial arts in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. Miramax in fact, was very successful at presenting art films as high-class pornography in its promotion of *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover*

(1998), *Tie Me Up, Tie Me Down* (1990), and *Ready to Wear* (1994), particularly through its ability to manufacture a media circus around its battles with the Motion Picture Association of America over the X or NC-17 ratings given to these films. (Tellingly, at the press conference Miramax organized to protest the rating of *Ready to Wear*, it was represented by superlawyer Alain Dershowitz and supermodel Helena Christensen, who was featured, next to nude, in the poster for the film.)

Miramax had the perspicacity to see that there was another “little something extra” that would draw the crossover viewers in the nineties: *taste*, which had become the sex of the nineties. Taste, or more specifically how to get it, was as foreign to Hollywood action films and teen pix as adult sexuality had been in the fifties, despite the fact that it was otherwise ubiquitous in popular culture in the form of the gastro-porn and décor-porn that were becoming phenomenally popular through cable television and shelter, food, and lifestyle magazines. Tasteful romance, that is, romance between attractive, cultured individuals in the right sort of clothes and locations, whose own lifestyle could serve as a primer for a host of interdependent pleasures—sexual, literary, touristic, gastronomic—became the stable product of the Miramax films of the nineties, from the conflation of sex and food in *Like Water for Chocolate* (1992) and *Chocolat* (1999) to the explicit celebration of romantic hunk as taste machine in *Kate and Leopold* (2002), in which the hero has his showdown with his rival for Kate’s affections in a fashionable New York restaurant and humiliates him by demonstrating that when it comes to taste, size matters. I introduce *Kate and Leopold* here even though it is not an adaptation film, because the character of Leopold is a creature of the nineties adaptation, the personification of the sort of romance promoted by these films and the sort of taste that serves as its foundation. Leopold knows everything about painting, opera, wine, and food but apparently has never been to “the pictures.”

As a way of determining just how identifiable the Miramax style has become within American film culture, I asked the students in my contemporary Hollywood class in the fall of 2002: “Imagine a new Miramax adaptation is opening this Friday at the local multiplex. What would you expect it to be like?” I include their responses here because I was struck by how effortlessly they were able to sketch out a set of expectations. Despite the fact that many of the films that are considered to be emblematic of Miramax were first developed at other studios and then acquired by Miramax when financing stalled and most have been coproduced with other studios, an

identifiable Miramax style has nonetheless been established within American film culture. According to my undergraduates, who have all come of age, cinematically speaking, during its rise to prominence, a Miramax adaptation had the following:

1. Big, passionate love story: involving quality characters who are attractive and articulate but not intimidating intellectually
2. Both prestige actors (mainly European, e.g., Binoche, Scott Thomas, Bonham Carter) and movie stars (Paltrow, Depp, Kidman, Affleck) in same casts
3. Lots of “classy” dialogue: obviously not contemporary American conversational speech, but perfectly understandable to current audiences
4. Visibly “literary” in some way: authors as main characters, characters shown writing, reading, close-ups of books or libraries
5. Geographic exoticism: featuring settings most appealing to American college-educated audiences—English countryside, Tuscany, the south of France, North African deserts
6. Historical exoticism: period pictures ranging between 1820s and 1940s
7. Lush visual style: showcasing the dialogue but never taking precedence over it or calling attention to stylistic experimentation (“not Aronfsky or Lynch, in other words”)
8. “Foreign feeling”: that is, foreign compared with mall movies but not really foreign as such (“art cinema lite”)
9. Not age-specific in terms of audience appeal: “date movies” yes, but also the sort of films “you could go to on Christmas break with your mother and not feel too cheesy about it”
10. Widely advertised: “Your mother asks you if you’ve seen it yet,” though she doesn’t ask this of Miramax hipster films like *Swingers* or Miramax foreign films like *City of God*)
11. Extensively merchandized in quality formats: that is, adaptations currently in release likely to be immediately encountered upon entering at Barnes & Noble or Borders on new release tables at front of store, with poster for the film on the cover (also likely to see *making of* books, screenplays, etc.)

The list the students compiled within a matter of minutes suggests a number of very significant things about Miramax. In terms of brand recog-

dition, it has an identifiable profile that most corporations spend millions to create. These films have so defined the category of the adaptation film that the brand has become synonymous with the category item. When *Sense and Sensibility* (1995) was brought up as an example during this discussion, and it was quickly pointed out by other students that it was not a Miramax product, the response was, “Maybe not technically, but it’s still a Miramax movie.” The authorship of these adaptations of works written by, or directly associated with, major literary figures, was framed by my students in terms of neither literary authors nor cinematic auteurs but of a film company that is a division of a major media conglomerate, Disney (even though Disney never entered the discussion).

The high-concept adaptation that Miramax hybridized so successfully depended on the combination of things formerly thought to be not just mutually exclusive, but mutually antagonistic within the dominant taste categories of American culture. In other words, Miramax made the twain meet. These films, according to my students’ Miramax movie profile, combine actors and stars as a matter of course, seem both foreign and familiar at the same time, and are equally dependent on elegant words and beautiful images for their success. Yet perhaps the most important hybridization of what was formerly considered antagonistic is the way these films manage to radiate a quality *cultural* experience while being so intensively *marketed*. This ability to sustain in some sort of equilibrium the celebration of a literary experience on film and the marketing of that experience without invalidating it in the process was the key to Miramax’s prestige formula. But that kind of equilibrium can be maintained only by appealing to transcendent values that can transform mere commodity relations into enlightened cultural exchange.

In the case of Miramax, this was founded on two interdependent combinations — the intertwining of sexual passion with a passion for the literary experience, and the collapsing of film company and audience into a shared community of book lovers. Just as the book club neutralizes the taint of the commodification of that reading experience, through the appeal to a community of passionate readers whose love of reading and love of belonging are thoroughly fused together, Miramax successfully fashioned its own kind of community, in which creative personnel and devoted fans are imagined as part of the same cine-literary club. The charge that Miramax films “Harlequinize” the complicated love stories found in the literary texts that have been adapted is an oversimplification, because it fails to recognize how

loving in a Miramax adaptation is indeed a matter of overwhelming passion, but its manifestations are consistently expressed in terms of writing and reading for an appreciative audience that validates the transcendent nature of the experience. This conflation is nowhere more explicitly or succinctly expressed than in that advertising copy for *Shakespeare in Love*, which bears repeating here: “A celebration of life, language and the creative process that has critics and audiences across America laughing and crying, standing and cheering.” Note here how the eroticizing of the creative process is inseparable from audience participation, a point made even more explicitly later in the same advertisement: “Prepare to be ravished by a movie that excites and entrances on so many levels that it takes your breath away.”

The transcendent nature of this rapturous love of literature that appears to be nothing less than the most refined form of sexual passion is at the very heart of *Il Postino*. The figure of Pablo Neruda in this film is a paradigmatic example of the role of the author within cine-literary culture. The author is a cultural Titan because he or she is the singular voice responsible for all this passionate meaning, reigning supreme as love advisor rather than mere text function. The restoration of the author goes hand in hand with the revival of a premodern, decidedly Romantic aesthetic, in which literary achievement is measured more in terms of emotional impact than stylistic refinement. Neruda may be in this small town in Italy because he has been exiled from Chile due to his political activism, but once there, he becomes a *lover*, offering advice in affairs of the heart and dancing the tango with a degree of passionate intensity that convinces the viewer that political interests could only be a sideline.

That this kind of passion inspires a community, which then validates its transcendent power, is made explicit in additional material included on the original videotape release of the film. After the film and an extended advertisement for the soundtrack album, another trailer appears promoting an album of Neruda’s *Love Poems*. The roster of readers includes prestige actors such as Ralph Fiennes, Rufus Sewell, Miranda Richardson, and Willem Defoe, as well as movie stars and pop star celebrities in the form of Julia Roberts, Sting, Madonna, Wesley Snipes, and Samuel L. Jackson. The experience of the film is multiplied in high-concept form through the production of these commercial intertexts—two different recordings as well as a volume of Neruda’s love poetry published by Hyperion Books, a division of Miramax. But what distinguishes this from the merchandizing as-

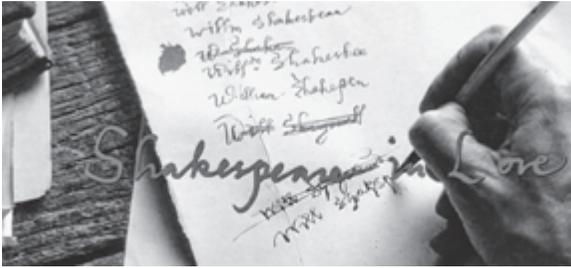
sociated with blockbusters is the attempt to present stars like Wesley Snipes and Madonna, who are synonymous with the most mainstream commercial entertainment, engaged in what labors to be a noncommercial venture. The voice-over in the *Love Poems* advertisement informs us that “in order to pay homage to Neruda, these celebrities got together” to record these poems out of sheer love for his work. Rather than a mere spin-off product, the *Love Poems* appear to be a spontaneous gesture of passion for literature, a kind of ad hoc, Poetry Live-Aid in which Sting and Madonna do charitable work for a noble cause. The “pay homage” formulation represents a fascinating interplay between financial and cultural capital—the former made possible by Disney-style merchandizing, the latter dependent on literary aura—that suggests a purer aesthetic realm in which celebrities and fans spontaneously form a community of book lovers.

This determination to fashion a shared community as part of the promotion of film in a manner that intensifies rather than strips away literary aura is exemplified by the special event organized for *The English Patient*. In February 1997, approximately a month before the Academy Awards, Miramax, through Disney’s book division, Hyperion Books, organized a kind of public reading that serves as a pristine example of cine-literary textuality. Using the poster for the film as its frame, this advertisement in the Sunday *New York Times* announced a charity event sponsored by two publishers, Vintage and Hyperion Books, for the benefit of the American Film Institute and the PEN American Center for Literacy (a division of the same organization that annually gives the prestigious PEN Faulkner Award, roughly comparable to the British Man Booker Prize). Here the figure of the actual author (Ondaatje) replaces the cinematic image of the author (Neruda) as a guarantee of cultural aura as he actually appears onstage. But this was not your ordinary author’s reading—this featured Ondaatje reading from *The English Patient*, and the film’s director-screenwriter, Anthony Minghella, reading from his *English Patient* screenplay. They were joined by the St. Luke’s Chamber Ensemble, which played selections from the soundtrack of *The English Patient*, conducted by the composer, Gabriel Yared. Here the author’s public reading, traditionally a uniquely literary ritual devoted to the celebration of the word, had acquired cinematic dimension, in terms of the sponsors, the charities, and the featured entertainers, resulting in an intertextual, intermedia form that was neither literary or cinematic but an unusual combination of the two. Within this context, the screenplay quite literally shares the

stage with the novel, gaining in prestige as it is given equal footing with that novel; the fusion between the two is made complete when Minghella proceeds to read from the novel and then from his screenplay.

Here, the celebration of words appears to be as much a cinematic pleasure as a literary one, a point made quite vividly in the convergence of Miramax Films and Vintage Books, chief American broker of quality, award-winning novels that come accompanied by a sophisticated book club and reading guide apparatus. This shared community also includes the book lover and cinephile in an advertisement made to resemble an invitation to a charitable event: "Please join us for an evening of readings and conversation." This was indeed a charitable, nonprofit event, but at the same time it also functioned as a magnificent promotion for the film during the Academy Awards voting period, a time when the legendary Miramax treatment is in full swing and special events are arranged for Academy members across the country.

The hybridization of the literary and the cinematic, made possible by the convergence of the literary experience and the marketplace is at the very center of *Shakespeare in Love*. The first thing we are told in the opening graphics is, "In the glory days of the Elizabethan theater two playhouses were fighting it out for writers and audiences." This sets in motion an elaborate relocation of the glory of literature not just within a commercial context but within contemporary Hollywood. The combination of graphics that resemble a description of the film business and the period images they are laid over produces a dual-tracked temporality; the point is reiterated in the opening tracking shot through the Rose Theatre, where Shakespeare's company was based, and by another graphic: "Across the river was the competition, built by Philip Henslowe, a businessman with a cash flow problem. . . ." The tracking shot comes to rest on a poster for a play, *The Lamentable Tragedy of the Moneylender Revenged*, which is followed by a bullet track to backstage, where Mr. Fennyman the financier is torturing Henslowe for the money he's owed. After a short dialogue scene in which the profit motive for producing plays is again reiterated, the author appears, if only a piece of him. The first two shots of Shakespeare produce a neatly constructed discrepancy. In the initial close-up of his hand, he is writing away, but as that hand moves across the page we see superimposed across that image in bold red graphic the title of the film, apparently written in cursive script by the man himself at that very moment. Here the author, the author of authors, is writing *Shakespeare in Love* in his own hand, guaranteeing the authenticity of the



11. Variations on Shakespeare's signature, from *Shakespeare in Love*

film that is signed by none other than Shakespeare himself. Yet the next shot appears to demythologize the moment, through a point-of-view shot in which we see that same hand writing signatures that don't look anything like the autograph in the red graphic that is still emblazoned over the image onscreen—which now shows us the same hand writing an endless series of signatures, none of them *right*.

The film may be about Shakespeare, literary god, the author of authors, but at this point he is so far away from that status that he is still deciding what to call himself, alternating between Will and William and trying out a variety of spellings for his last name. The discrepancy between these signatures, one emanating from within the period image, the other one coming from the graphics that have been established as a voice in the twentieth century, sets in motion a process of demythologizing and simultaneously remythologizing Shakespeare throughout the rest of the film.

Throughout this first third of the film Shakespeare is characterized as hack screenwriter on the make, incorporating plot lines suggested to him by Christopher Marlowe and seemingly more worried about his own cash flow problems than artistic creation. His artistry is mere pose at this point, little more than an affectation he displays like the leather jacket—it goes with the role. After a dialogue scene with Richard Burbage, in which the

production of plays is discussed only in terms of financial gain, the audience is apparently prepared to agree with Henslowe when he tells Will, “You see, *comedy*. Love and a bit with the dog, that’s what they want.” The fact that we see Queen Elizabeth laughing at the slapstick dog routine only validates Henslowe’s “give ’em what they want” sentiment. Given the film’s frequent recourse to a “wink-wink, this is really all about Hollywood” allegorical mode, Henslowe is the voice of the film business, the ironic deflator of any mystification of theater as Great Literature, telling us, in effect: “You see folks, it’s always been an entertainment business.” This approach goes unchallenged in the opening scenes of the film, because Shakespeare is devoid of *originality*, the indisputable requirement of genuine authorship, which is opposed to that marketplace — at least by the standards of the late twentieth century, which keeps elbowing its way onscreen.

And then everything changes, as Shakespeare finds not just his muse but also his collaborator/lover. The rest of the film remythologizes Shakespeare, not by restoring him to his former status as literary god, but by reinventing him as lover extraordinaire, his genius clearly depending on his ability to perform in bed and then write about it as quickly as possible, transcribing passionate conversation into literary dialogue. His originality is revealed to be the result of another collaborative process in which he no longer steals from Marlowe but fashions great literature directly out of his love life. This conflation of love life and literature, in which Shakespeare out-performs the tango-dancing Pablo Neruda in *Il Postino* is most explicitly visualized in the cross-cutting between the play rehearsal and the love scenes between Will and Lady Viola. Here the bedroom and the playhouse are fused into one continuous space through the repeated tracking shots, cross-cuts, and the very skillful use of bed posts and pillars accompanied by the continuous nondiegetic music, all of which make love talk and great literature seem indistinguishable.

In the midst of this intercutting, Will breaks away from his lover to go write, the script of *Romeo and Juliet* becoming an up-to-the-minute reporting of their love, as it is occurring. The shot of Shakespeare rushing to his writing table is obviously intended to echo the opening shot of him scratching out his signatures. Here, as we see the hand move across the page, the disembodied voice of Lady Viola seems to be speaking the line *as* he is writing it, a point reiterated by the quick cut to the pair in bed, where she is reading from the same page. Where the shots of the author’s hand that open the film stress only discrepancy, now there is only perfect union —



12. “Co-creation”: Will Shakespeare (played by Joseph Fiennes) and Lady Viola (played by Gwyneth Paltrow) turning love life into literature, from *Shakespeare in Love*

the hand writes and voice recites: “But soft! What light through yonder window breaks?” Writing the lines, reading the script, rehearsing the play, and performing the sex that inspires it all are all interdependent parts, the creative process becoming the enactment of pure desire, a point made most vividly at the end of the sequence as the cross-cutting between bedroom and playhouse accelerates, culminating in a tight close-up of Lady Viola’s face in full orgasm, the moment when passionate conversation and *literature* are as fused together as the lovers. There may be, as Lady Viola tells Will after they make love for the first time, something better than a play, namely sex, but the best plays about love are transcriptions rather than mere *inventions*.

This scene may epitomize the successful fusion of passion and passion for literature, but that convergence, in a Miramax movie, needs an audience, a shared community. I refer here not just to the wildly appreciative audience at the Rose, whose rapture and then thundering ovation are offered as proof of the instant appeal of the play. The appearance of Queen Elizabeth in such deus ex machina fashion to decide the wager only confirms that this is what audiences really want, even back then — quality love stories. But there is another audience in the film that confers even greater power on the play.



13. Lady Viola and Fennyman (played by Tom Wilkinson) enraptured, from *Shakespeare in Love*

In the midst of the cross-cutting between playhouse and bedroom there are two shots of the *first* audience. We see the actors in attendance, apparently mesmerized by the play as Ned and the others come forward to the edge of the stage to listen attentively, seemingly struck dumb by all those words. Most interestingly, after cutting back to the couple now just approaching orgasm, the cut back to the playhouse shows us Fennyman by himself, the money-lender now mesmerized by the play, artistry apparently overwhelming all commercial concerns.

The film offers its own proof that literary passion can collapse the bar between commerce and art by creating an experience so transcendent that it takes the breath away from Lady Viola and audiences everywhere—Fennyman is so swept away that he becomes an actor desperate to take part in this enrapturing experience. This transformation epitomizes the Miramax image as maker of quality cinema, itself the Moneylender Enraptured. The marketplace yields to great art. Henslowe remains the fool who doesn't quite get it as he looks mystified while Fennyman and the actors are overwhelmed by the play. Fennyman is so appalled by Henslowe's money talk that he literally kicks him out of the theater and apologizes to the cast for the

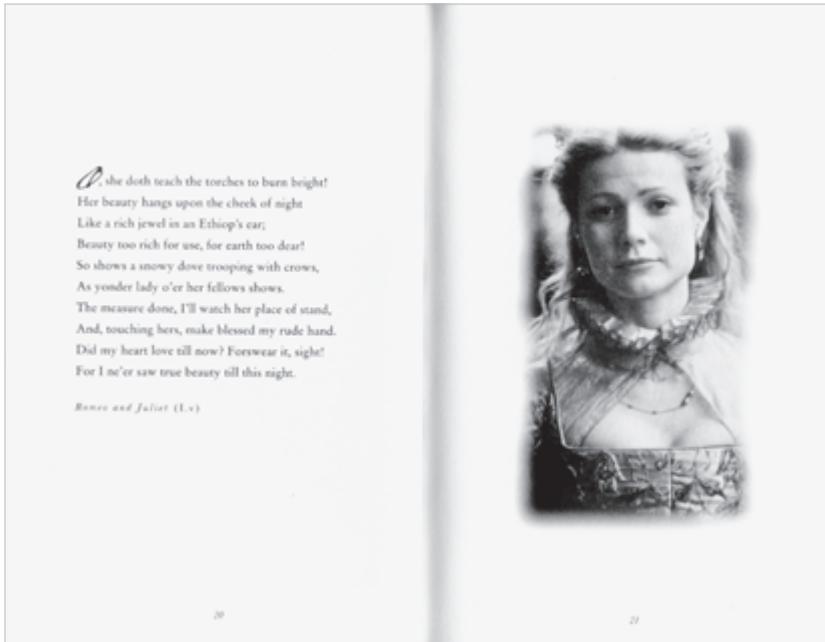
disruption, the commercial by this point having no place in the production of art, even for the financier.

Despite this celebration of literature that transcends the marketplace and this overt eroticizing of literary passion as the most refined expression of sexual passion, *Shakespeare in Love* was marketed so heavily that when it won the Academy Award for Best Picture, Miramax was accused of buying the Oscar through its massive advertising campaign. The day after the awards ceremony, in an article entitled “Mogul in Love with Winning” in the *New York Times*, Bernard Weinraub reported:

Executives at Dreamworks, including Jeffrey Katzenberg, have said in recent weeks that Mr. Weinstein has upped the ante by spending millions to promote *Shakespeare*. Mr. Katzenberg’s partners, Mr. Spielberg and David Geffen, were also known to be angry with Mr. Weinstein. . . . Bill Mechanic, chairman of Fox Entertainment, said, “It’s like the process of trying to win an election. It’s no longer about the material or the merit. It’s about how much money you spend. It’s not what the Academy founders set out to do.” (B1)

Here Weinstein, the enlightened financier in the style of Fennyman, is portrayed as a mogul perverting the artistic process by buying prestige, absconding with cultural capital it somehow isn’t entitled to in order to cash it in at the box office. This scenario reveals just how far Miramax had come, from distributor of alternative art cinema to a company that outspent all rivals in its relentless promotion of its films, to a point where the mainstream industry, exemplified by Spielberg and Katzenberg, are the injured parties invoking the Academy Awards as a measure of film quality, untainted by commercial interests. In a telephone interview with Weinstein conducted by Bernard Weinraub and reported in the same 1999 article in the *New York Times*, Weinstein provided a succinct formulation of the Miramax strategy,

The overall campaign from beginning to end for *Shakespeare* is \$30 million. It’s a bit less than the overall campaign for *The English Patient*. I’m not doing anything different to market these movies this year than any other year. We began the movie with a small release. Went wide. Got to the academy. And then the blitzkrieg was really in support of the commercial release of the film. *Shakespeare in Love* was \$38 million at the box office before the nomination. It’s \$66 million now. And it will be \$75 million by the time of the awards.



14. Illustration from the Miramax Books edition of Shakespeare's love poetry, *Shakespeare in Love: The Love Poetry of William Shakespeare*

“Getting to the Academy” is a crucial step in this process, because once the nominations are secured and the quality factor established, the nominations become the centerpiece of the two-pronged blitzkrieg aimed at the general audience and Academy voters with the expectation of exponentially greater box office returns. The extensive marketing of *Shakespeare in Love* involved more than just advertising, as Miramax merchandized the film in high-concept style through its simultaneous release of a number of ancillary spin-off products. The release of a soundtrack album and screenplay are, of course, standard operating procedure even for the most “independent” films, but Miramax Books also released *Shakespeare in Love: The Love Poetry of William Shakespeare*. This volume is another perfect example of cine-literary culture, since it so neatly hybridizes the literary and the cinematic, featuring excerpts from the plays and the sonnets accompanied by stills of Joseph Fiennes and Gwyneth Paltrow, which function as illustrations on the pages facing the poems.

These pairings of verse and film stills are punctuated with two-page spreads featuring slightly gauzier stills with Shakespeare's handwriting,

the same handwriting we see in the film, now laid over the image as a kind of tasteful dialogue balloon. For example, there's a shot of Paltrow overlaid with "Good night, good night. Parting is such sweet sorrow that I shall say good night till it be morrow" in cursive script. The format of this volume is virtually indistinguishable from the standard gushy love poetry volumes that are so ubiquitous at Valentines Day, a point made rather conclusively by the fact that I purchased my copy of *Shakespeare in Love: The Love Poetry of William Shakespeare* at a Barnes & Noble bookstore here in South Bend, where it was displayed on the Valentines Day table in the center of the rotunda, alongside titles that did not share quite the same literary pedigree, *101 Nights of Greaat Romance*, *101 Nights of Greaat Sex* . . .

When I showed this book to the students who had assembled the Miramax movie profile, it was met with a round of laughs and shaking heads, one female student commenting, "I liked the movie but I wouldn't be caught dead with that thing." Their reaction suggests that Miramax was obviously appealing to another audience of readers/viewers, but what are the contours of that taste community? One would expect college educated, or college bound, since it is after all Shakespeare, but my college students recoiled from it in horror. The easy answer is romance reader types, who adored the film as a great love story and tuned out the fact that it was Shakespeare; only this book is filled with Shakespeare's verse — so what would explain an appeal so strong that it figures so prominently on the Love Table at Barnes & Noble, four years after the release of the film?

The success of any high-concept blockbuster depends not on the appeal to a mass audience but rather on a studio's ability to *mass* audiences, normally by targeting different audiences through diversified advertising and merchandizing strategies. In film business talk, this has been called "filling out the quadrant." The publication of Shakespeare's love poetry by Miramax demonstrates how successfully those strategies were applied to literary properties, but filling out the quadrant was complicated in this case because the massing of audiences involved the potential for profound taste conflicts that would not arise in the promotion of the average blockbuster. The merchandizing of *Lord of the Rings*, for example might involve action figures for children and special edition books for teenage and adult readerships, but the presence of Gandalf as action figure does not negate the pleasures taken by the more mature readers/viewers who want to consider Tolkien's opus a literary masterpiece. For Miramax to fill out the quadrant sufficiently for a literary prestige picture to become a box office smash, taste cultures that

might otherwise view each other antagonistically had to be encouraged to not just enjoy the same film but somehow regard it as *their own*.

To return to *The English Patient*, the gala authors' reading event staged by Miramax and Vintage and Hyperion Presses at Town Hall in March 1997 was aimed at a sophisticated taste culture, one that read their Sunday *New York Times* religiously, attended authors' readings, and would know automatically where Town Hall was and be familiar with the sort of protocols involved at such events. That audience was not likely to buy *The Love Poetry of William Shakespeare*, and the suggestion that they might read romance novels would produce the same sort of giggling that my students displayed. Yet when Ondaatje was featured in a profile in the *New York Times* after the event, another audience came into play. The interviewer, Ben Ratliff, describes the Indian lunch he and Ondaatje are enjoying during their conversation:

The restaurant is a block away from the Ritz, his base during a quick visit to New York to give a reading at a sold-out Town Hall, along with Anthony Minghella, the screenwriter and director of *The English Patient*. One spectator was Kathryn Falk, the editor of *Romance Times*, the trade magazine of the romance novel business, whose February issue had an article pronouncing *The English Patient*, "greatest romantic movie of the decade." "Oh my god," he (Ondaatje) said with an uneasy chuckle. "Mmmm . . . *Romance Times*. I hadn't realized it had got to that level." (sec. 1, 47)

The English Patient: *Getting to "That Level"*

How did it get to that level? And what exactly is *that level*? Certainly, few adaptations have ever appealed across so many different taste cultures that were formerly thought to be mutually antagonistic. The awards that *The English Patient* has won in novel and film incarnations demonstrate that range, from Booker Prize to Academy Awards to *Romance Times*, a range that translates quite easily into the traditional high-brow, middle-brow, and low-brow culture hierarchy. Yet the successes that the novel and its adaptation have enjoyed also reveal how antiquated that hierarchy has become, now that formerly elite pleasures have become so successfully *massified*. The work of Arjun Appadurai (in particular, his introduction to *The Social Life of Things*) is especially useful in describing the contours of this transformation. Appadurai argues that value is determined within consumer societies

by “regimes of value” that establish the customary paths through which a specific commodity circulates. Within a given path, an entire network of institutional frameworks and protocols maintain the value cohesiveness of that particular regime. But the value of commodities can be changed fundamentally through what he calls diversions, in which an object begins to circulate in a different orbit. An example of this sort of diversion, according to Appadurai, is the way that objects which function as tools within one path (Masai spears, Dinka baskets, etc.) become objets d’art through a very specific form of aesthetic diversion. Appadurai insists, “Diversions are meaningful only in relation to the paths from which they stray” (28). In the case of *The English Patient*, the move from Booker Prize to film adaptation is not without precedent—since its inception in 1969, thirteen novels that have been short-listed for the Booker Prize have been made into films, two of them by Steven Spielberg: Thomas Kenneally’s *Schindler’s Ark* (1982) and J. G. Ballard’s *Empire of the Sun* (1984). These adaptations may represent a shift in paths but not real diversions, since the cultural capital that comes with the Booker is incorporated in the promotion of the important picture. The event at Town Hall exemplifies the merger of literary culture into quality film culture, as though the latter were simply an extension of that former path, which might involve massive changes in the geography, capital, and delivery system but nonetheless appears to be an extension rather than a diversion, because it subscribes to the same regime of value by celebrating the transcendent power of all those words.

Adapting a novel in such a way that it moves from Booker Prize to *Romance Times*, on the other hand, involves a genuine diversion, because it is predicated on a change in regimes of value, specifically in regard to the relationship between pleasure and quality. The Booker, like the PEN Faulkner, is a recognition of superior achievement within the realm of serious fiction, a regime of value that privileges the appreciation of literary craft as a pleasure unto itself, and therefore rather dubious about any pleasures that fictional texts generate that aren’t authorized as such. *Romance Times* and its readers aren’t bound by the same covenant—the pleasures that the film version of *The English Patient* offers depend on a particular way of envisioning love, in which case the impact of the stars far outweighs that of the author. The two different covers of the novel visualize this neatly. The original dust jacket and paperback cover featured a black-and-white photograph of a figure enshrouded by a misty landscape, its face completely indiscernible. The cover of the American paperback edition that appeared after the release

of the film was the poster for the film—a tight close-up of the beautiful couple in passionate embrace. The television spot advertisement reiterated this focalization on the couple virtually to the exclusion of everything else except a few all-purpose combat shots taken from the Tobruck sequence. The faces of Katharine (Kristin Scott Thomas) and Almasý (Ralph Fiennes) dominate the ad, and only four lines of dialogue from the film are quoted in alternation with the voice-over listing the Academy Awards the film had just won, lines that encourage the readers of *Romance Times* to think of the film as their own:

Katharine: Promise me you'll come back for me.

Almasý: I promise I'll never leave you.

Voice-over: Winner of. . . .

Katharine: We didn't care about countries, did we? None of that mattered. There's something finer than that.

Voice-over: [continues to enumerate awards]

Almasý: We're the real countries. Not the boundaries drawn on maps. As God wanted, to walk in such a place with you.

This television advertisement obviously may Harlequinize the love stories found in Ondaatje's novel, but it does not completely misrepresent the sort of passion that is so all-pervasive in Minghella's film. How it got to "that level" can be explained in terms of marketing, but filling out the quadrant necessarily involves particular adaptation strategies that need to be examined more closely in order to delineate the relationship between literary and cine-literary.

The English Patient is a revealing case study in this regard, because the adaptation was so self-consciously "literary," yet its literariness is so at odds with the overtly literary aspects of the novel. Ondaatje's novel includes a wide array of intertexts that are used repeatedly to establish both the historical stage for the action and the relevant antecedents for Ondaatje's own writing. He makes the two main landscapes for the novel, northern Italy and the Sahara, hum with the echoes of past inscriptions, the intertexts referred to repeatedly by both characters and narrator. Almasý says, while watching Katharine read the story of Candaules and Gyges by the fire: "I would often open Herodotus for a clue to geography. But Katharine had done that as a window to her life" (233). The echoes of previous inscriptions that become figurations for the characters in the present are just as resonant when the action moves to Italy. As Hana reads aloud to Almasý from

the books she finds in the library, passages from Stendhal and Tacitus are quoted in the text, forming a chorus of voices, each envisioning this same landscape across the centuries. At one point, Kip looks up into the cypress trees, whose middle branches had been shelled away, and muses, “Pliny must have walked down a path like this, or Stendhal, because passages of the *Charterhouse of Parma* had occurred in this part of the world too” (72). Almasi is convinced that this isn’t just any old ruined palazzo, telling Hana, “I think this was the Villa Bruscoli. . . . Yes, I think a lot happened here. . . . Pico and Lorenzo and Poliziano and the young Michelangelo. . . . They sat in this room with a bust of Plato and argued all night” (57). Ondaatje makes the commonplace book an explicit intertextual model for his own project. The most visible form of this sort of intertextuality as palimpsest is Almasi’s copy of Herodotus, which “he added to, cutting and gluing in pages from other books or writing in his own observations—so they all are cradled within the text of Herodotus” (16). Katharine’s drawings are also glued into the book by Almasi, and she later writes in it as she lies dying in the Cave of Swimmers, adding still more layers of inscription on top of Herodotus. The end result is an elaborate intertextual web, a novel in which characters’ words and images intermingle with those of Herodotus, Tacitus, and Giotto, as well as Stendhal, Fenimore Cooper, and Kipling, all of which are cradled within the text of Ondaatje. Almasi formulates the intertextual project of the novel succinctly: “We are communal histories, communal books” (261).

Minghella’s version of *The English Patient* epitomizes the distinctive characteristics of *cine*-literary textuality in terms of what it transposes from the novel to the screen in order to advertise its own literariness, and in terms of what it omits in its pursuit of quality passion. The film focalizes on Almasi’s copy of Herodotus as the principal signifier of the film’s literary affiliations. There are a number of shots of the book itself, and we see both Almasi and Katharine adding their inscriptions. Hana reads from this book extensively, her words often becoming a voice-over, which at times gives way to the voices of Almasi and Katharine, speaking aloud what they’ve written. This voice-over resonates as arch-literary, because it isn’t Hana’s account of the action, told to the reader in a conversational manner à la *Virgin Suicides*, nor is it the voice of the disembodied author, à la *Tom Jones*. It is instead a *reading* of a text composed by other characters, written in an intensely poetic style of prose, filled with figures of speech, cast in rhythmic, repetitive cadences as they try to describe their love and loss. They caress the words they use to

accomplish this, and the film does all it can to continue that caressing of the written word, making reading a privileged activity within the film, both in terms of onscreen action and the soundtrack, which repeatedly focalizes on the words.

While the layers of Tacitus, Stendhal, and company do not appear in the film, the omission that really differentiates the literary from the cine-literary concerns Kip's relationship to all these words and the passion they convey. I'm referring here to the profound ambivalence he feels toward his European education and the sort of political tension that his character creates within the novel, neither of which has a place within the world of the film. One of the principal features of the cine-literary is the equation of quality literature with quality passion—great literature *sweeps you away*. But the displacing of Kip reveals exactly what has to be swept aside, in order for the cine-literary to sweep you away. At the end of the novel, he reacts violently to the news of the bombing of Hiroshima, an event not even alluded to in the film. His reaction throws into question all of the refinement and good taste that come with the literariness that Miramax promotes so unequivocally. Upon learning the news of the bombing, Kip rushes into Almsy's room and takes aim with his rifle, firing at the last moment at the fountain instead of at the English patient. In what the novel constructs as a point-of-view shot from Kip's perspective, looking down the barrel of the gun at Almsy's face, he screams:

I sat at the foot of this bed and listened to you, Uncle. . . . I believed I could carry that knowledge, slowly altering it, but in any case passing it on beyond me to another. I grew up with the traditions from my country, but later, more often, from *your* country. Your fragile white island that with customs and manners and books and prefects and reason somehow converted the rest of the world. You stood for precise behavior. . . . Was it just ships that gave you such power? Was it, as my brother said, because you had histories and printing presses? (283)

This rejection of the ideological baggage that comes with all the books and good taste reflects the tension in the novel between desire and global power relations. When Caravaggio tells Kip not to blame Almsy because he isn't English, his response throws their national differences into sharp relief: "American, French, I don't care. When you start bombing the brown races of the world, you're an Englishman. You had King Leopold of Bel-

gium and now you have fucking Harry Truman of the USA. You learned it all from the British” (286).

The conclusion of the film version of *The English Patient* sweeps all this away in a grand romantic ending that seems more in keeping with the recording of Pablo Neruda’s *Love Poems* or *Shakespeare in Love: The Love Poetry of William Shakespeare*. Just as the value of all things literary is never questioned, the tension between desire and national identity is collapsed—everything is subservient to quality passion. The characters whose love defies all maps get the last word, primarily because the complications of racial difference are nowhere to be found on this cinematic map that is so unblemished by postcolonialism. Two brief scenes near the end of the film reveal what gets swept away. The first is a scene in which Kip reacts to the death of his partner, Hardy, which takes the place of Kip’s speech about bombing the brown races of the world. As he packs up his belongings he tells Hana: “I was thinking yesterday, the Patient and Hardy, they’re all that’s good about England. And I couldn’t even say what that was. We didn’t exchange two personal words and we’d been together through some terrible things. He was engaged to a girl in the village. And us, he never once, he didn’t ask about whether I could spin the ball at cricket, or the karma sutra . . . *I don’t even know what I’m talking about*” (emphasis mine). To which Hana replies simply, “You loved him.” Kip only stares off into the distance, overcome by his grief. Here, solidarity in arms replaces outrage as national differences are overcome through love, a position entirely contradictory to the climax of the novel. Kip’s impassioned speech is not just omitted but replaced by his inability to even know what he is saying. The overpowering nature of quality passion acquires mythical proportions in the last scene featuring Almsy and Katharine. After we have heard Hana’s, and then Katharine’s voice recount her death, and seen Almsy die in the villa, the couple reappear in their glistening silver biplane, now in some sort of mythical realm where they fly out into a world without maps, where they linger yet.

Ironically, the last scene in Ondaatje’s novel is arguably more cinematic, for it tells the reader something quite different about the nature of love. The novel concludes with a cross-cut that visualizes their connection: “And so Hana moves and her face turns and in a regret she lowers her hair. Her shoulder touches the edge of the cupboard and a glass dislodges. Kirpal’s left hand swoops down and catches the dropped fork an inch from the floor and gently passes it into the fingers of his daughter, a wrinkle at the

edge of his eyes behind his spectacles” (302). Ondaatje creates a “match on action” cut—Hana knocks the glass toward the floor, and through the “cut,” it becomes the fork caught by Kip in his kitchen in India sitting amidst his family, married and raising children with someone else. In his analysis of this concluding scene Raymond Younis, in an essay in *Literature and Film Quarterly*, argues: “The novel’s end suggests that it is the things that bring two nationalities or two people together, and not the things which separate them, that are ultimately of the greatest value.” But they are apart despite that connection. This “cut” crystallizes the exquisite agony of the moment—they may well have been the great love of each other’s lives, but they are on opposite sides of the world, following lives that will never allow them to meet again because of the geopolitical factors that blew them apart. Love, in the case of this couple, cannot overcome maps.

In her reading of *The English Patient*, Jacqui Sadashige, also writing in *Literature and Film Quarterly*, argues that the film “de-postmodernizes” the novel:

Whereas Ondaatje’s treatment of his characters suggests that there are multiple subjectivities located in myriad and simultaneous loyalties to structures such as family, nation, and race, Minghella’s film constructs and fetishizes an essential interior self. . . . More specifically, the film implies that selfhood is located in a person’s ability to love and is evidenced by acts inspired by such sentiments. As a result, the “lover” emerges as the true subject—set against the fleeting and mutable identities associated with race or nationality. (255)

Ondaatje has indeed been considered one of Canada’s foremost postmodern writers, figuring prominently in Linda Hutcheon’s *The Canadian Postmodern*. Yet this notion of an essential self as lover, transcending mere nationality was not invented by Miramax and company because it is so prominently advanced throughout the novel by Almasy and Katharine. This notion of love overpowering the map is set in direct opposition to Kip and Hana’s relationship, in which the reverse is true—sometimes the map is inescapable. The dialogic relationship between these two ways of imagining love and nationality, one a vestige of European Romanticism, the other shaped by a South Asian postcolonialism, is the central tension in the novel, a point made quite succinctly in Ondaatje’s invocation of the fresco and the parable to describe these characters. Late in the novel the narrator says of Kip: “The

naive Catholic images from those hillside shrines that he has seen are with him in the half-darkness. . . . Perhaps this villa is a similar tableau, the four of them in private movement, momentarily lit up, flung ironically against this war” (279). The connection between the religious art and the characters in the villa is reiterated on the next page, when an explicit comparison is made between the statuary in the church and Hana, Kip, and Almasy: “these creatures that represent some parable about mankind and heaven” (279).

Ondaatje’s novel is a postmodern parable that offers the reader two different lessons about the relationship between love and nationality, notions that remain suspended in a dialogic tension. Hutcheon’s contention that one of the distinguishing features of postmodern textuality is the rejection of the either/or dichotomies of high modernism in favor of a both/and aesthetic is particularly relevant here. Neither Almasy nor Kip serves as the *raisonneur* in this novel, because they both do, given the novel’s consistent endorsement both of their perspectives. Almasy’s insistence that he wants to live in a world without maps is articulated in some of the most poetic passages in the novel, the very beauty of the language giving those sentiments not just credibility but also an extremely seductive power. Within this dialogic parable, however, Almasy’s internationalism is also undermined by the presence of Kip, whose impassioned speech about Hiroshima makes Almasy’s “citizen of the world” perspective seem hopelessly naïve, a position that only an old-world European aristocrat could advocate. The novel’s final cross-cut concludes the parable by emphasizing both the connection that grand passion produces and the separation that the world of nationalities still enforces.

Minghella’s film exemplifies the Miramax movie style in terms of its celebration of an intensely literary passion, but questions concerning the fidelity of this adaptation can be oversimplified. The film is, in many ways, a meticulous envisioning of Almasy’s worldview. Walter Murch’s sound design and editing create a filmic equivalent of the meandering narrative voices in the novel, which “slip from level to level like a hawk” (4). The credit sequence, which serves as a kind of overture to the film, visualizes quite brilliantly Almasy’s obsessions with the desert, Katharine, and inscription. The backdrop for the credits appears to be sand until it is revealed to be a parchment, when the brush begins to paint the swimming figure, at which point the paper dissolves into desert, which resembles in its contours the curves of a human form, thereby neatly visualizing the interdependency between



15. "Air Pottery Barn": the biplane carrying Amasy and Katharine, from the film *The English Patient*

the book, the desert, and the woman's body, which consume Amasy. But this series of dissolves is interrupted by the introduction of the gleaming silver biplane carrying Amasy and Katharine.

What was a hunk of junk in the novel is here transformed into "Air Pottery Barn," the biplane as stylish accent piece that is the perfect mode of transport for "Swept Away Romance," as the film fades into the land of a Ralph Lauren "Safari Collection" advertisement. By focusing on the European lovers and celebrating their belief in the transcendent power of a love that sweeps away all maps, only half the fresco comes into view, and as a monological fragment, it changes the parable completely. The film, like the novel, concludes with cross-cutting, but here the alternation is between Hana leaving the villa and the images of Amasy and Katharine flying across the desert, which open the film. Hana becomes the *reader* of their story rather than a lover herself (see Patrick Deer's "Defusing *The English Patient*" for an especially compelling analysis of this transformation). Like Mr. Fennyman, she plays the role of audience member transformed, a member of the ad hoc community that has been drawn together by the power of the words that tell this transcendent love story.

The Hours: *The Genius of the Quality System?*

I want to conclude with a discussion of the Miramax/Paramount adaptation of *The Hours*, because it complicates the sociology of adaptation that I have been tracing throughout this chapter. How that Miramax formula (whether applied by Miramax, Paramount, or a combination of the two) works in Stephen Daldry's adaptation represents a significantly different incarna-

tion of the cine-literary, specifically in the ways it envisions the relationship among love, literary life, and imagined community of readers/viewers that is the foundation of the Miramax adaptation. In many ways, the film fits the Miramax movie profile sketched out by my students by making authors and avid readers the central characters. Michael Cunningham's novel is about Woolf's writing of *Mrs. Dalloway* and also how that novel is read by another character, Laura Brown, whose experience of the novel appears to be as intense and formative as the writing of the book was for the author. The third character, a literary editor named Clarissa Vaughan (dubbed Mrs. Dalloway by her former lover, Richard, in their younger days as undergraduate English majors), is a character two times over. She is the contemporary Manhattanite version of Woolf's character, in the process of organizing her own dinner party, as well as the model for the main character in the one novel that Richard has written—thereby incarnating one character while serving as the inspiration for another. Richard is the esteemed poet, about to receive a prestigious literary prize ("The Carruthers"), whose poems we learn late in the film are addressed to the mother who abandoned him, who happens to be the same Laura Brown—at which point, Laura becomes not just an avid reader of Woolf's novel but also the inspiration for her son's literary creations. We also see Leonard Woolf, Virginia's husband, actively engaged in the copy editing and printing of books at the Hogarth Press office, just as Clarissa works as an editor at an (unnamed) press specializing in literary books. This all-pervasive literariness naturally results in dozens of shots of writers writing, readers reading, and repeated dialogue sequences about the all-consuming power of both. Most important, the film's opening sequence features repeated extreme close-ups of the author's hand, as in *Shakespeare in Love*—here is the very act of writing from which everything we are about to see flows.

The creative personnel brought together to make the film and the eventual promotion of the film also exemplify the Miramax adaptation formula in paradigmatic form. Cunningham's novel had achieved both literary pedigree (it won the Pulitzer Prize and the PEN Faulkner Award) and bestseller status. As a literary bestseller it was very successfully marketed as a book club darling and became a mass market phenomenon, featured prominently at superstores like Barnes & Noble and Borders but also as a Recommended Book on end-cap displays in Target stores, alongside *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *The Girl with a Pearl Earring*. That pre-sold "quality" concept was further amplified by involving Philip Glass, Davis Hare, and Stephen Daldry (all

Academy Award timber), as were the players who were assembled, Meryl Streep and Julianne Moore having already achieved “fine actor” status, joined by an acknowledged movie star, Nicole Kidman. The film was given massive advertising support, Kidman became a fixture on daytime television chat shows promoting the film, and all three principals appeared together on the *Oprah Winfrey Show* (on November 8, 2002).

The promotion of *The Hours*, however, involved a different strategy from *The English Patient*. Instead of filling out the quadrant in terms of massing disparate audiences, it took the form of a saturation campaign aimed at a particular taste culture. Consider how the film was promoted within the various sections of the *New York Times* national edition, a favorite venue of Miramax advertising outside of trade publications like *Variety* and *The Hollywood Reporter*. I say “various sections” because, unlike the full-page and two-page spreads for *Shakespeare in Love* and *The English Patient*, which had appeared in the Arts and Leisure section alongside the rest of the film ads, *The Hours* was ubiquitous throughout the newspaper. The full-page and two-page spreads for *The Hours* were there in the Sunday edition, and substantial ads appeared regularly in the daily national edition as well (another standard venue for Miramax ads). What distinguished the promotion of *The Hours* was its inescapability throughout the paper. In the Sunday, January 19, 2003, edition for example, there was a full-page ad for the film in Arts and Leisure section (“The Most Nominated Drama of the Year,” complete with appreciative blurb from the *Times*’s own critic, Stephen Holden), another smaller ad in the *Book Review*, and yet another half-page ad in the Sunday Style section, this one advertising “Virginia Woolf and *The Hours*, a Sponsored Archive of *The New York Times*,” complete with another series of photos of the three stars. In addition to these advertisements, an article by Michael Cunningham about the adaptation was featured on the front page of the Arts and Leisure section: “The Novel, the Movie: My Baby Reborn,” in which the author states: “I find myself in an enviable if slightly embarrassing position as one of the only living American novelists happy with his experience with Hollywood” (22); a full-page ad for the film appeared on the facing page. The adaptation appeared to be both a literary/film achievement and a lifestyle phenomenon, the latter point reiterated by further ads for the film in the Thursday House and Home section of the *Times*, a recently added section modeled after shelter magazines. Another article about Cunningham, “This Is the House the Book Bought,” appeared in a later House and Home section (October 24, 2003), in which Cunningham recounted

how the success of his novel had allowed him to buy his beach house on Cape Cod.

These ads and articles demonstrate two things. First, the distinction between advertisement and newsworthiness all but collapses—the ultimate proof that a successful buzz has been generated around a high-concept blockbuster, only in this case, it is a quality, high-concept adaptation. Second, reading the novel, seeing the film, and lusting after beach houses all become interrelated, even interdependent pleasures within the same taste culture, since the need to be in the know about this particular adaptation seems to be inescapable, given its coverage in the literary, film, fashion, and shelter sections of the same national newspaper. If, as I argued earlier in this chapter, the Merchant and Ivory adaptations of the late eighties and early nineties were primers in the art of gracious living, comparable to similar lessons being offered in shelter, travel, and fashion industries, Miramax/Paramount formalizes those connections into a series of tightly integrated intertextual arcs that form an elaborate taste synergy that link the novel, author, adaptation, film company, and audience within the same sensibility. For the Laura Browns of 2003, *The Hours* was inescapably the must-see quality film of the moment.

Given this relentless promotion of the film, how good could such an adaptation be, especially if we pose the traditional questions about fidelity in regard to such an overtly literary novel? The answer is, amazingly successful—a fact that complicates any hard-and-fast equations regarding the relationship between marketing strategies and adaptations strategies. While *The Hours* enjoyed the sort of advertising campaign that rivaled any high-concept prestige picture, its complicated narrative structure and intricate editing patterns represent a completely different kind of cinematic aesthetic than the “art cinema lite” style used in other Miramax adaptations. Rather than simplifying the novel’s interlacing of three distinct narrative strands, which transpire in three different historical periods, the film actually makes the interplay ever more intricate, creating complicated patterns of mutuality that are possible only through cinematic means. Where Cunningham’s novel cuts back and forth between three main characters in alternating chapters, each approximately ten to fifteen pages long, the film often cuts between them on a shot-by-shot basis in montage sequences where each one appears to either be engaged in the same activity or completes the other’s actions.

When Laura Brown checks into the Normandy Hotel to take her own

life, she lies down on the bed and begins reading her copy of *Mrs. Dalloway*. In Cunningham's novel, she speculates about Woolf as she reads:

It seems, somehow, that she has left her own world and entered the realm of the book. Nothing, of course, could be further from Mrs. Dalloway's London than this turquoise hotel room, and yet she imagines that Virginia Woolf herself, the drowned woman, the genius, might in death inhabit a place not unlike this one. . . . She strokes her belly. I would never. She says the words out loud in the silent room: "I would never." She loves life, loves it hopelessly, at least at certain moments; and she would be killing her son as well. . . . She imagines Virginia Woolf, virginal, unbalanced, defeated by the impossible demands of life and art: she imagines her stepping into a river with a stone in her pocket. Laura keeps stroking her belly. It would be as simple, she thinks, as checking into a hotel. It would be as simple as that. (152)

In the film Laura Brown reads her copy of *Mrs. Dalloway* at the Normandy, and Woolf's voice-over speaking the words of the novel binds them together sonically as well as visually. But the film adds another even more sophisticated relationship between the two characters through the cross-cutting. This scene at the hotel occurs during Woolf's speculation about what to do with her character Mrs. Dalloway. As Brown reads her copy of *Mrs. Dalloway*, we hear the voice-over say, "It is possible to die," at which point, according to the screenplay, "suddenly brackish water floods from underneath, washing up over the sides of the bed. LAURA, in her imagination, sinks under the water, strewn with weeds, and then drowns" (Scene 61). As such, this shot is an elegant visualization of Brown's imagining herself as Woolf drowning.

But in the very next shot we see Woolf in 1923, again saying, "It is possible to die," this time, completely lost in thought during her sister Vanessa's visit. Vanessa responds by telling her daughter Angelica: "Your aunt's a very lucky woman, Angelica, because she has two lives. Most of us have only one, but she has the life she leads and she also has the book she's writing." She then addresses Virginia, "What were you thinking about?" Virginia replies, "Oh. I was going to kill my heroine. But I've changed my mind." At this point, the images of Brown at the Normandy are made to appear—retroactively, through the cross-cutting—to have been not just of her reading *Mrs. Dalloway* but also as a visualization of Woolf's own speculation about what to do with her character Mrs. Dalloway as she is writing *Mrs. Dalloway*. Brown is so taken with the novel because she *is*, in effect, Mrs. Dalloway,



16. Laura Brown (played by Julianne Moore) engulfed: the effect of water washing over Laura's bed in the Hotel Normandy, from the film *The Hours*



17. Laura Brown and Virginia Woolf (played by Nicole Kidman) as one: the scene with Laura, in her room at Hotel Normandy, cutting to Virginia, speaking to her sister, from the film *The Hours*

and can therefore serve as a possible future for that character, just as Woolf functions as the possible future Brown considers for herself. This particular dimension of the interplay is intensified even further in the next two shots.

After Woolf says she has decided not to kill her heroine, we see Laura back in the hotel room lying on the bed as it was before the flood waters came, closing the book, rubbing her stomach, and saying, “I can’t. I can’t,” seemingly as a direct result of the author’s decision about her heroine. This is followed by a cut back to Woolf, still in conversation with Vanessa: “I fear I might have to kill someone else instead.” The creation of this sense of mutuality, in which these women appear to be so intimately attuned to each other’s perspectives, despite their geographic and historical differences, is accomplished by the most *cinematic* of techniques—parallel editing and a *mise-en-scène* that emphasizes the inherent plasticity of the image.

Conceived of in this way, *The Hours* seems like a radically different kind of adaptation. Yet to what should we attribute these differences? To the fact that Scott Rudin, and not Harvey Weinstein, was the producer and Miramax was brought in to coproduce at a later point in the film’s development? Or to the fact that the film did not attempt to capture the *Romance Times* readers and therefore fill out the quadrant, but instead appeared content to appeal to a relatively homogeneous audience, which had at its center the Laura Browns and Clarissa Vaughans of the world, who form the dominant readership for quality fiction in the United States? Or did a story about three women, all either bisexual or homosexual, already delimit the potential audience for the film and therefore establish a built-in horizon of expectations that made a more sophisticated stylistic treatment possible? And why, despite that more sophisticated approach, did *The Hours* (though nominated for seven awards, including Best Picture) fail to win as many Academy Awards or enjoy the box office success of *The English Patient* or *Shakespeare in Love*? Was it because *The Hours* was never given as wide a release as *Chicago* and had practically disappeared from multiplexes outside major cities in the weeks immediately preceding the Academy Awards, despite being released in the same slow roll-out fashion at approximately the same time as *Chicago*? Or because Miramax decided to put its promotional might behind *Chicago*, a film with far greater mass market appeal, despite its lack of comparable prestige as a literary adaptation? Underlying this last explanation is the suspicion that Miramax had become so mainstream that it no longer needed to position itself as a quality alternative, now that it could make a classic genre film into

Best Picture the way major studios had done for decades with big splashy musicals such as *Gigi* (1958), *My Fair Lady* (1962), or *The Sound of Music* (1965).

The answer is, all of the above, because no one auteur-director, producer screenwriter, actor, or composer defines the Miramax prestige picture style. No matter how much the popular press may portray Harvey Weinstein as a combination of Leo B. Mayer and Irving Thalberg, ostensibly controlling all decisions as *the* contemporary movie mogul, an auterist approach (even if centered on the film executive) misses the uniqueness of this particular production system. Since the advent of cinephilia in the 1950s, the category of art film has been defined against the constraints of the studio system, a scenario in which “personal vision” prevailed against the industry only in rare cases that were to be celebrated as a victory of artistry over commerce. In his seminal study *The Genius of the System* (1990), Thomas Schatz argues that this category of genius needed to be redefined in reference to classic Hollywood, because the production of so many films now considered masterpieces was attributable not to the determination of a few brave mavericks but a very particular production system: “The quality and artistry of all these films were the product not simply of individual human expression but a melding of institutional forces. In each case the style of a writer, director, star—or even a cinematographer, art director, or costume designer—all fused with the studio’s production operations and management structures, its resources and talent pool, its narrative traditions, and market strategy” (604).

For Schatz, that production system ended when the classic studio system faded away in the sixties, but I think it can be a very useful template for delineating the Miramax profile. This is not to suggest that their success is simply a matter of reestablishing the classic studio model, but rather that it represents both a restoration and reformulation of that mode of filmmaking by adapting it to a production system based on *packaging* quality film properties. The establishment of a relatively stable group of directors, stars, screenwriters, editors, and composers, none under the sort of exclusive contract demanded by the major studios during their golden age, but all nevertheless coming together on a regular basis to form remarkably similar packages based on literary bestsellers, which will then be heavily marketed using remarkably similar promotional strategies, sounds a fair amount like that whole equation of pictures Schatz describes.

The genius of this system may resemble that of a traditional studio, but with crucial differences. Miramax in the nineties and MGM during the

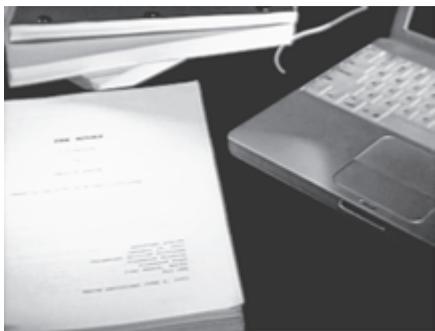
golden age of the studio system each developed a rhetoric of quality that was laid over a highly diversified group of films by different production units. But MGM was never perceived to be anything other than a movie studio, while Miramax was able to *brand* its literary adaptations, even as it privileged the uniqueness of each prestige picture in terms of the singularity of the literary work and the creative genius of director, screenwriter, stars, and composers, all seemingly getting together to produce masterpieces on a one-off basis. The high-concept adaptation developed by Miramax then rests on another hybridization—the classic Hollywood studio system and the traditional European film production company, which would seemingly form, only to dissolve after the masterpiece was realized. By combining the factory and the boutique, Miramax gave its audience what it expects in a world of “good-design” chainstores, superstore bookstores, and Starbucks cafés—increasingly easier access to what were formerly considered elite pleasures, which are carefully cultivated to retain the vestiges of exclusivity, even as they become increasingly ubiquitous.

So, ultimately, how does one judge the effects of this mode of quality film production, which has made cine-literary culture such an enormous success in terms of the financial and cultural capital it continues to generate? Easy answers to that question are invariably wrong, simply because the effects are multiple and conflicting. Close-grain qualitative distinctions can, indeed must, be drawn in order to appreciate the possible moves that can be made within this whole equation of quality pictures that is the Miramax formula. While all of these films create a *quality* cine-literary experience for appreciative audiences, a comparative analysis of the adaptations *The English Patient* and *The Hours* reveals both the formula and the variations. Both novels are pedigreed exemplars of contemporary literary fiction. Both film versions involved a world-class array of directors, screenwriters, actors, composers, cinematographers, and editors. Both were given very substantial advertising and promotion. Yet one so simplifies a narrative universe in search of a grand love story that it becomes an instant classic for pulp romance readers, while the other only further complicates an already sophisticated narrative structure that concentrates on anything but traditional heterosexual romance.

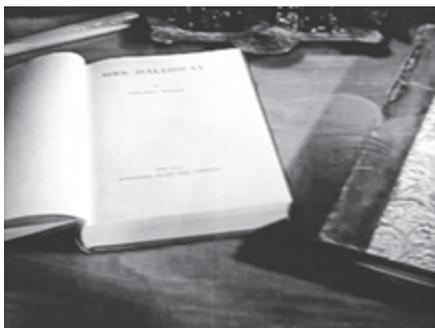
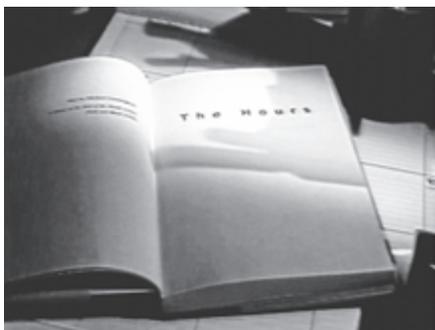
This analysis of the interplay between textual and promotional strategies, no matter how carefully situated in reference to broader changes within the infrastructure of the entertainment industries and the evolution of American popular taste, still cannot determine, once and for all, the decidability of effect. I am convinced that *The Hours* is a more compelling

cine-literary hybrid than *The English Patient*, and one could conclude that it is the far more “faithful” adaptation, in terms of how the film develops intensely cinematic ways to visualize such an arch-literary novel. Yet many Woolf scholars have vehemently attacked *The Hours*, not for the film’s lack of fidelity to Cunningham’s novel, but Cunningham’s lack of fidelity to the *real* Virginia Woolf. Despite the lack of that fidelity, the promotion of the film version of *The Hours* made *Mrs. Dalloway* a bestseller in the United States for the first time, in February 2003, during the height of the Academy Awards season, becoming the number 1 paperback on the Amazon.com sales list on Valentine’s Day. Both my local Barnes & Noble and Borders were sold out of copies the same day I encountered *The Love Poetry of William Shakespeare* on the featured “romance” table at the center of the rotunda. When *Mrs. Dalloway* reappeared the following week, the books were not on the shelf in the Woolf section in Literature and Fiction; dozens of copies came in their own free-standing cardboard display at the front of the store, bearing a new cover featuring a heritage-style photo, complete with women in white linen dresses and sun hats, along with two stickers on the front cover: “The Novel That Inspired *The Hours*” and “Harvest Reading Guide.” The film version of *Mrs. Dalloway* (1998) had no such impact on the sale of the novel, but then it played in very limited release within the art house circuit. In this case at least, the argument that adaptation films lead viewers to become readers of the novels adapted is rather overwhelmingly true.

That one of the chief goals of the film version of *The Hours* was to turn viewers of the film into readers of *Mrs. Dalloway* (if they were not already a member of Woolf’s fan base) becomes particularly clear in the “Special Features” on the DVD version of the film, which presents a host of novel-to-film interrelationships in a sophisticated form of cine-literary textuality. In the segment “The Mind and Times of Virginia Woolf,” scholars (Hermione Lee, Molly Hite, Francis Spalding) are introduced as authoritative talking heads profiling the author and, at the same time, validating the film’s fidelity to that life. Attestations to the scholarly legitimacy of the adaptation thus come along with the film, serving as a Readers/Viewers’ Guide included in the same box instead of at the back of the book. Like the Readers’ Guide, the Special Features take as a given the viewer’s thirst for more authoritative inside information about the Author. In another special feature, “The Lives of Mrs. Dalloway,” Woolf is joined by three more authors (Cunningham, Daldry, and Hare, who elaborate on how they tried to do justice to the masterpiece). Their commentary is intercut with close-ups from the film of



18. How a film script derives from a book about another book: the adaptation process, as shown in *The Hours*



Woolf's hand writing furiously and more close-ups of a copy of *Mrs. Dalloway*, which is given reliquary status, with the camera tracking up to the book exactly as the camera is used to move across the table to "find" the book in the title sequence of *Masterpiece Theatre* productions, only here the key passages are highlighted by accent lighting.

The interdependency of the film script, Cunningham's novel, and *Mrs. Dalloway* is visualized very efficiently in a concluding pan across all three—the viewer is shown in explicit terms how the script was derived from the novel, which was derived from the original masterpiece. The authors' reading organized by Miramax at Town Hall and featuring Ondaatje and Minghella has become, by this point, a featurette in the DVD package—the shared community of appreciative writers/readers/viewers that form part of the text that is *The Hours*. That the ultimate value of the film still depends on its ability to lead viewers to become readers reaches its zenith in the audio commentary on the feature by both the director and novelist. At the point when the waters rush up around the sleeping Laura Brown in bed in the hotel room, we hear:

Cunningham: I just have to pause to mention it. It's a hugely successful movie about people reading a book. Imagine!

Daldry: Well, there was a moment, wasn't there—I know we've discussed this in the past—that books change your life. Everyone used to believe that. Now, perhaps not so much.

Cunningham: Not so much. I hope this movie is doing something to reestablish that notion!

In the case of *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Hours*, Daldry's film undoubtedly attempts to reestablish that notion, since the cinematic and literary experiences are thoroughly interdependent, and reading and watching are made to appear just as tightly interdependent. Any sort of taste hierarchy that might have insisted on qualitative differences between the two no longer holds sway—quality reading and quality viewing have equal footing within cine-literary culture. Because of this equal footing, "adaptation talk," has apparently acquired an entertainment value unto itself for a quality readership/viewership. Where the discussion of how successful a given adaptation was formerly *entered the picture* only at a later point during the interpretive process, when avid fans or professors of English weighed in with their evaluations, now the viewer of the DVD boxed set enters a conversation already under way, a conversation between members of a shared commu-

nity that establishes the utmost seriousness of all parties. The popularization of not just the adaptation film but of adaptation talk was an inevitable development, given the ever-expanding number of adaptation films, the refinements of DVD technology, and the cultivation of quality audiences for Readers' and Viewers' Guides, which provide specialized information, the "something extra," needed to really appreciate the text from an informed position. Here we're encouraged to believe that the movie is better because everyone involved in the preparation of both the film and the featurettes loves the novel just as much as you do, and in the case of Hermione Lee and company, they know them better than you do—and they are still ready and eager to join this cine-literary community.

The boom in adaptation films in Hollywood in the nineties depended on a complicated interplay between aesthetic pleasure and commercial interests. The transformation of the adaptation from *Masterpiece Theatre* marginality to Miramax ubiquity was the result of unprecedented developments in the business of culture and the hierarchies of popular taste. The formation of a massively successful cine-literary culture cannot be accounted for by the actions of any one director or studio head, although the efforts of Merchant and Ivory and the Weinstein brothers all had a profound impact in shaping that success. Perhaps the most revealing indication of how completely the Miramax equation came to redefine the category of the adaptation was the cover of the *New York Times Magazine's* Annual Movie Issue (November, 9, 2004). There beneath a cluster of a number of A-list movie stars was the caption: "Tis the Oscar-scheming, novel-adapting, release-date-juggling, upper-mid-brow-seducing, period-recreating, art-budget-breaking, grown-up-pleasure-making prestige film season." The Miramax formula had become, by this point, programmatic for the entire prestige film business, and the cine-literary so successfully hybridized that it had become part of the infrastructure of American culture.