

## Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation

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The language of criticism dealing with the film adaptation of novels has often been profoundly moralistic, awash in terms such as *infidelity*, *betrayal*, *deformation*, *violation*, *vulgarization*, and *deseccration*, each accusation carrying its specific charge of outraged negativity. *Infidelity* resonates with overtones of Victorian prudishness; *betrayal* evokes ethical perfidy; *deformation* implies aesthetic disgust; *violation* calls to mind sexual violence; *vulgarization* conjures up class degradation; and *deseccration* intimates a kind of religious sacrilege toward the "sacred word." In this chapter I would like to move beyond a moralistic approach to propose specific strategies for the analysis of adaptations. Rather than develop a full-blown narratological theory of novel and film, my agenda is modest and practical. But first I need to deal with the issue of "fidelity."

### The Chimera of Fidelity

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Let me begin by acknowledging that the notion of the fidelity of an adaptation to its source novel does contain its grain of truth. When we say an adaptation has been "unfaithful" to the original, the term gives expression to the disappointment we feel when a film adaptation fails to capture what we see as the fundamental narrative, thematic, and aesthetic features of its literary source. The notion of fidelity gains its persuasive force from our sense that some adaptations are indeed better than others and that some adaptations fail to "realize" or substantiate that which we most appreciated in the source novels. Words such as *infidelity* and *betrayal* in this sense translate our feeling, when we have loved a book, that an adaptation has not been worthy of that love. We read a novel through our introjected desires, hopes, and utopias, and as we read we fashion our own imaginary mise-en-scène of the novel on the private stages of our minds. When we are confronted with someone else's phantasy, as Christian Metz

pointed out long ago, we feel the loss of our own phantasmatic relation to the novel, with the result that the adaptation itself becomes a kind of "bad object."<sup>1</sup> To paraphrase the Georges Perec lines borrowed by Godard in *Masculin Feminin*, "We left the theatre sad. It was not the adaptation of which we had dreamed. . . . It wasn't the film we would have liked to make. Or, more secretly, that we would have liked to live."<sup>2</sup>

But the partial persuasiveness of "fidelity" should not lead us to endorse it as an exclusive methodological principle. The notion of fidelity is highly problematic for a number of reasons. First, it is questionable whether strict fidelity is even possible. A counter-view would insist that an adaptation is automatically different and original due to the change of medium. Here we can take as our own Fritz Lang's response (in *Contempt*) to the producer Prokosch's accusation of infidelity to the script: "Yes, Jerry, in the script it's written, in a film it's images and sounds . . . a motion picture it's called." The words of a novel, as countless commentators have pointed out, have a virtual, symbolic meaning; we as readers, or as directors, have to fill in their paradigmatic indeterminances. A novelist's portrayal of a character as "beautiful" induces us to imagine the person's features in our minds. Flaubert never even tells us the exact color of Emma Bovary's eyes, but we color them nonetheless. A film, by contrast, must choose a specific performer. Instead of a virtual, verbally constructed Madame Bovary open to our imaginative reconstruction, we are faced with a specific actress, encumbered with nationality and accent, a Jennifer Jones or an Isabelle Huppert.

This "automatic difference" between film and novel becomes evident even in fairly straightforward adaptations of specific novelistic passages. Take, for example, the passage from Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* in which Ma Joad contemplates her memorabilia just before leaving her Oklahoma home for California:

She sat down and opened the box. Inside were letters, clippings, photographs, a pair of earrings, a little gold signet ring, and a watch chain braided of hair and tipped with gold swivels. She touched the letters with her fingers, touched them lightly, and she smoothed a newspaper clipping on which there was an account of Tom's trial. (*The Grapes of Wrath*, London: Penguin, 1976, p. 118)

In this case a realist director (John Ford) adapted a realist novel just a few months after the novel's publication, attempting a "faithful" rendition of the specific passage. In the film we see Ma Joad sit down, open the box, and look at letters, clippings, photographs, and so forth. But even here the "cinematization" generates an inevitable supplement. Where Steinbeck wrote "photographs," Ford had to choose specific photographs. The mention of "earrings" in the novel does not dictate Ford's choice of having Ma Joad try them on. The newspaper account of Tom's trial requires the choice of a specific newspaper, specific headlines, specific

illustrations, and specific fonts, none of which is spelled out in the original. But beyond such details of *mise-en-scène*, the very processes of filming—the fact that the shots have to be composed, lit, and edited in a certain way—generates an automatic difference. Nothing in the novel prepares us for the idea that Ma Joad will look at the memorabilia by the light of a fire or that the fire's reflection will flicker over her face. Nothing dictates the point-of-view cutting that alternates close shots of Ma Joad's face with what she is looking at, the contemplative rhythm of shot and reverse shot, or the interplay of on-screen and off-screen space, all of which is arguably in the spirit of the novel but not literally in the written text. Nor does the Steinbeck passage mention music, yet the Ford version features a melancholy accordion version of a song ("Red River Valley"). And even if the text had mentioned "Red River Valley," that would still be quite different from our actually hearing it performed. And even if the passage had mentioned both the music and the firelight and the light's flickering over Ma Joad's face, that would still not be anything like our seeing her face (or Jane Darwell's) and hearing the music at the same time.

The shift from a single-track, uniquely verbal medium such as the novel, which "has only words to play with," to a multitrack medium such as film, which can play not only with words (written and spoken), but also with theatrical performance, music, sound effects, and moving photographic images, explains the unlikelihood—and I would suggest even the undesirability—of literal fidelity. Because novels do not usually feature soundtracks, for example, should the filmmaker deprive him or herself of music as an expressive resource?<sup>3</sup> But quite apart from this change in signifying materials, other contingencies also render fidelity in adaptation virtually impossible. The demand for fidelity ignores the actual processes of making films—for example, the differences in cost and in modes of production. A novel is usually produced by a single individual; the film is almost always a collaborative project, mobilizing at minimum a crew of four or five people and at maximum a cast and crew and support staff of hundreds. Although novels are relatively unaffected by questions of budget, films are deeply immersed in material and financial contingencies. Therefore, grand panoramic novels such as *War and Peace* might be difficult to film on a low budget, whereas interiorized novellas such as *Notes from Underground* seem more manageable. With a novel, questions of material infrastructure enter only at the point of distribution, whereas in the cinema they enter at the phase of production of the text itself. Although a novel can be written on napkins in prison, a film assumes a complex material infrastructure—camera, film stock, laboratories—simply in order to exist. Although it costs almost nothing for a novelist to write "The Marquis left Versailles palace at 5:00 P.M. on a cold and wintry day in January 1763," the filmmaker requires substantial funding in order to stage a simulacral Paris (or to shoot on location), to dress the actors in period costume, and so forth.

The notion of "fidelity" is essentialist in relation to both media involved. First, it assumes that a novel "contains" an extractable "essence," a kind of "heart of the artichoke" hidden "underneath" the surface details of style. Hidden within *War and Peace*, it is assumed, there is an originary core, a kernel of meaning or nucleus of events that can be "delivered" by an adaptation. But in fact there is no such transferable core: a single novelistic text comprises a series of verbal signals that can generate a plethora of possible readings, including even readings of the narrative itself. The literary text is not a closed, but an open structure (or, better, structuration, as the later Barthes would have it) to be reworked by a boundless context. The text feeds on and is fed into an infinitely permutating intertext, which is seen through ever-shifting grids of interpretation.

This process is further complicated by the passage of time and by change of place. The verbal signals are not always communicated in the same way in a changed context. References obvious to eighteenth-century readers of *Robinson Crusoe* are not necessarily obvious to twentieth-century readers. References clear to English readers of the novel are not necessarily clear to French readers. At the same time, certain features of Defoe's hero, such as his misogyny and latent homoeroticism, might be *more* visible to present-day than to eighteenth-century readers precisely because contemporary critical discourses have made feminist and homosexual readings available. The greater the lapse in time, the less reverence toward the source text and the more likely the reinterpretation through the values of the present. Thus Jack Gold's adaptation of *Robinson Crusoe, Man Friday*, "sees" the Defoe novel through the contemporary values of the counter-culture—spontaneity, sexual freedom, antiracism.

The question of fidelity ignores the wider question: Fidelity to what? Is the filmmaker to be faithful to the plot in its every detail? That might mean a thirty-hour version of *War and Peace*. Virtually all filmmakers condense the events of the novels being adapted, if only to conform to the norms of conventional theatrical release. Should one be faithful to the physical descriptions of characters? Perhaps so, but what if the actor who happens to fit the description of Nabokov's Humbert also happens to be a mediocre actor? Or is one to be faithful to the author's intentions? But what might they be, and how are they to be inferred? Authors often mask their intentions for personal or psychoanalytic reasons or for external or censorious ones. An author's expressed intentions are not necessarily relevant, since literary critics warn us away from the "intentional fallacy," urging us to "trust the tale not the teller." The author, Proust taught us, is not necessarily a purposeful, self-present individual, but rather "un autre moi." Authors are sometimes not even aware of their own deepest intentions. How, then, can filmmakers be faithful to them? And to what authorial instance is one to be

faithful? To the biographical author? To the textual implied author? To the narrator? Or is the adapter-filmmaker to be true to the style of a work? To its narrative point of view? Or to its artistic devices?<sup>4</sup>

Much of the discussion of film adaptation quietly reinscribes the axiomatic superiority of literary art to film, an assumption derived from a number of superimposed prejudices: *seniority*, the assumption that older arts are necessarily better arts; *iconophobia*, the culturally rooted prejudice (traceable to the Judaic-Muslim-Protestant prohibitions on "graven images" and to the Platonic and Neoplatonic depreciation of the world of phenomenal appearance) that visual arts are necessarily inferior to the verbal arts; and *logophilia*, the converse valorization, characteristic of the "religions of the book," of the "sacred word" of holy texts.

Structuralist and poststructuralist theoretical developments, meanwhile, indirectly undermine some of these prejudices in ways that have implications for our discussion of adaptation. The structuralist semiotics of the 1960s and 1970s treated all signifying practices as productive of "texts" worthy of the same close attention as literary texts. The Bakhtinian "translinguistic" conception of the author as the orchestrator of preexisting discourses, meanwhile, along with Foucault's downgrading of the author in favor of a pervasive anonymity of discourse, opened the way to a "discursive" and nonoriginary approach to all arts. With poststructuralism the figure of the author, rather like the Robin Williams character in *Deconstructing Harry*, loses focus and firmness. Derridean deconstruction, meanwhile, by dismantling the hierarchy of "original" and "copy," suggests that both are caught up in the infinite play of dissemination. A film adaptation seen as a "copy," by analogy, would not necessarily be inferior to the novel as the "original." And if authors are fissured, fragmented, multidiscursive, hardly "present" even to themselves, how can an adaptation communicate the "self-presence" of authorial intention? In the same vein, Roland Barthes's provocative leveling of the hierarchy between literary criticism and literature tends, by analogy, to rescue the film adaptation as a form of criticism or "reading" of the novel, one not necessarily subordinate to the source novel.

### From Essence to Specificity

A variation on the theme of fidelity suggests that an adaptation should be faithful not so much to the source text, but rather to the essence of the medium of expression. This "medium-specificity" approach assumes that every medium is inherently "good at" certain things and "bad at" others.<sup>5</sup> A cinematic essence is posited as favoring certain aesthetic possibilities and foreclosing others, as if a specific aesthetic were

inscribed on the celluloid itself. Here is film critic Pauline Kael (in *Deeper into Movies*) on the subject of the "natural" propensities of the film medium:

Movies are good at action; they're not good at reflective thought or conceptual thinking. They're good at immediate stimulus, but they're not a good means of involving people in the other arts or in learning about a subject. The film techniques themselves seem to stand in the way of the development of curiosity.

Kael seems to be saying that films cannot be intelligent or reflective—and this is from someone who claims to be a "fan" of the movies. Despite her self-proclaimed populism, Kael shares with certain literary elitists the assumption that the cinema inevitably lacks the depth and dignity of literature. But apart from her factitious hierarchizing of the arts, Kael makes suspect generalizations about the cinema. Are films good at portraying only action and not subjective states? What about surrealism and expressionism, not to mention music and video or the work of Alfred Hitchcock? Should film not be "theatrical"? Should all the films inspired by Brecht in their dramaturgy or by Stanislavsky in their acting be dismissed as "uncinematic"? Notions of filmic and literary essence, in this sense, impose an oppressive straitjacket on an open-ended and "non-finalized" set of practices.

A more satisfying formulation would emphasize not ontological essence, but rather diacritical specificity. Each medium has its own specificity deriving from its respective materials of expression. The novel has a single material of expression, the written word, whereas the film has at least five tracks: moving photographic image, phonetic sound, music, noises, and written materials. In this sense, the cinema has not lesser, but rather greater resources for expression than the novel, and this is independent of what actual filmmakers have done with these resources. (I am arguing not superiority of talent, but only complexity of resources. Indeed, one could credit literary fictioners with doing a lot with little, whereas filmmakers could be censured for doing so little with so much.) In a suggestive passage, Nabokov's Humbert Humbert laments the prodding deliberateness of prose fiction, with its subordination to linear consecution, its congenital incapacity to seize the moment in its multifaceted simultaneity. Gleefully reporting his wife Charlotte's providential death by car crash, he deplores having to put "the impact of an instantaneous vision into a sequence of words." The "physical accumulation on the page," he complains, "impairs the actual flash, the sharp unity of impression" (*Lolita* [New York: Berkley Medallion, 1977], p. 91). By contrast, the same crash as staged by Kubrick's *Lolita* offers precisely this simultaneity of impression: we see the crash as we hear it, along with the commentative music that conveys a specific attitude toward the events presented. Yet I am in no way arguing the superiority of the

Kubrick rendition. Nabokov, paradoxically, conveys more sense of discontinuity (for example, between the tragic theme of untimely death on the one hand and Humbert's flip, cynical, self-regarding style of presentation on the other) than does Kubrick, despite the discontinuous multiplicity of the film tracks.

Although Humbert Humbert lusts after the cinema's "fantastic simultaneousness," he might also envy its potential for nonsimultaneity, its capacity for mingling apparently contradictory times and temporalities. Each of the filmic tracks can potentially develop an autonomous temporality entering into complex relations with the other tracks. Film's multitrack nature makes it possible to stage contradiction between music and image—for example, Kubrick's underscoring of the opening shot of nuclear bombers, in *Dr. Strangelove*, with the instrumental version of "Try a Little Tenderness." A quoted piece of music, with its own rhythm and continuity, can "accompany" an image track characterized by a different rhythm and continuity. Thus the cinema offers possibilities of disunity and disjunction not immediately available to the novel. The possible contradictions between tracks become an aesthetic resource, opening the way to a multitemporal, polyrhythmic cinema.

The novelistic character also potentially undergoes a kind of fissure or fragmentation within the film adaptation. Although the novelistic character is a verbal artifact, constructed quite literally out of words, the cinematic character is a uncanny amalgam of photogenic, body movement, acting style, and grain of voice, all amplified and molded by lighting, mise-en-scène, and music. And although novels have only character, film adaptations have both character (actantial function) and performer, allowing for possibilities of interplay and contradiction denied a purely verbal medium. In the cinema a single actor can play many roles: Peter Sellers played three roles in *Dr. Strangelove*, Eddie Murphy five roles in *The Nutty Professor*. Conversely, multiple performers can play a single role: different actors portrayed the four incarnations of Christ in Rocha's *Age of the Earth*, and two actresses (Angela Molina and Carole Bouquet) played Conchita in Buñuel's adaptation of *The Woman and the Puppet* (*That Obscure Object of Desire*).

In the cinema the performer also brings along a kind of baggage, a thespian intertext formed by the totality of antecedent roles. Thus Lawrence Olivier brings with him the intertextual memory of his Shakespeare performances, just as Madonna brings the memory of the various personae of her music videos. By casting Jack Palance as the hated film producer Prokosch in *Contempt*, the auteurist Godard brilliantly exploited the sinister memory of Palance's previous roles as a barbarian (in *The Barbarians*, 1959), and as Atilla the Hun (in *Sign of the Pagans*, 1959). This producer, the casting seems to be telling us, is both a gangster and a barbarian, a suggestion confirmed by the brutish

behavior of the character. The director can also have the performer play against the intertext, thus exploiting a realm of tension not available to the novel. To appreciate the force of this difference, we need only contemplate the consequences of other casting choices. What would have happened if Fritz Lang had played the Prokosch role in *Contempt* or if Marlon Brando—or Pee Wee Herman—had played Humbert Humbert in *Lolita*?

Along with character and performer, the cinema offers still another entity denied the novel: the dubber (postsynchroniser), allowing for further permutations of character and voice. In India playback singers, who dub the moving lips of the stars on the image track, become famous in their own right. This third instance enables filmmakers to make thematic points about characters. Thus Glauber Rocha, in his *Deus e Diabo na Terra do Sol* (*Black God, White Devil*, 1964), has actor Othos Bastos dub the voices of both the “black God” and the “white devil,” thus insinuating a deeper subterranean unity linking these apparently antagonistic characters.

Both novel and film have consistently cannibalized other genres and media. The novel began by orchestrating a polyphonic diversity of materials—courtly fictions, travel literature, allegory, and jestbooks—into a new narrative form, repeatedly plundering or annexing neighboring arts, creating novel hybrids such as poetic novels, dramatic novels, cinematic novels, and journalistic novels. But the cinema carries this cannibalization to its paroxysm. As a rich, sensorially composite language characterized by what Metz calls “codic heterogeneity,” the cinema becomes a receptacle open to all kinds of literary and pictorial symbolism, to all types of collective representation, to all ideologies, to all aesthetics, and to the infinite play of influences within cinema, within the other arts, and within culture generally.

The cinema is both a synesthetic and a synthetic art, synesthetic in its capacity to engage various senses (sight and hearing) and synthetic in its anthropophagic capacity to absorb and synthesize antecedent arts. A composite language by virtue of its diverse matters of expression—sequential photography, music, phonetic sound, and noise—the cinema “inherits” all the art forms associated with these matters of expression. Cinema has available to it the visuals of photography and painting, the movement of dance, the decor of architecture, and the performance of theater. Both the novel and the fiction film are summas by their very nature. Their essence is to have no essence, to be open to all cultural forms. Cinema can literally include painting, poetry, and music, or it can metaphorically evoke them by imitating their procedures; it can show a Picasso painting or emulate cubist techniques or visual dislocation, cite a Bach cantata, or create montage equivalents of fugue and counterpoint. Godard’s *Passion* not only includes music (Ravel, Mozart, Ferre, Beethoven, and Fauré), but is conceived musically, and not only



includes animated tableaux based on celebrating paintings (Rembrandt's *Night Watch*, Goya's *The Third of May*, and Delacroix's *Turkish Bathers*), but also expresses a painterly concern with light and color. The famous definitions of cinema in terms of other arts—"painting in motion" (Canudo), "sculpture in motion" (Vachel Lindsay), "music of light" (Abel Gance), and "architecture in movement" (Elie Fauré)—merely call attention to the synthetic multiplicity of signifiers available to the cinema.

### Translations and Transformations

If "fidelity" is an inadequate trope, we must then ask, What tropes might be more appropriate? One trope, I would suggest, is "translation." The trope of adaptation as translation suggests a principled effort of intersemiotic transposition, with the inevitable losses and gains typical of any translation.<sup>6</sup> The trope of translation undergirds the textual mechanisms of Godard's *Le Mepris* (*Contempt*, 1963), itself an adaptation of the Moravia novel *Il Disprezzo*, a novel whose partial subject is the issue of the adaptation of Homer's *The Odyssey* for film. The film deals with various kinds of translations, literal and figurative. The translation is literal both in its implicit reference to the translation of *The Odyssey* from classical Greek into contemporary European vernaculars and in its literal inclusion of a translator (not present in the novel)—the interpreter Francesca (Georgia Moll)—who mediates linguistically between the monolingual American producer Prokosch and his more polyglot European interlocutors. (When Italian laws concerning obligatory postsynchronization led Italian dubbers to eliminate the role of Francesca, Godard disassociated himself from the Italian version of the film.) Francesca's hurried translations of Fritz Lang's poetic quotations prove that, in art as in language, "traduire, c'est trahir." Her translations invariably miss a nuance, smooth over an aggression, or exclude an ambiguity. But the film also concerns less literal translations: the generic "translation" of Homer's epic poetry into contemporary novelistic prose and the intersemiotic "translation" of Moravia's novel into Godard's photographic images and sounds. In this sense, *Contempt* can be seen as a meditation on the richly ambiguous nature of all translation and adaptation. At the same time, the film suggests, art renews itself through creative mis-translation.

In fact, adaptation theory has available a whole constellation of tropes—translation, reading, dialogization, cannibalization, transmutation, transfiguration, and signifying—each of which sheds light on a different dimension of adaptation. For example, the trope of adaptation as a "reading" of the source novel—a reading that is inevitably partial, personal, and conjectural—suggests that just as any text can generate an

infinity of readings, so any novel can generate any number of adaptations. Why should we assume that one director—for example, John Huston—has said everything that needs to be said about *Moby-Dick*? (If one has nothing new to say about a novel, Orson Welles once suggested, why adapt it at all?) A single novel can thus generate any number of critical readings and creative misreadings. Indeed, many novels have been adapted repeatedly. *Madame Bovary* has been adapted at least nine times, in countries as diverse as France, Portugal, the United States, India, and Argentina. Each adaptation sheds a new cultural light on the novel; the Hindi version, entitled *Maya* (Illusion) not only envisions *Bovary* through the grid of Hindu philosophy ("the veil of illusion"), but also links Emma's romanticism, quite logically, to the conventions of the Bombay musical.

Godard regarded his Moravia source novel as a banal, old-fashioned, premodernist novel, which suggests that adaptations can be motivated as much by hostility as by affection. A "reading" can also be a critique. Sergio Giral's adaptation of Cuba's first antislavery novel (Anselmo Suárez y Romero's *Francisco: El Ingenio o Las Delicias del Campo* [*Francisco: The Sugar-mill or the Delights of the Canefields*, 1839], for example, was inspired by hostility to the source novel. Although the novel, often called the "Cuban *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," sentimentalizes slavery, the film adaptation, tellingly retitled *El Otro Francisco* (*The Other Francisco*) denounces that very sentimentality. The Giral adaptation promotes interplay between diverse generic modes of presentation: a parodically melodramatic approach, sarcastically "faithful" to the sentimental spirit of the novel; a staged (anachronistically verité) documentary about the novel's production context; and a realistic reconstruction of the historical life of the enslaved. Taken together, the three modes emphasize exactly what is suppressed in the novel: the economic motives behind the abolitionist movement, the catalyzing role of black rebellion, and the artistic mediation of the story itself. In the novel, Francisco commits suicide when he learns that his true love Dorotea has surrendered to the lust of her white master, but the documentary-style segments suggest that a slave would never commit suicide over an ill-fated romance. The film's final section stages the slave uprisings missing from the novel.

The Giral film self-reflexively, almost paradigmatically, explores the notion of adaptation as demystificatory critique. To be more precise, Giral submitted the original novel to a series of activist operations: he parodied the novel—for example, in the opening precredit sequence, by exaggerating the novel's melodramatic conventions through their filmic equivalents, overwrought acting, haloed backlighting, soft-focus visuals, and lachrymose music; he contextualized the novel by revealing the social milieu or artistic habitus out of which the novel was generated—the upper-class liberal del Monte salon; he supplemented the novel by

including the author Suárez y Romero himself (or an actor impersonating him) in the film, informing us that the abolitionist author had himself inherited slaves; he inserted other contemporaneous historical figures such as the British free trade agent Richard Madden, a key figure in the background of the abolitionist movement, then in Cuba investigating the slave trade; he historicized the novel by drawing on Madden's two books on Cuban slavery in order to show slavery as a modern system of production; he documented slavery in such a way as to show us everything that the novel left out (the economic subtext of slavery and the geopolitical maneuverings of the British); he supplemented the information provided by the novel through his own research into Cuban history, revealing, for example, that Cuban independence was partially delayed due to fear of the "undue" empowerment of former slaves; he staged precisely what most frightened the Cuban elite—the history of black slave rebellion in Cuba (furthermore, he revealed that the author himself was aware of the rebellions, yet chose not to include them in his book); he resequenced the novel by having the film begin where the novel ends, with Francisco's suicide; and finally, he transformed the novel's docile central character, Francisco, into a revolutionary, the "other" Francisco of the title.

### Adaptation as Intertextual Dialogism

Adaptations, then, can take an activist stance toward their source novels, inserting them into a much broader intertextual dialogism. An adaptation, in this sense, is less an attempted resuscitation of an originary word than a turn in an ongoing dialogical process. The concept of intertextual dialogism suggests that every text forms an intersection of textual surfaces. All texts are tissues of anonymous formulae, variations on those formulae, conscious and unconscious quotations, and connotations and inversions of other texts. In the broadest sense, intertextual dialogism refers to the infinite and open-ended possibilities generated by all the discursive practices of a culture, the entire matrix of communicative utterances within which the artistic text is situated, which reach the text not only through recognizable influences, but also through a subtle process of dissemination.

Intertextuality, then, helps us transcend the aporias of "fidelity." But intertextuality can be conceived in a shallow or a deep manner. Bakhtin spoke of the "deep generating series" of literature—that is, the complex and multidimensional dialogism, rooted in social life and history, comprising both primary (oral) and secondary (literary) genres—which engendered literature as a cultural phenomenon. Bakhtin attacked the limitation of the literary scholar-critic's interest exclusively to the "literary series," arguing for a more diffuse dissemination of ideas as

interanimating all the "series," literary and nonliterary, as they are generated by what he called the "powerful deep currents of culture." Literature, and by extension the cinema, must be understood within what Bakhtin called the "differentiated unity of the epoch's entire culture" (Bakhtin, "Response to a Question from *Novy Mir*," in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* [ed. Carl Emerson and Michael Holquist, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986], p. 3).

Building on Bakhtin and Julia Kristeva, in *Palimpsestes* (1982) Gérard Genette offers other analytic concepts useful for our discussion of adaptation. Genette proposed a more inclusive term, *transtextuality*, to refer to "all that which puts one text in relation, whether manifest or secret, with other texts." Genette posited five types of transtextual relations, some of which bear relevance to adaptation. He defined the first type, "intertextuality" as the "effective co-presence of two texts" in the form of quotation, plagiarism, and allusion. Adaptation, in this sense, participates in a double intertextuality, one literary and the other cinematic.

"Paratextuality," Genette's second type of transtextuality, refers to the relation, within the totality of a literary work, between the text proper and its "paratext"—titles, prefaces, postfaces, epigraphs, dedications, illustrations, and even book jackets and signed autographs—in short, all the accessory messages and commentaries that come to surround the text and at times become virtually indistinguishable from it. In the case of film, the paratext might include widely quoted prefatory remarks by a director at a film's first screening, reported remarks by a director about a film, or widely reported information about the budget of a film.

"Metatextuality," Genette's third type of transtextuality, consists of the critical relation between one text and another, whether the commented text is explicitly cited or only silently evoked. In this sense, *The Other Francisco* can be seen as a metatextual critique of the Suárez y Romero novel. "Architextuality," Genette's fourth category, refers to the generic taxonomies suggested or refused by the titles or infratitles of a text. Architextuality has to do with an artist's willingness or reluctance to characterize a text generically in its title. Because most adaptations of novels simply carry over the title of the original, if only to take advantage of a preexisting market, this term would seem irrelevant to our discussion. Yet in some cases a changed title signals the transformations operative in the adaptation. Giral's title *The Other Francisco* alerts us to Giral's radical transfiguration of the politics and aesthetics of the source novel. The title *Clueless* disguises the Jane Austen source (*Emma*) while signaling the film's milieu: rich, upper-middle-class adolescents. As we shall see, the title of *Man Friday*, an adaptation of *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, signals a change in voice and perspective from those of the colonizer Crusoe to those of the colonized Friday, now no longer the "boy" of colonialist discourse, but a "man."

"Hypertextuality," Genette's fifth type of transtextuality, is perhaps the most suggestive of Genette's categories. It refers to the relation between one text, which Genette calls "hypertext," to an anterior text, or "hypotext," which the former transforms, modifies, elaborates, or extends. In literature the hypotexts of *The Aeneid* include *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad*, whereas the hypotexts of Joyce's *Ulysses* include *The Odyssey* and *Hamlet*. Both *The Aeneid* and *Ulysses* are hypertextual elaborations of a single hypotext, *The Odyssey*. Filmic adaptations, in this sense, are hypertexts derived from preexisting hypotexts that have been transformed by operations of selection, amplification, concretization, and actualization. The diverse filmic adaptations of *Madame Bovary* (by Renoir and Minnelli) or of *La Femme et le Pantin* (by Duvivier, von Sternberg, and Buñuel) can be seen as variant hypertextual "readings" triggered by the same hypotext. Indeed, the diverse prior adaptations can form a larger, cumulative hypotext that is available to the filmmaker who comes relatively "late" in the series.

Film adaptations, then, are caught up in the ongoing whirl of intertextual reference and transformation, of texts generating other texts in an endless process of recycling, transformation, and transmutation, with no clear point of origin. Let us take as an example *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, one of the seminal source novels of a specific European tradition, the realistic mimetic novel supposedly based on "real life" and written in such a way as to generate a strong impression of factual reality. Yet this "realistic" novel is itself rooted in various intertexts: the Bible, the literature of religious meditation, the journalistic texts about Crusoe's prototype, Alexander Selkirk, and sensationalist travel literature, to mention just a few. Defoe's 1719 novel, rooted in this complex and variegated intertext, also generated its own textual "afterlife" or "post-text." In France the exemplars of this post-text were called Robinsonades. Already in 1805, less than a century after the publication of the Defoe novel, a German encyclopedia (*Bibliothek der Robinsone*) offered a comprehensive guide to all the works inspired by *Robinson Crusoe*. Nor did this novelistic post-text end in the nineteenth century, as both Michel Tournier's *Vendredi, ou l'Île de la Pacifique* and Derek Walcott's *Pantomime*, in both of which *Crusoe* is reread through an anticolonialist grid, clearly attest.

The *Crusoe* post-text also has ramifications in the world of film, where a long pageant of adaptations has rung in changes on the themes of the original. *Miss Crusoe* (1919) performs a variation in gender, which is interesting because the novel, against the grain of the "desert island" genre, scarcely mentions women at all. *Little Robinson Crusoe* (1924), carrying out the logic of *Crusoe-as-children's-book*, changes the age of the protagonist, with Jackie Coogan coming to the island on wings to be worshiped by the naive natives. *Mr. Robinson Crusoe* (1932) keeps *Crusoe* but supplies him with a feminine companion, perhaps inevitably

called not Friday, but Saturday. *Swiss Family Robinson* (1940) permutes the number and social status of the characters, changing the solitary Crusoe to an entire family. The Laurel and Hardy film *Robinson Crusoe* (1950) performs a shift in genre, from colonial adventure story to slapstick comedy. Similarly, *Robinson Crusoe on Mars* (1964) turns the novel into science fiction: the "pioneer" on earth becomes a pioneer in space. In *Lieutenant Robinson Crusoe* (1965) there are transformations both professional and zoological, as Defoe's protagonist becomes the sailor played by Dick van Dyke, and Crusoe's parrot is replaced by a chimpanzee.

In *Robinson Crusoe* Daniel Defoe created one of the West's archetypal colonial-adventurer heroes. Crusoe, we often forget, had become wealthy through trade in slaves and Brazilian sugar. Cast away on an island, his first thought on seeing human footprints after years of solitude is that he might "get a servant." He names "his" islander "Friday" in memory of the day he saved the native's life, as a clear reminder of the rationale for enslaving him. It should not be surprising, therefore, that latter-day adaptations submit the novel to a kind of ideological critique. Luis Buñuel's film adaptation of the novel, *Robinson Crusoe* (1952), casts satiric doubt on Crusoe's religion but leaves unquestioned certain aspects of the film's colonialist discourse. Jack Gold's *Man Friday* (1975), meanwhile, turns Defoe's puritanical fable-cum-colonial-romance into an anticolonialist allegory. The film mocks Crusoe for his ledger-book mentality, his obsession with property, his racism, his chauvinism, and his puritanical phobias (he spends years on a tropical island without removing his fur clothing). *Man Friday* also draws out the novel's homoerotic subtext. As has often been noted, Defoe's Crusoe seems less erotically energized by his wife, whom he marries and dispatches in a single sentence, than by Friday, whom he describes as "handsome" and "well-shaped." In *Man Friday* Crusoe's fears of homosexual attraction lead him to rampant paranoia and (literal) self-flagellation, to the bemusement of Friday, who, not sharing Crusoe's erotic neuroses and inhibitions, offers himself as sexual solace.

Film adaptations can be seen as a kind of multileveled negotiation of intertexts. Therefore, it is often productive to ask these questions: Precisely what generic intertexts are invoked by the source novel, and which by the filmic adaptation? Which generic signals in the novel are picked up, and which are ignored? In the case of Fielding's *Tom Jones*, we are dealing with precisely the counter-tradition to *Robinson Crusoe*, the Cervantic tradition that is explicitly rather than surreptitiously intertextual. Henry Fielding called *Tom Jones* a "comic epic poem in prose:" comic in the sense both of a happy ending in plot and of ironic distance in style, epic in the sense of the periodic grandeur and elegance of the novel's epic similes, a poem in the sense of "creative work

of the imagination"—a poem this time not in stanzaic poetry, but in euphonious prose.

Interestingly, the Richardson and Osborne adaptation, often hailed as a model of sensitive adaptation, picks up some intertextual cues, but not others. It picks up some aspects of the novel's reflexivity, partially by borrowing the language of the novel both for intertitles and for voice-over narration, but it also mingles the literary cues with specifically filmic devices in such a way as to find the filmic equivalents of literary techniques. Albert Finney's complicit winks to the spectator "cinematize" Fielding's direct address to his "dear reader." Fielding's irreverent play with chapter titles ("Containing Five Pieces of Paper," "Containing the Time of a Year") becomes in the film a virtuoso display of a specifically cinematic device, the optical wipe, here rendered as spirals, bars, and scissors. Fielding's Cervantic (and Hogarthian) freezing of specific actions is rendered in the film by the literal freeze-frame: for instance, when the philosopher Square is caught in flagrante delicto in Molly's closet. Fielding's *exercises de style* (with excursions into pastoral, meditative, philosophical, and literary styles as well as that of Homeric simile) become in the film forays into cinematic stylistics: the accelerated motion of Mack Sennett, the iris-in on the villain. The novel's parody of Samuel Richardson's sentimental fictions becomes in the film the parody of silent period melodrama, rendered by means of overheatedly moralistic intertitles, improbable plot turns, and histrionic performance. Just as Fielding makes parodic allusions to his literary forebears, so Richardson and Osborne allude to their film antecedents through the use of archaic devices: Fielding's epic similes allude to the ancient Homeric roots of the western tradition, whereas Richardson and Osborne's use of archaic devices points to the tradition of the silent cinema.

### The Grammar of Transformation

To sum up what has been argued thus far, one way to look at adaptation is to see it as a matter of a source novel hypotext's being transformed by a complex series of operations: selection, amplification, concretization, actualization, critique, extrapolation, analogization, popularization, and reculturalization. The source novel, in this sense, can be seen as a situated utterance produced in one medium and in one historical context, then transformed into another equally situated utterance that is produced in a different context and in a different medium. The source text forms a dense informational network, a series of verbal cues that the adapting film text can then take up, amplify, ignore, subvert, or transform. The film adaptation of a novel performs these transformations according to the protocols of a distinct medium, absorbing and altering

the genres and intertexts available through the grids of ambient discourses and ideologies, and as mediated by a series of filters: studio style, ideological fashion, political constraints, auteurist predilections, charismatic stars, economic advantage or disadvantage, and evolving technology. The film hypertext, in this sense, is transformational almost in the Chomskian sense of a "generative grammar" of adaptation, with the difference that these cross-media operations are infinitely more unpredictable and multifarious than they would be were it a matter of "natural language."

Central to the transformational grammar of adaptation are permutations in locale, time, and language. The Renoir and the Chabrol adaptations of *Madame Bovary* feature continuity between the language and locale of the source novel and the language and locale of the film adaptations. The Minnelli adaptation, by contrast, features discontinuity; studio lots "stand in" for France, and the actors speak English, with occasional use of French words and intermittent use of French accents. The filmmaker adapting a novel written in another country and in another language is confronted with a series of options: Should the director find performers from the country in question? Should he have actors from the "home" country speak with an accent? Or should the adapter "Americanize" the source novel? The bored provincial protagonist of Woody Allen's *Purple Rose of Cairo* (played by Mia Farrow), deluded by artistic fictions, can on some levels be seen as an American Bovary. The director must also confront questions of temporality and epoch. Is the film adaptation a costume drama that respects the historical time frame of the original, or does it "update" the novel? The history of the theater features innumerable updatings of Shakespeare, for example, yet the practice is less common in film. Of the recent spate of Jane Austen films, only *Clueless* updated the original, but without referencing the novel explicitly.

Although some broad genres (comedy, tragedy, and melodrama) are shared between novel and film, other genres are specifically filmic (e.g., the animated cartoon) because they depend on specific cinematic features such as the moving image, film editing, and so forth. The complexity of these intertextual negotiations becomes manifest in the case of the Spielberg adaptation of Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. The novel interweaves any number of intertexts, literary and extraliterary, each with its own network of connotations and implications: the epistolary novel, implying not only a specific orchestration of voice, but also such themes as patriarchal oppression (as in *Pamela* and *Clarissa*), the structural principle of procrastinated rape (here not procrastinated, but rather placed on the very first page), and class consciousness; the historical romance, implying a past setting but here domesticated and rendered quotidian; the autobiographical slave narrative, implying the personalization of social protest; the realistic novel, with its connotations



of democratization, stylistic dignity, and the respectful treatment of the everyday life of people of "lower" social strata; the bildungsroman, or novel of development, evoked by Celie's coming-of-age story; the reflexive novel, found in the direct thematization of Celie's wrestling with language and writing; the fairy tale, implied by the once-upon-a-time quality of the girl-child's fantasies; inspirational literature (religious, secular, and feminist), implied by the overall homiletic drift of the novel; and the blues, cited literally and emulated figuratively as a vernacular art. The novel also engages in what Bakhtin calls "hidden polemics," for example, by critiquing antecedent racist representations, discourses, and stereotypes about black women and about the black family. The portrait of African religion as highly mystical, for example, argues against the stereotypical view of African religions as overly physical, superstitious, and hysterical.

In his adaptation Spielberg picks up some of these cues, ignores others, and "adds" specifically filmic allusions and protocols. He pushes the source novel toward the heightened emotions and Manichean moralism of melodrama and underscores this generic option through the lush, richly symphonic music of the Quincy Jones soundtrack. Spielberg maintains the conventions of the epistolary novel but cinematizes it with recurrent shots of the mailbox and the letters themselves while imbuing the tradition with the grain of specific voices such as Whoopie Goldberg's. In terms of specifically filmic genres, we catch the stereotypical echoes of the "all-black musical" (e.g., *Hallelujah* and *Cabin in the Sky*), especially in the gospel sequences. Here we sense that the director's experience of black people, at least at that time, had largely been mediated by film, and specifically by film of a tradition that makes the black rural community the locus of spiritual and physical vibrancy. The more bluesy-jazzistic sequences recall a different tradition, one that renders blacks not as rural and primitive, but rather as urban and sophisticated and Afromodernist.<sup>7</sup> The film is also inflected by the specifically filmic tradition of slapstick farce and minstrelsy, as exemplified by Harpo's repeated pratfalls and by "Mister's" ponderously comic efforts to cook for Shug. At the same time, the film adds a literary supplement through literary references not made in the source novel, notably through references to Dickens' *Oliver Twist*.

The question of intertext also brings up the question of parody. Although some adaptations, such as the Richardson and Osborne *Tom Jones*, pick up on the parodic cues of their source novels, others ignore them. Both the Chabrol and the Renoir adaptations of *Madame Bovary*, for example, do surprisingly little with a recurrent feature of the source novel, its rendering of Emma's interior consciousness, in *le style indirect libre*, through parodic exaggerations of the stylistic vices of such writers as Chateaubriand and Sir Walter Scott. Minnelli emphasizes Emma's early reading of romantic novels, but has James Mason's voice-

over condemn her "illusions" and "dreams" in a univocal fashion that has little to do with Gustave ("Madame-Bovary-c'est-moi") Flaubert's "complicitous critique" of his heroine. Kubrick's version of *Lolita*, similarly, does almost nothing with the densely parodic prose of the Nabokov source novel or, for that matter, with all the self-flauntingly cinematic and self-referential ideas proposed in Nabokov's screenplay, partly as a function of Kubrick's instrumental view (at the time) of prose style as what the artist uses to fascinate the beholder and thus to convey feelings and thoughts.<sup>8</sup>

### Transmutations of Plot and Character

Much of the literature on adaptation has concentrated on specifically textual operations having to do with plot events and characters. Often we find a kind of condensation of characters. The many Okie families of *The Grapes of Wrath* are foreshortened into the Joads of the John Ford version. The bevy of female lovers of Jules and Jim in the Henri Pierre Roche novel are condensed into Catherine (Jeanne Moreau) in the Truffaut adaptation. Film adaptations have a kind of "Sophie's choice" about which characters in the novel will live or die. But although adaptations tend to sacrifice "extra" characters from novels, occasionally the opposite process takes place, as we saw in the case of *El Otro Francisco*. The Minnelli version of *Madame Bovary* adds the character of Flaubert himself, who is being tried for obscenity in the courts of France. Godard adds the character of the translator Francesca in *Contempt*, precisely in order to highlight the polyglot ambiance of international coproductions in the 1960s, as well as to make a more metaphorical point about adaptation as a process of translation.

Characters can also be subtly changed. The white judge in Thomas Wolfe's *Bonfire of the Vanities* became the black judge played by Morgan Freeman in the Brian de Palma adaptation, presumably as a way of sidestepping and warding off the accusations of racism leveled against the novel. Film adaptations often ignore key passages in the source books. None of the *Madame Bovary* adapters, to my knowledge, chose to stage the opening passage in which a group of pupils "nous étions à l'étude, quand le Proviseur entra, suivi d'un nouveau. . . ." And most of the adaptations downplay Charles's first wife in order to concentrate on the relationship between Emma and Charles.

Film adaptations usually make temporal changes as well. Therefore, two months in the Alberto Moravia source novel become just two days in the Godard adaptation (*Contempt*), part of a Brechtian "theatricalization" of the source novel. On the other hand, events in the source novel can be amplified, as when, in the case of *Tom Jones*, a few sentences regarding Squire Western's love of hunting became in the film

the pretext for a spectacular fox hunt staged in an attempt to make the film more "cinematic" but also in order to strengthen the satire of the landed gentry. Film adaptations can also add events—for example, in the form of Peter Sellers's inspired improvisations in the Kubrick *Lolita*. These additions can have any number of motivations: to take advantage of a brilliant actor, to suggest contemporary relevance, or to "correct" the novel for aesthetic reasons. In the case of Godard's *Masculine Feminine*, supposedly an adaptation of a Guy de Maupassant story, very little was retained from the source novel. Godard kept only a few of the characters' names and almost nothing else, to the point that those who sold the rights concluded that those rights had not even been used.

There is also the complex question of point of view. Does the film adaptation maintain the point of view and the focalization (Genette) of the novel? Who tells the story in the novel vis-à-vis the film? Who focalizes the story—that is, who sees within the story? Genette distinguishes between the instance that tells (the narrator), the instance that sees and experiences (the character), and the instance that knows (the filter). In Godard's *Contempt* there is a clear shift in point of view or, to change the metaphor, to a change in voice, a "transvocalization." Although the novel is narrated as a reminiscence in the first person by screenwriter Ricardo Molteni (Paul in the film), the film is neither narrated in the first person, nor is it a reminiscence, nor is it told from any particular point of view except that, perhaps, of the cinema itself. What was therapeutic first-person rumination in the novel—"I decided to write these memoirs in hopes of finding [Camille] again"—becomes a kind of no-person point of view in the film. The unreliable narrator of the novel—we slowly realize that he is highly disturbed, paranoid, almost hallucinatory—gives way to the impersonal narration of the film, all as part of a drift toward a Brechtian depersonalization and depsychologizing. The emphasis shifts from one character's mind to the relations between five characters belonging to the same film milieu.

This is not the place to attempt to perform an ambitious extrapolation of Genette's categories concerning novelistic discourse to filmic discourse. Suffice it to say that such categories as "variable focalization" and "multiple focalization" are very suggestive for film analysis. The former evokes the tag-team approach to point of view that characterizes Hitchcock's films, moving between major characters such as Mitch and Melanie in *The Birds* but also moving to minor characters such as the boy who whistles at Melanie in the opening shots, the man who observes her from the dock at Bodega Bay, or even the birds who oversee her departure in the shot/reverse shot structure of the final sequence. "Multiple focalization" evokes not only the multiple perspectives of a film such as *Rashomon* or *Citizen Kane*, but also the multiple focalizations of a dispersed narrative such as that of Altman's *Nashville*.

Film adaptations of novels often change novelistic events for (perhaps unconscious) ideological reasons. In the case of the Minnelli *Madame Bovary*, Charles Bovary is made to refuse to operate on Hippolyte (whereas in the novel he bungles the operation), presumably out of respect for Hollywood pieties concerning the pater familias figure. Film adaptations of novels thus become entangled in questions of ideology. Does the film "push" the novel to the left or the right in terms of sexual, racial, and class politics? Spielberg's *The Color Purple* plays down the lesbianism of the Alice Walker novel. And by having Shug reconcile with her censorious preacher father, the adaptation "repatriarchalizes" a feminist novel. The John Ford version of *The Grapes of Wrath* shies away from the socialist drift of the Steinbeck novel. But the drift is not always rightward. *Man Friday*, as we have seen, pushes *Robinson Crusoe* to the antiracist, anticolonialist, antireligious left. The narrative sequencing can also be rearranged, with clear ideological overtones. The circular structure of the Kubrick *Lolita* clearly draws attention away from Humbert Humbert's nympholepsy and toward the murderous rivalry between Humbert and Quilty in ways that lead one to suspect that this was a sop to the censors. In the John Ford *Grapes of Wrath*, as has often been pointed out, the sequencing of the three camps—the Hooverville, the New Deal "Wheatpatch," and the Keane Ranch—is altered so as transform what was a spiraling descent into oppression into an ascent into New Deal benevolence and good order.<sup>9</sup>

Just as interesting as what in the source novel is eliminated or bypassed is why certain materials are ignored. The intercalary, essayistic chapters of *The Grapes of Wrath* were largely eliminated from the John Ford adaptation, presumably because they were seen as "uncinematic" but also because those chapters happen to be the places in which John Steinbeck's (then) socialist opinions were most in evidence. The philosophical meditations that dot Melville's *Moby-Dick* were largely ignored in the John Huston adaptation, again because of their "uncinematic" nature but also perhaps because film producers assumed that the mass audience would not be "up to" such lofty and allusive materials. The adaptations of reflexive novels such as *Tom Jones* or *Lolita*, in the same vein, tend to downplay the literary-critical excursions that mark the source novels. Although reflexive in certain respects, the Osborne and Richardson *Tom Jones* does not try to recreate the film equivalents of Fielding's essays in literary criticism—for example, by proffering film criticism—presumably because tampering too much with the filmic illusion would spoil the "sport" of the fiction.

Here we enter the fraught area of comparative stylistics. To what extent are the source novel and the film adaptation innovative in aesthetic terms, and if they are innovative, are they innovative in the same way? *Madame Bovary* was extremely innovative at its time for its decentered approach to narrative, its subversion of norms of character, its

mobile approach to point of view, and its systemic frustration of the reader's expectations. To what extent do the various film versions provide an equivalent sense of such innovations? To what extent do they go beyond the novel to innovate in cinematic terms? The answers to these questions become crucial when we realize that *Madame Bovary*, although written prior to the advent of the cinema, can reasonably be called protocinematic. Eisenstein famously cited the "agricultural fair" chapter in the Flaubert novel as a brilliant precinematic example of montage. The concept of the "cinematic novel" has, admittedly, often been abused, bandied about so imprecisely as to mean anything from a book that has sharply imagined physical action to a book that uses certain techniques reminiscent of film. Despite this danger, it is nonetheless fruitful, I think, to see a novel such as *Madame Bovary* as protocinematic. Flaubert was an author at a crucial transitional moment within the history of the novel, one distinct from both the sober documentary realism of Defoe and the playful reflexivity of a Cervantes or a Fielding. I am referring to the moment when a kind of mobilized regard crystallized the altered perceptions associated with modernity—an altered gaze associated both with impressionism in painting, where the artist is attentive to what intervenes between the object and the eye, and with modernism in the novel, where point of view and filters of consciousness become paramount organizing principles—instantiating a subjectification and a relativization of the stabilities of the classical realist model.

Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* might be called both proleptically modernist and protocinematic in a number of senses: in its film script-like notation of precise gestures (see, for example, the account of Charles Bovary's first arrival at Emma's family farm); in its artful modulation, à la Hitchcock, of point of view, whereby we experience flickering moments of identification not only with major characters such as Emma and Charles, but also with minor characters and even with unnamed characters who never again appear in the text; in its precise articulation, reminiscent of camera "setups," of character vantage points within voyeuristic structures (for example, the two gossips who observe Emma from their attic post or the "curieux" of the final pages who peeks at Charles from behind a bush); in its kinetic, destabilized portraiture of characters as a kind of flowing composition in time; in its verbal recreation of the "feel" of seeing, especially encumbered seeing (Emma's squinting, her intermittent loss of focus, her attempts to discern objects in the distance); in its "impressionist" attention to the vapors and gases jostling one another in the atmosphere, as well as to the dynamic agency of light in modifying appearances, as seen in the use of such light-active words as *blanchissaient*, *vernissait*, and *veloutant*; in the corporeal empathy with which it identifies the reader with the very body of the heroine (for example, the account of Emma's milky orgasm with Rodolphe); in the kinesthetic quality of Flaubert's prose, its manner of

mobilizing the reader's gaze (for example, the accounts of the passing world as seen from the moving *hirondelle*); and in the ironic manipulation of "focal length"—for instance, in the abrupt move from the long view of the cab containing the fornicating Leon and Emma to the close view of "the torn-up note," followed by the extremely long view that turns Emma into a generic "femme" descending from a vehicle.

Compared with the novel, the film adaptations of *Madame Bovary* are much less innovative, and much more concerned with adapting the text to a mainstream audience. In other words, the phenomenon of "mainstreaming" is not limited to ideological issues; there also exists the phenomenon of aesthetic mainstreaming. Despite its surface modernity and its technological razzle-dazzle, dominant cinema has maintained, on the whole, a premodernist aesthetic corresponding to that of the nineteenth-century mimetic novel. In its dominant mode it became a receptacle for the mimetic aspirations abandoned by the most advanced practitioners of the other the arts. Film inherited the illusionistic ideals that impressionism had relinquished in painting, that Jarry had attacked in the theater, and that Proust, Joyce, and Woolf had undermined in the novel. Aesthetic censorship, in this sense, might be in some ways more severe and deeply rooted than political self-censorship. Adaptation, in this sense, seems to encounter the most difficulty with modernist novels such as Joyce's *Ulysses*, Nabokov's *Lolita*, or Duras's *L'Amant*. When Jean-Jacques Annaud turns Marguerite Duras's modernist, feminist novel *L'Amant* into a linear, masculinist, mainstream film, we are not entirely wrong to regret that the director has misrecognized the most salient traits of Durasian *écriture*. When a modernist, discontinuous novel is made relatively continuous through the dumb inertia of convention; when a filmic adaptation is thought to need a sympathetic male protagonist in order to be palatable for a mass audience (whence Minnelli's idealized Charles Bovary); when the hero cannot die or the villain must be punished; when a digressive, disruptive style must be linearized into a classical three-act structure with exposition, conflict, and climax; when morality must be reconfigured to suit preestablished Manichean schemas; when a difficult, reflexive novel must be made transparent and redundant; when the spectator must be led by the hand—in such cases, I would suggest, we find a kind of ideologically driven failure of nerve to deal with the aesthetic implications of novelistic modernism.

By adopting the approach to adaptation I have been suggesting, we in no way abandon our rights or responsibilities to make judgments about the value of specific film adaptations. We can—and, in my view, we should—continue to function as critics; but our statements about films based on novels or other sources need to be less moralistic, less panicked, less implicated in unacknowledged hierarchies, more rooted in contextual and intertextual history. Above all, we need to be less

concerned with inchoate notions of "fidelity" and to give more attention to dialogical responses—to readings, critiques, interpretations, and rewritings of prior material. If we can do all these things, we will produce a criticism that not only takes into account, but also welcomes, the differences among the media.

#### NOTES

1. See Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), p. 12.

2. Georges Pérec, *Les Choses* (Paris: L. N. Julliard, 1965), p. 80 (translation mine).

3. One of the side effects of reading a novel after having seen its cinematic adaptation, for me at least, is that I tend to "hear" the music track as I read.

4. Julio Bressane, in his film adaptation of the Machado de Assis novel *Memorias Postumas de Bras Cubas*, professed a lack of interest in the novel's plot while rigorously attempting to find film equivalents of its devices. The literary device of the posthumous narrator, for example, is "translated" by a filmmaker's sound boom's banging up against a skeleton.

5. For a critique of medium-specificity arguments, see Noel Carroll, *Theorizing the Moving Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

6. For a systematic, even technical, exploration of adaptation as translation, see Patrick Cattrysse, *Pour une Théorie de l'Adaptation Filmique: Le Film Noir Américain* (Paris: Peter Lang, 1995).

7. See James Naremore's chapter on *Cabin in the Sky* in his *The Films of Vincente Minnelli* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 51–70.

8. One regrets that the later, more reflexive, Kubrick of *Clockwork Orange* and *Dr. Strangelove* did not return to the Nabokov text and process it through a more stylistically self-conscious grid.

9. See Warren French, *Filmguide to The Grapes of Wrath* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973).