



FILM
CULTURE

IN TRANSITION

*Figuring
the Past*

Period Film and
the Mannerist Aesthetic

BELÉN VIDAL

AMSTERDAM UNIVERSITY PRESS

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The publication of this book is made possible by a grant from the British Academy.

Front cover illustration: Bright Star (© BBC Films / The Kobal Collection)

Cover design: Kok Korpershoek, Amsterdam

Lay-out: JAPES, Amsterdam

ISBN 978 90 8964 281 3 (paperback)

ISBN 978 90 8964 282 0 (hardcover)

e-ISBN 978 90 4851 353 6

NUR 670

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Acknowledgements

This book has had an extremely long gestation, and I am indebted to many persons and institutions that provided invaluable support along the way. I thank the British Academy for its financial support, and the editorial team at Amsterdam University Press, who made it possible for this book to see the light of day. I would like to thank especially Thomas Elsaesser for his encouragement, Jeroen Sondervan for shepherding the project and Steph Harmon for her careful copy-editing of the manuscript.

I am most indebted to John Caughie and Julianne Pidduck; not only were they committed and sharp readers for this project at the stage of doctoral research, but they also introduced me to what it means to think critically about film. I could not have wished for better mentors. The Department of Theatre, Film and Television Studies at the University of Glasgow provided a nurturing intellectual environment and my first real home away from home. It was there that this project started, and I benefitted from the guidance, support and feedback of many teachers and friends, including Karen Boyle, Dimitris Eleftheriotis, Ian Garwood, Christine Geraghty, Ian Goode, Karen Lury and Vassiliki Kocolotroni.

During my time at St Andrews and King's College London I have continued to learn in dialogue with wonderful colleagues and students. For her intelligent criticism, support and friendship, I am deeply indebted to Ginette Vincendeau. Big thanks are also due to Natalie Adamson, Vicente J. Benet, Bernard Bentley, Mark Betz, Tom Brown, William Brown, Sarah Cooper, Kay Dickinson, Richard Dyer, Mette Hjort, Yun Mi Hwang, Dina Iordanova, Lawrence Napper, Michele Pierson, Gill Plain, Jen Rutherford and Leshu Torchin – and very especially to David Martin-Jones, Gary Needham and Sarah Neely. Their friendship has sustained me and their knowledge of film has always inspired, and often dazzled me. Cinephilia may be a solitary passion, but it only thrives in good company.

This project has greatly benefitted from interaction with various academic interlocutors. Invitations to speak at a number of international conferences and research seminars helped enormously, and provided important stepping stones towards this book. Heartfelt thanks to those who encouraged me to publish on this topic at various stages, especially Mireia Aragay, John Caughie, Annette Kuhn, Antonio Lastra, Graham Petrie and Vicente Sánchez-Biosca. An early version of material included in chapter two appeared as 'Classic Adaptations, Modern Reinventions: Reading the Image in the Contemporary Literary Film'

in *Screen*, vol. 43, no. 1 (2002); sections of chapter three were published as 'Feminist Historiographies and the Woman Artist's Biopic: The Case of *Artemisia*', in *Screen*, vol. 48, no. 1 (2007) and as 'Playing in a Minor Key: the Literary Past through the Feminist Imagination', in *Books in Motion: Adaptation, Intertextuality, Authorship*, edited by Mireia Aragay (Rodopi, 2005). Work that formed the basis of chapter four was published as 'Labyrinths of Loss: The Letter as Figure of Desire and Deferral in the Literary Film', in *Journal of European Studies*, vol. 36, no. 4 (2006). A sample has also appeared in Spanish in the journal *Archivos de la Filmoteca* (no. 39) and in the collection *Estudios sobre cine*, edited by Antonio Lastra (Verbum, 2004).

Thanks to friends for countless great discussions about movies we watched together over more than two decades, for keeping in touch and for welcoming me back, year after year: Paula Burriel, Ángela Elena, Esmeralda Landete, Hellenia López, Enrique Planells, Carolina Sanz, Anna Brígido, Vicente Rodríguez and Ilinca Iurascu.

My biggest debt of love and gratitude is to my family, especially to my parents, my grandfather Eustasio, my aunts Lolín and Guillermina, and *la dulce* Enriqueta. My amazing sisters Gisela and Gemma helped me keep sane with emotional support, lots of fun, trips to the cinema (and beyond) and much, much practical help. Gemma also doubled as a formidable research secret agent, indefatigably tracking down books and films.

Most of all, I thank Manuel for being with me every step of this adventure, through a hundred letters, several houses and a few dramatic changes in the picture. Thank you for watching and reading, for all the great discussions, and for believing in me even when I did not. I could not have done this without you.

This book is dedicated to my parents, Jaime Vidal Martínez and Gemma Vilasur Lloret. Thank you for supporting me in all kinds of ways, for enduring my absence, and for not allowing me to forget the important things in life.

Introduction – Period Film and the Mannerist Moment

The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there.

L.P. Hartley, *The Go-Between* (1953)

The term irony has become too worn out to be useful... When we think about distance we think about the cutting off of emotion, and it's not that. It's a distance that brings with it a greater emotional reservoir of feeling.

Todd Haynes. Interview with Nick James, *Sight and Sound* (2003)

In the introduction to his evocatively titled book *The Past is a Foreign Country*, David Lowenthal remarks that 'it is no longer the presence of the past that speaks to us, but its pastness'.¹ This subtle distinction underlies the pleasures of the period film, in which the 'the Past' (as original myth or foundational moment) resonates in the present through the visual (and aural) spectacle of pastness, and its intricate signs. The period film stages a return to a place and time whose codes may seem strange and, more often than not, irrelevant. However, period objects and rituals are a source of continuing fascination, which accounts for the genre's enduring popularity. Behind the apparent nostalgia for the essence of something lost, there is always something found that becomes meaningful for each generation of viewers, inscribed in the ways we imagine the past according to the needs and expectations of the present. This book explores the period film by focusing on the visual pre-eminence given to its *figures* of meaning. The notion of figure provides a prism through which to look at a film genre that thrives on convention and variation. Focusing on a cycle of films made between 1990 and 2010, I will be discussing the ways these films project the *contemporary* historical imagination through a unique aesthetic that engages with the textures of the past in distinctive ways.

The period film presents a narrative image of a distant but recognisable cultural past through the work of the *mise-en-scène*. 'Period film' often works as a conveniently functional umbrella term for historical films and classic adaptations, and within them, a wide variety of genre pieces (swashbuckling adventures, thrillers, romances, comedies of manners or epics) that exploit the past as a conveniently exotic background for genre narratives.² Scholarly accounts of the genre tend to use 'historical film' for films that reconstruct documented

events over 'costume films', which may adapt historical sources or canonical novels, but allow fictional – most often, romance – narratives and the detail of period reconstruction to dominate over engagement with historical issues.³ 'Costume film' (or, again with stronger generic connotations, 'costume drama') stresses the distance from lived memory as well as the emphasis on spectacular *mise-en-scène*. Although often used indistinctively from period film, as Julianne Pidduck has noted, costume drama mobilises a refusal of historical or literary authenticity that are the founding terms in debates around historical cinema. "Costume" suggests the pleasures and possibilities of masquerade – the construction, constraint and display of the body through clothes'.⁴ Such elements of disguise and fabrication have strong gender connotations. From a film studies rather than industrial perspective, the 'heritage film' has become another recurrent term, mainly associated with period drama in modern national contexts as distinct from Hollywood's take on the genre (which, in turn, tends to overlap with American cinema's retelling of the United States' heritage). In all cases, the period film's relationship with the historical past runs a broad gamut of approaches. From consensual to controversial, and every shade in between, the genre is inflected by its own historicity, that is, its often oblique relationship with the present through the conventions that structure such relationship at any given point in time.

'Period film' is just one among various possible generic labels that I could have chosen for this book. My preference for this particular term resides in its being the least connoted, the closest to a canvas capacious enough to embrace its multiple manifestations. 'Period' refers to a length of time characterised by a specific culture and, by extension, to mainstream film's ambition to produce a reconstructed image of that culture as an enticing cinematic experience. In the process, a specific aesthetic takes shape through film's absorption (or 'cannibalisation') of literary, painterly and photographic references, which have their own genealogy of representations in film history. Period films have generated abundant scholarship concerned with the representations and 'uses' of the past, whether literary or historical – less so with the specific ways in which such past is *figured*, that is, given visual and narrative entity, and made sense of, through the prism of present stylistic choices, cultural concerns and imaginative (retro-) projections. This book addresses the period film's return to particular narratives from the past, but I do not aspire to map the genre's evolution, nor to produce a survey of its themes or types. What fascinate me in these films are the moments that engage us visually as spectators of a reality at a remove, the continuities and connections between films that arise from these moments, and the wider preoccupation with an aesthetics of cultural representation that can be inferred from them.

'Period film' also suggests the attempts to capture an interval in a chain of events that stretches until the 'present' of any film, and which implicitly construes such present as both its outcome and its source in the way it views its own past. In this respect, the greatest attraction, and the greatest challenge in dealing with a film genre is to situate its present-ness *historically*. The two decades that circumscribe my analysis constitute a particularly rich phase, in which the period film has gained a renewed popularity and visibility in national and international contexts. Rather than attempt to construct an explanatory model that accounts for this contemporary renaissance, I will refer to the debates that have dictated interpretation of what I claim can be considered an increasingly mannerist genre.

Fragments and Figures

Why and how is the period film *mannerist*? The period film revives the past through the work of *mise-en-scène* in which, as Pam Cook has noted, the 'symbolic carriers of period detail – costume, hair, décor – are... intertextual sign systems with their own logic which constantly threatens to disrupt the concerns of narrative and dialogue'.⁵ The genre finds its *modus operandi* in the balance between an overall sense of visual realism and the spectacle of period reconstruction. However, it is by means of the fragment and the detail that the period film channels our engagement with the reality represented. Mannerism points to a mode in which the narrative priorities of the cinematic image shift to the visual emphasis and affective meanings of *figuration* – not in the sense of a displaced (metaphorical, deep) function of language but, on the contrary, as attention to the 'surface' visual qualities of a motif that is afforded special weight and duration.

The emphasis on the fragment becomes especially visible in films with a marked confidence in their generic identity. Let us take the opening sequence of *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE* (Joe Wright, 2005), a lavish, mainstream film production with 'classic' literary credentials. The film was released in the wake of a ten-year cycle of screen adaptations from novels by Jane Austen, which included, among others, the enormously successful six-part BBC series *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE* (1995); the film *SENSE AND SENSIBILITY* (Ang Lee, 1995); *PERSUASION* (Roger Mitchell, 1995); *EMMA* (Douglas McGrath, 1996); a left-field *MANSFIELD PARK* (Patricia Rozema, 1999), as well as a host of quality television productions and trans-cultural '*up*-daptations' that use Austen's literary works as a flexible source for contemporary characters and storylines, such as the high-school teen picture

CLUELESS (Amy Heckerling, 1995) and the Bollywood-style BRIDE AND PREJUDICE (Gurinder Chadha, 2004).

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE's opening sequence sets the tone of the film as a whole as one of *knowingness*. It positions the spectator vis-à-vis the fictional world portrayed, but also brings to the fore the self-consciousness with which it carries its own status as the 'archetypal adaptation'⁶ – a recognisable staple in global film culture, at least through an Anglocentric consideration of the genre's popularity. The film opens with a long shot of the peaceful English countryside bathed in golden sunlight. A series of exterior shots follow a quick-paced Elizabeth Bennet as she walks, book in hand. We first see Elizabeth in a frontal close-up, her eyes lowered, as the Steadicam shot moves forward with her at brisk pace. A cut to an over-the-shoulder close-up stresses her absorption in the book she is reading, which she closes as she approaches the Bennets' family home. The camera smoothly follows Elizabeth as she walks alongside the house,⁷ and then parts with her. In the same uninterrupted take, the camera glides inside the house to meet the other four Bennet sisters in a vignette of lively domesticity. Jane is busy with housework; Mary sits at the piano; Lydia and Kitty, the youngest siblings, muck about the house; they move in and out of the frame as the camera proceeds with its itinerary, surveying a dining room littered with feminine bric-a-brac. Then, it picks Elizabeth up again, as she stops outside a window. A point-of-view shot shows her parents inside, double-framed within the shot. Their conversation is captured in deep-focus sound so Elizabeth (and we) can be privy to it. Her agitated mother communicates an important piece of news to her rather calmer father: the arrival of new tenants at Netherfield Park. Elizabeth smiles and goes into the house. This gesture acknowledges not only her familiarity with the scene, but ours as well.

The opening sequence condenses an array of tropes associated with the British period film in a visually eloquent manner. The preference for outdoor settings that integrates the period house in the pastoral landscape (a feature that distinguishes the *mise-en-scène* of 1990s Austen adaptations, in contrast with earlier studio-bound versions) reinforces the illusion of a world expanding realistically beyond the margins of the frame. At the same time, the widescreen cinematography and elaborate camerawork exert a tight control over the world *in* the frame, asserting this new version of the Austen classic as emphatically cinematic. The preference for the mobile long take injects a muscular sense of style into the proceedings; it also connotes an auteurist stance traditionally excluded from the appreciation of the generic pleasures of period drama.⁸ Equally important, the literary word has been replaced by self-conscious references to reading and looking, two activities that present Elizabeth as the protagonist, the reader and the spectator of her own story.⁹

In this version of *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE*, Austen's novel has become part of a tapestry of recurrent visual figures which, given a consistent identity through genre, function as a generative template for new films. *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE* expands the boundaries of the cycle from its very centre, retracing its steps with a clear sense of self-consciousness as well as a fidelity to the cultural and affective meanings established by previous adaptations. What is especially striking about this opening is that narrative exposition is condensed, and plot development merely signalled. Characters have become almost archetypes; events are given minimal introduction through dialogue. Instead, the conjunction of mobile framing and dynamic staging within the frame stresses the immersion in the past as a sensory experience, where narrative progress is secondary to the link between description, movement and affect afforded by the space of the house itself.

Whilst absorbing writing (the book motif that refers to the literary roots of the film) as one more layer in the textures of the sequence, *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE* invites readings that shift away from the centre of gravity posed by inherited literary models, and into visual patterns cemented throughout and across films. In an innovative approach that highlights the richness of the new generic cycles that arose in the 1990s, Pidduck looks at the intertextual spatiality of the genre through Gilles Deleuze's movement-image and Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the chronotope. Pidduck examines previous Jane Austen adaptations in terms of sociocultural axes of gender, sexuality and colonialism mapped onto discursive regularities, some of which are visible in *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE* (which post-dates the cycle identified by Pidduck): 'the country walk', 'the ball', 'the woman at the window', 'the writing desk and the letter', are movement-images that form a self-contained microcosm. Pidduck writes:

Deleuzian thought foregrounds movement, becoming, transformation, and has been most obviously deployed in relation to dynamic cinematic genres such as action cinema. In contrast, Bakhtin's Marxist legacy carries the slowness of historical, social and subjective change – the weight of oppression and struggle. This tension echoes recursively between costume drama's own intransigent stasis (and imputed conservatism), and its tremendous quiet energy, which has generated stunning formal innovation, a healthy crop of crossover popular hits, as well as spoofs and parodies.¹⁰

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE fits neatly into this model of thought, and even takes it further. Elizabeth's trajectory of *becoming* is primarily a problem of figural movement and visual mapping, which highlights the historical constraints and possibilities exerted upon feminine desire. As she approaches the Bennet house, a long shot sees her cross a moat over a narrow bridge, a movement reprised later in her cross-country walk to Netherfield in a dynamic composition that shows her as a lonely, tiny figure making her way across the landscape captured picto-

rially in extreme long shot. This emphasis on forward movement offers a strong dramatic contrast with the containment of the house brought to bear on the younger Bennet sisters, who are seen constantly moving in circles, bouncing up and down in excitement, as if unable to transcend its limits. When the Bennet sisters pour into the sitting room, demanding answers from their father with regard to the new neighbour at Netherfield, the five young women and their mother stand rigidly blocked in a receding composition in depth. In this shot, the widescreen framing creates a highly theatrical tableau for comic effect, producing a detached, suspended moment of stillness and potentiality.



Feminine confinement: tableau moment in PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

But could this transparent use of framing and space be, perhaps, not so far from a more opaque articulation as the one offered by the film *INNOCENCE* (Lucie Hadzihalilovic, 2004)? Both films develop as fantasy¹¹ scenarios about young girls in a cloistered environment, waiting for a release which, it is suggested, forcibly happens through the pressures of sexual maturation. The latter, however, relies on images that attempt to capture a state of consciousness rather than narrative action. In *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE* subjectivity is subordinated to spatial movement, and yet the perfectly symmetrical shot of the house that closes the sequence, held in a long take as the frame slowly zooms out, disrupts the sequential nature of the movement-image, bringing attention once more to the fragment as it crystallises into a full-fledged figure. Having lost its function as an establishing shot, this anti-naturalistic, flattening shot inflects the realist representation of the social world described in the film with the self-containment of the doll's house: this shot is not an obscure metaphor, but an affective metonym of the world of imagination of the period film. However, it is also a figure that trips the eye; an illustration of an illustration. If we look again at the opening sequence as an extended elaboration on the figurative possibilities of

the house, this motif brings into focus the tantalising problem of representing time and affect in the popular films about the (cultural, literary, socio-historical) past within conventional spatial patterns of representation. If we look at the film in *fragments*, certain figures arise, overlaid with subjective investments that manifest in different visual alignments.

This opening gambit wants to bring attention to the argument and method of this book. The opening sequence in *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE* suggests a mannerist overvaluation of the fragment that characterises the period film as a contemporary genre. Working from a selection of films, I will look at visual and rhetorical figures of meaning that self-consciously emerge within the ‘wholeness’ of the worlds of the period film. I particularly focus on three of these recurrent figures, whose potential has been intimated in the opening sequence of *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE*: the *house*, the *tableau* and (as a compressed token of scenes of reading and writing) the *letter*. Working from this purposefully narrow vision, the juxtaposition of fragments into figures will open up to wider considerations about the contemporary period film, and especially its aesthetic re-articulation of prevalent historiographical and cultural debates about the genre.

An International Genre

The opening sequence of *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE* arguably encapsulates a mannerist moment in the period film. This moment manifests itself in a double impulse, compressing its source narratives into a series of visual motifs, and expanding these into rhetorical figures able to generate new reading contexts of their own. This pattern of repetition and variation is linked to the study of the evolution of film genres. As Barry Langford has noted, the pleasure afforded by generic narratives largely derives from ‘the *tension* between novel elements and their eventual reincorporation into the expected generic model’.¹² This allows us to recognise and interpret a genre film, but the idea of cohesive film genres is, as Langford goes on to note, difficult to maintain, especially in the context of post-classical cinemas. The films examined in this book arise from different contexts of production in Europe and America and challenge a cohesive approach in light of the proliferation of critical discourses and classifications: they can be considered, alternatively, classic adaptations, historical dramas, or heritage films. Whilst taking ‘genre’ as the glue that cements these discourses together, I focus on specific questions of aesthetics and figuration raised by a selection of films that, significantly, emerge at a moment in which the genre consolidates as an international format.

Academic discussion of the period film has tended to stay, as Pidduck notes, within the confines of the 'perpetual present' of the movement-image.¹³ The opening of *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE* trades on sensations of discovery as well as familiarity; sensations that correspond with the film's desire to inflect an established narrative through stylistic variation and updated cultural values. This move, typical of the way genres adapt through time and context and keep renewing their contract with audiences, is at the centre of the rich debates about representation that have focused critical attention. To note that Keira Knightley's performance as the long-legged, fast-talking, boot-wearing, country-roaming Elizabeth Bennet may be bordering on the anachronistic is hardly the point anymore; the film inserts itself clearly into a long-standing tradition of British literary adaptations for cinema and television, and addresses an ever-changing, imagined community of spectators with a generational investment in new versions of classic stories cut to fit the zeitgeist. In a study of *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE* as a classical adaptation, Christine Geraghty comments on the self-effacing, earth-coloured costumes and naturalistic performances which bring a distinctive unfussy, 'natural' look to this version of the classic novel. Embodied by the emphatically modern Knightley, Elizabeth Bennet becomes a blueprint for a feminine coming-of-age narrative that is timeless, but at the same time, as Geraghty sharply notes, decidedly 'postfeminist': an Austenian heroine on a self-centred quest for emotional fulfilment, this is an Elizabeth 'who hardly knows of the battles for independence being fought for or around her'.¹⁴ This representation, which makes the film readable as a symptom of discourses about femininity in the wider popular culture, is also a template with the ability to fit in existing patterns and generate new film narratives, where the source text is progressively assimilated as part of a network of intertextual references: for example, in the biopic-romcom *BECOMING JANE* (Julian Jarrold, 2007) or the television series *LOST IN AUSTEN* (ITV, 2008), in which a twenty-first-century London girl magically travels through time to the world of *Pride and Prejudice*.

The film's calculated effort in stylistic difference within iconographic continuity reflects the economic demands and possibilities opened by the global audiovisual economy of convergence since the 1990s.¹⁵ The British period film in particular has evolved from a strand in national film and television production to an international product shaped by the niche-market targets and cosmopolitan strategies of global Hollywood. This reconfiguration of economic interests has been extensively documented by Andrew Higson,¹⁶ and met with a shift in critical focus from a literary-centred film tradition, to its transformation into a versatile generic product.¹⁷ In relation to the details of domestic country living on prominent display in the opening sequence in *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE* (Elizabeth walks past the laundry hanging out to dry; chickens and pigs ramble about on the grounds that surround the Bennet house), Higson notes that the film pro-

poses a 'dirty realist' version of Austen that may strain the middlebrow profile of the British quality film, but one that ultimately does not disrupt the focus on an England that is 'pre-industrial and picturesque, even if the picture is a little bit muddy round the edges'.¹⁸ This is a film designed for:

Dedicated fans of Austen, but also for dedicated fans of Knightley; for lovers of English literature, but also for lovers of romantic costume drama; and for those who visit art-house cinema, but also for those who prefer the multiplexes. It was also another Anglo-Hollywood film, made by the British company Working Title in collaboration with its main funder and parent company, the American studio Universal.¹⁹

The changes in the financial make-up and expanding reach of the British period film in the global image market economy forms the background to the cultural debates about the 'heritage film',²⁰ a critical discourse that brings to the fore the genre's problematic relationship with national identity. Although the heritage film should be best understood as a critical formation anchored in the histories of British cinema, it has prompted a re-evaluation of the modern period film at large as an expression of a nostalgic impulse for preservation (of the past) and evasion (from the present). The desire for the past in the heritage film is signified by the emphasis on visual spectacle. The surprise success in the 1980s of a small cycle of historical screen fictions and classic adaptations, including titles that contributed to the renaissance of British cinema such as *CHARIOTS OF FIRE* (Hugh Hudson, 1981), *A PASSAGE TO INDIA* (David Lean, 1984), *A ROOM WITH A VIEW* (James Ivory, 1986) and *HOWARDS END* (Ivory, 1990; discussed in chapter two) soon gained critical currency as a cultural trend,²¹ which the 'Austen boom' of the 1990s helped consolidate. Picturesque cinematography and slow-moving narratives captured the warm glow of the past, and elaborate period costumes, artefacts, heritage sites and interiors construed familiar yet exotic locations (the English countryside, Oxbridge, colonial India, Italy) as backdrop to stories typically set among the upper-middle or aristocratic classes. As Higson argued in his original 1993 critique, these heritage films express an ambivalent tension: the spectator is made to identify with the dilemmas experienced by characters under social and emotional pressure, yet the sumptuous re-creation of bygone social milieus invites an appreciative look that undercuts the elements of criticism, constructing a mythical, ultimately desirable image of the national past.²²

These period fictions became amalgamated with a profitable heritage industry, given a new impulse by the institutional culture in 1980s Britain under the conservative rule of Margaret Thatcher, and serving the interests of a neoliberal agenda that undertook a selective recuperation of heritage which excluded alternative versions of a more plural national culture.²³ At a moment of economic and social decline, these gentrified versions of the English past dwelt on reas-

suring myths of a pre-industrial (aristocratic) social order. The heritage film could be equated to a 'folklore from above' amenable to appropriation by a resurgent nationalism at home, and to producing a blatantly skewed, if seductive, image of British culture abroad.²⁴

The critique of the heritage film is the most salient example of the way that an ambiguous, non-political aesthetic defaulted to a politically suspicious nostalgia that responds to contemporary cultural anxieties about our relationship with the past. This ideological analysis of genre has tended to supply an explanatory model for its popularity as a commodity attuned to the expansion of a middle-brow culture that feeds upmarket niche trends. For Dianne F. Sadoff, the films themselves thematise this ideological thrust in their modes of address; she discusses *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE* as a film that comes at the end of a 'Jane Austen decade' which moved from the 'critique of the values of cultural acquisition and accumulation among the upper gentry' (in the BBC series *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE* and Michell's *PERSUASION*) to the eroticisation of such values in the film by Wright.²⁵ In this respect, the house as home stands in sharp contrast with the opulent house-museum. In a particularly sumptuous rendering of Mr Darcy's Pemberley (shot on location at the historical estate of Chatsworth House), Elizabeth walks in awe across a sculpture gallery, where she stumbles upon a bust of the man himself. Tears well up in her eyes; the visual connection between the young woman and the sculpture momentarily confounds the love encounter with aesthetic emotion. Yet this moment takes place as an excessive *mise en abyme* of the heritage film's own endemic relationship to mass tourism and the heritage industry which, for Sadoff, addresses a middlebrow spectator lost, like Elizabeth, in a fantasy of class mobility and cultural consumerism.²⁶

This understanding of the ambiguity of visual spectacle as conservative typically produces unambiguous interpretations of the films. Nostalgia has become a byword for period films 'frozen', so to speak, in the perpetual present of narrative classicism and the orderly spectacle of the house-museum; pastness appears disconnected from the (historical) past by an aesthetic of surfaces. The paradoxical loss of (semiotic) potential arising from the plenitude of period spectacle is also historically symptomatic. The rise of history as spectacle heralded the end of modernisms in international cinema; as Françoise de la Bretèque suggests, the end of the new waves, with their almost exclusive focus on the present, seems indissolubly joined to a renewed interest on the part of European auteur cinemas in filming the past, something that popular cinemas had never stopped doing.²⁷ The preoccupation with nostalgia, commercialism and identity underpinning the Anglo-American debates about the period film meets, in this regard, the problems with (popular) memory at the core of national cinemas often marked by – and marking – traumatic histories.²⁸

The modern period film has metamorphosed into a *post*-phenomenon that renders the unifying heritage label inadequate: post-national, post-quality, post-heritage and postmodern. In the two decades under consideration, the period film becomes increasingly sophisticated visually, but also increasingly difficult to pin down according to national or auteurist traits of style and content. Its agenda also becomes more diversified, and (even) more dis-located. For example, *ARTEMISIA* (Agnès Merlet, 1997) exemplifies the opportunities offered by co-production arrangements, and the drive of European cinema to capitalise on a European cultural heritage. A French-language film about an Italian Baroque painter and proto-feminist icon, made with a mixed Italian and French cast and crew, *ARTEMISIA* filters the ambiguous postfeminist turn in contemporary cinema through an extraordinary attention to the milieu of Baroque painting and to the possibilities of the painterly image in film. In contrast, *ONEGIN* (Martha Fiennes, 1997) and *A LOS QUE AMAN/TO THOSE WHO LOVE* (Isabel Coixet, 1998), also the work of women directors, resist national as well as overtly feminist frameworks of interpretation by erasing the conventional markers of heritage realism and opting for a formalist engagement with ambiguous romance stories that deprive their feminine characters of agency.

The ever-expanding market for period films that think transculturally and transnationally has provided a platform for rising directors (such as Wright, director of *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE* and *ATONEMENT*, 2007) as well as established figures of independent cinema (Terence Davies, Jane Campion, James Ivory) to negotiate the transition from minority and low-budget cinemas to the high-end of specialised mainstream filmmaking. Their films co-exist with a robust tradition of studio period dramas with an auteur sensibility here exemplified by Martin Scorsese's *THE AGE OF INNOCENCE* (1993), which displays a marked self-consciousness about the histories as well as the mechanisms of the genre.

It would be more difficult to argue for the transnationality of the period films examined in this book in terms of a genuine *culturally* hybrid cinema. The period film may be more productively associated with an 'international film format'²⁹ and a set of 'travelling cultural forms'³⁰ that circulate through 'transnational culture areas based on shared cultural assumptions',³¹ and which can be appropriated, and replicated, at national level. The two films that bookend the case-study-based chapters in this book as well as the time period for my investigation, *HOWARDS END* and *ATONEMENT*, are representative of this international film format, and of the shifts in critical reception from the early 1990s to the late 2000s. Both films draw on international sources of funding and focus on British themes but, as we will see, whilst *HOWARDS END* has been mostly examined as a culturally English film and the epitome of heritage filmmaking, *ATONEMENT* has, in contrast, been discussed in terms of its formal reflexivity and its relationship with previous film histories.

The more the period film becomes a stylised time capsule, designed with international audiences in mind and detached from the geopolitical lines of force in national cultures, the more it resists nationally oriented readings. The period film should be considered instead as a fully-fledged international genre, based on iconographic conventions that can be creatively appropriated and re-encoded according to changing notions of realism, authenticity and ideological repurposing in order to address diverse audiences. The genre thus raises fascinating questions that call for a rethinking of its aesthetic difference.

Mannerism: The Possibilities of a Conservative Aesthetic

Films such as *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE* allow us to trace patterns that make other works readable in terms of the possibilities and limitations of the genre to adapt to changing horizons of taste and consumer demand. The transparency of this narrative form means, however, that something may be lost in terms of the potentiality of its visual strategies to take the established meanings of cultural representation *further*. In a short piece about trends in European cinema published in 1992, Antoine de Baecque criticises the emergence of an 'international form' defined by its homogeneity: an international cinema that rests on the *polished* as the condition for transcultural visibility. The target of this critique is an 'academicist' style (a formally unadventurous style that conflates realism and idealism in the treatment of its subject matter) that rests on the elimination of cultural difference – a harmonious form vacated of the plurality of its cultural roots. De Baecque argues that one of the most salient manifestations of this international form is the filming of culture as spectacle (as opposed to cinema tied to cultural expression) in literary adaptations such as *CYRANO DE BERGERAC* (Jean-Paul Rappeneau, 1990) and *L'AMANT/THE LOVER* (Jean-Jacques Annaud, 1992) that exploit 'the effect of historical exoticism'.³²

More polemic than analytical, this piece reflects a critical turn arising from the identity void left by exhausted modernist traditions; it is a response to a new European cinema that faces the twin pressures of the need for an economic transnationalism in its national film industries, and the encroachment of global Hollywood. Whilst representative of a long-standing chasm between auteur cinema and popular cinemas in France,³³ this appraisal points, significantly, to the conflation of form and cultural value that also underpins the emerging critique of the heritage film in Britain. Seen as the return to a new cinema of quality, the heritage film sports a self-effacing craftsmanship at odds with expressions of authorship as well as with a British tradition of realism.³⁴

These critical histories unfold in a decade (the 1990s) marked by a preoccupation with cultural representation. An increasingly fragmented map of approaches put questions of nation, gender, sexuality, race and class at the forefront of Anglo-American film studies. In this context, historical spectacle and period realism re-emerged as seemingly conservative idioms that facilitated the evasion from the (political) present. Dislodged from a politically resistant modernist aesthetic, and from the explicit progressiveness of critical realism, the illusionist scenarios of the past posit a two-way movement of escape and return through historically exhausted forms. This movement is ambiguous, but also affective, due to, and not despite, an aesthetic that seeks to close the gap between past and present even as it acknowledges the existence of such gap. As Cook puts it, the period film's fascination with the reconstruction of an ultimately imaginary 'reality' reinforces the idea that 'the past in such fictions is never simply the past: they look backwards and forwards at the same time, creating a heterogeneous world that we enter and leave like travellers, in a constant movement of exile and return'.³⁵ What brings together the films analysed in this book is a specific mode of address: a 'present-in-the-past' that asks to be examined in light of its own investment in reconstruction (realism) as well as disguise (fantasy). In this respect, the temporality of the period film emerges as the opposite of modernist de-dramatisation or distantiation: it re-dramatises the past as an emotionally charged space, and shows a preference for affective rather than intellectual histories.

This book explores these questions through the notion of a mannerist aesthetic, which arises from a corpus of films that engage with the past through their content *and* form. Although this term belongs primarily to art history, its secondary meanings of belatedness and stylisation befit, as I will show, concrete filmic objects. Film studies has thrived on such appropriations; formative distinctions between the classical and the post-classical, as well as its own historical *-isms* (with its multiple iterations of classicism and modernism) have been the building blocks of film historiography. Notably, the field has experienced a turn to notions of the Baroque in search for a philosophical and aesthetic language to address the merging of film and new media, and the new forms of visual transmediality and cultural remediation arising from this paradigm shift.³⁶ Of more relevance to my text-focused, synchronic study of genre is, however, Mieke Bal's conceptual revisitation of the Baroque in the contemporary plastic arts. Inspired by Bal, I would like to argue that mannerism can be used, not as a set of stylistic parameters or of historical citations, but as an encompassing 'perspective' in cinema; a way of thinking *from* the present and *for* the historical moment of the present, in relation to 'some elements' of the past which can help illuminate the films' own intertextual histories and meanings.³⁷

The mannerist aesthetic can be conceptualised as a flexible mode that signals connections between films in three interrelated ways: formal, generic and affective. Formally, the mannerist aesthetic denotes a productive matrix of fantasy driven by a fetishism of the markers of period reconstruction. It connotes a conventional system of realism that has become figuratively excessive. Rather than using this term as a template for formal periodisation, I want to use it to discuss period spectacle as a flexible idiom for international circulation at the point at which motifs become detachable visual fragments that call attention to themselves and obey their own (intertextual) logic.

Mannerism is, in this respect, an aesthetic of *figures*, a term that is redolent of the rhetorical function of language. The figure moves between the literary and the visual, the narrative and the poetic. Fluctuating between both terms in each binary pairing, the figure posits a contamination between writing and the visual, which may be instrumental in disrupting the – after Roland Barthes – ‘reality effect’ that pre-determines the dominant readings of period reconstruction. I use Barthes’s visual semiotics alongside Jean-François Lyotard’s notion of the figural to examine how the figure works within and against the (discursive) temporality of narrative in relation to the formal and cultural remediations effected by period spectacle.

Generically, mannerism can be best situated in relation to themes and tone. More specifically, what brings the films under discussion together is melodrama: the persistent return to narratives that translate the past into an idiom of melancholy and loss. The contemporary period film is intimately connected to melodrama both as a mode,³⁸ and as an intermedial form linked to a tradition of historical genres (in painting and in literature), the modern novel and the woman’s film. The mannerist aesthetic is analogue to other artistic junctions in which the highbrow runs into the popular; what leads to a dead end in the former can be productively revived in the latter. Cinema grants older forms a new lease of life.

Some of the first groundbreaking studies on film melodrama used Peter Brooks’s work on theatrical and literary melodrama as a springboard to focus on the ‘excessive’ textual style of Vincente Minnelli’s and Douglas Sirk’s films against the backdrop of the historical and ideological economy of the Hollywood studio system in its last stages.³⁹ Melodrama was thus redefined as *the other* of realism; a mode located on the very tensions and limits of what could be expressed through bourgeois realism. This mode could co-exist with the naturalised template of the classical realist text and, at the same time, distinctively depart from it. If melodrama is tied to the emergence of modern life and to cinema as a form of popular ‘vernacular modernism’ anchored in ‘sensory experience and sensational effects’ in excess of narrative comprehension,⁴⁰ historically it is also poised, as Joe McElhaney has noted, on the cusp of the ruptures

and transformation of (Hollywood) late classical cinema in chronological co-existence with emerging film modernisms.⁴¹

The consideration of the mannerist aesthetic in relation to melodrama also needs to take into account the ways in which the image in the contemporary period film rests to a large extent on a sensory experience that is intermedial, and which mobilises intertextual histories of representation. Period drama operates as an *anamorphic* mirror of tradition: a textualisation of a previous text, in which the perfection of the illusion shows its fracture – the play of mirrors that makes representation possible. A genealogy of prior formations of temporality and visual affect underlies the mannerist image in the period film. Caroline Dunant has pointed out the ‘melodramatic pleasures’ that connect the Hollywood and Italian silent epics by David W. Griffith, Cecil B. De Mille or Giovanni Pastrone with the Olympian ‘wide-screen’ paintings by Frederic Leighton and Lawrence Alma-Tadema. About the latter, she writes: ‘the focus is on a moment, a seemingly trivial incident in a story of an everyday nature, but taking place within a very elaborate and fully realised set’.⁴² This impulse is equally present in the increasingly elaborate *mise-en-scène* of period films that aspire to the realist reconstruction of social worlds; for example, *IL GATTOPARDO/THE LEOPARD* (Luchino Visconti, 1963). As Dunant points out, whilst pursuing the illusion of realism, the above forms of pictorial melodrama highlight their constructedness as a fantasy:

In these paintings, the past is an identifiable place, with the pleasure principle paramount. The emphasis is on the emotive or melodramatic moment in anecdotal scenes of heightened visibility... These paintings aim (as the screen was later to do) for the achievement of a total visual field as a simple artless reflection of a reality, the fabrication of a world as a space for dreaming, the acknowledgement and feeding of a desire not only to watch, but also to experience, to be ‘there’.⁴³

If, as André Bazin famously noted, the photographic realism of film defused the drive for realism as a goal in painting,⁴⁴ what are the implications of the preference for figurative painterly styles in the reconstruction of imaginary period worlds in contemporary cinema? Even when the link is made explicit (for instance, Brooks recognises the influence of Eugène Delacroix on the visual style of Patrice Chéreau’s historical romance *LA REINE MARGOT/QUEEN MARGOT* [1994]),⁴⁵ the period film of the 1990s-2000s may be closer to the mannerism of a Paul Delaroche, than to Delacroix’s maturity; that is, closer to the hyper-reality of the historicist vignette than to the conceptual (and a-narrative) ‘essential moment’ of historical painting (as we will see in chapter three). In the identification of a woman with her home in *HOWARDS END*, in the thematisation of the pictorial gaze in *THE AGE OF INNOCENCE*, or in the heightened sense of spatial entrapment in *THE HOUSE OF MIRTH* (Terence Davies, 2000), a specific mode of tem-

porality emerges which is intimately related to the melodramatic investment in the primacy of vision, creating a bridge between older and newer artistic forms.

Finally, the mannerist mode is an affective mode which, I want to claim, cannot be separated from gendered aesthetic histories. The period film has a special critical relationship with women and feminine culture that revolves around identity, taste and consumption. The heritage-film debates have pointed out a history of devaluation of the popular period drama on the grounds of its allegedly feminine mode of address; for example, the decorative excess attached to the cycle of costume melodramas made by the Gainsborough Studios in the 1940s has been put in historical context as an antidote to a restrictive consensus around quality and realism,⁴⁶ whereas the charges of conservatism and class-biased nostalgia levelled against the British quality films of James Ivory have been contested in terms of the spaces they open for alternative sexual identities and feminine pleasures.⁴⁷ This critique redressed the terms of the debate by putting gender at the forefront of the discussion. However, ultimately it continued to explore the contentious relationship of British cinema with issues of nation and representation.

The rhetoric of figures explored in this book seeks, instead, to flesh out the place of the feminine in relation to an aesthetic founded on the desire for, and the fidelity to, the past through a hybrid discourse. As Andreas Huyssen has claimed, modernism fetishised femininity whilst excluding real women; from Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* to Jean-Luc Godard's *À BOUT DE SOUFFLE/BREATHLESS*, there is a (critically) well-trodden path of modernist art that appropriates femininity only to condemn it for its presumed inseparability from mass culture. The latter has been the 'hidden subtext of the modernist project', but also has been put in the place of its (gendered) other.⁴⁸ In this respect, this book explores the different shades of fidelity to the past in a film cycle that, in common with other postmodern cultural objects, dismantles the divide between high and popular culture. The mannerist aesthetic is fully postmodern insofar as it, as Huyssen would put it, dramatises a 'constant, even obsessive negotiation with the terms of the modern itself' outside the canonical and presumably exhausted practices of modernism,⁴⁹ and yet it reframes and appropriates some of its strategies.

Perhaps counterintuitively, I want to claim the feminine as the 'absent presence' in the genre's relationship with post-structuralist film theory – almost its blind spot – despite (or perhaps due to) the ubiquity of discussions about gender and cultural production (female authorship), representation (cultural histories) and reception (period film as a 'feminine genre'). In the films under scrutiny, gender is central to moments where the mannerist overvaluation of the fragment becomes more visible, most notably in the crises arising from the advent of the modern staged by period fictions. Such crises are rendered through

conventional narrative templates that point, however, towards modernity's historical *other*: what falls off-limits in the structures of feeling that underlie those fictions. In this respect, the feminine strains form itself; it is consubstantial to the *figural* reversal of the figurative form – what Lyotard calls, as we will see, the 'double reversal of the fantasy' –, which becomes manifest in the figure's visual other: the house's *ghost*, the tableau's *frame*, the letter's *hand*. The mannerist aesthetic works as a mode which is, *a priori*, conservative in its desire for the past, and yet *ambiguously* so. The balance between conservative repetition and progressive variation forms a recursive structure prone to reversals and transformations, which I will explore through the contexts of interpretation generated by each of the three chosen figures.

This book is structured in four chapters. Chapter one lays the theoretical grounds for my discussion of the mannerist aesthetic in relation to a cultural form pervaded by a sense of belatedness. The period film's fidelity to the past is mediated by the engagement with historically closed forms of writing (such as the classical narrative mode) which reveal realism as a fiction – a reality effect. Using the work of Barthes in relation to writing and the image, and Lyotard's post-Freudian notion of the figural, I examine the figure's formal and affective potential and, through it, the structures of feeling that underlie the genre.

Chapter two focuses on the house as a figure of spatial continuity between present and past. Through multiple thematic variations – as inheritance, museum, or bourgeois interior – the house is the common figurative thread in the analyses of *HOWARDS END*, *THE GOLDEN BOWL* (Ivory, 2000), *THE AGE OF INNOCENCE* and *THE HOUSE OF MIRTH*. Spatial notions of realism and fidelity are traversed by ghosts which, enfolded in the marks of time and temporality, inflect period realism through the prism of affective memory and melancholy.

Chapter three continues to examine the illusionist mode of period realism through its discontents and discontinuities. In this chapter, the tableau is examined as an instance of temporal manipulation of the film frame and narrative interruption. Tableau and portrait moments draw attention to the strategies of double-framing, superimposition and deframing, all of which make the frame visible. The tableau-as-figure structures my analysis of *THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY* (Jane Campion, 1996), *ARTEMISIA* and *THE GOVERNESS* (Sandra Goldbacher, 1998) in relation to the constraints and possibilities offered by the genre for feminist rewritings of the past.

Chapter four focuses on the letter to examine the absorption of the literary into the textures of the visual, and the irruption of writing in the image (framed text or writing across the frame) in three further international films: *ONEGIN*, *TO THOSE WHO LOVE* and *ATONEMENT*. The chapter looks at the ways in which the figuration of the letter appears as the hidden third term in an intersubjective correspondence, visualised by the letter that arrives too late and the child mes-

senger's hand. The melodramatic temporality of the letter deconstructs romance, but also reconstructs interrupted histories that layer the mannerist aesthetic of the period film.

The case studies explored in this book converge through common themes of melancholy and loss, but it is equally important to highlight how such melancholy permeates forms themselves. Mannerism manifests itself in the persistent after-effect of specific literary and cultural formations, such as the classical realist narrative model. The films under investigation cite films that precede them, and actualise figures that circulate in culture within new contexts. This book engages with the mannerist aesthetic as a viable idiom of the past that retrieves fossilised figures of writing. At the same time, the very 'roundness' of the mannerist figures – and of the sealed-off worlds they erect – contains the fissures and frictions that make meaningful the myriad 'presents-in-the-past' of the genre. This characterisation of the contemporary period film as mannerist demands a double shift in the terrain of analysis: on the one hand, from a postmodern 'aesthetics of surfaces' to an *aesthetics of textures*, which pays attention to both the fabric (as in the textural, the weaving of visual and material forms in the dense *mise-en-scène* of the past) and the text (the textual weaving of meanings); on the other hand, from the allegiance to the realist scene to the 'other scene' of culturally engrained desires and fantasies. It is on the grounds of fantasy – rather than in the plenitude of the realist illusion – that we find the specificity of the period film for the contemporary moment.

Chapter I – A Poetics of Figuration

The Belated Moment of Mannerism

The study of the period film is a rich if deeply fractured field. Adaptation studies, the heritage debates, not to mention historians looking at film as a tool for representing the past, all have a stake in the genre. However, whilst more self-conscious intertextual practices (for example, film parodies or ‘updating’ of classic literary texts) have rapidly found their slot in a taxonomy of postmodern film genres, the aesthetics of period cinema remains somehow resistant to classification other than as a rehash of the literary as cultural commodity in a post-literary age. The genre is torn between the search for modernity in the past, and the return to an idea of classicism through narrative form. This puts these images of the past in a contradictory *pre*-(post)modern position, tantamount to a return to older traditions of quality in European cinema. In the words of John Caughie, ‘quality’ is a mode of production that ‘has avoided its historical appointment either with modernism, with naturalism or with critical realism’.¹ The spectre of quality somehow excludes the period film from the vitality of popular genres and the rootedness of art cinema in the here and now. However, the attention granted to nostalgia as key to the agenda of the period film overshadows the complex workings of its forms and themes, which repeatedly evoke the past through images of plenitude and loss. Rather than nostalgia, fantasy and its multiple spatio-temporal displacements might be, as we will see, a more useful compass to guide us through the journeys of period drama.

The period film’s iconographic obviousness and instant readability disguise the fact that the genre mobilises an array of visual forms that have their own genealogy and are first and foremost self-referential. Ginette Vincendeau argues that, ‘where costume dramas up to the late 1950s exhibited a certain “innocent” verisimilitude within the conventions of classical cinema, those of the late 1970s onwards can only be highly aware of retracing earlier grounds (in this sense they are automatically mannerist and postmodern)’.² However, the association between costume drama and a ‘classicist’ (rather than classical) idea of cinema style, detached from both the popular and the personal, is an enduring one, and has been reinforced by the debates around the heritage film as a middlebrow genre in British film studies. In France, the grand return of the period film in

the 1990s was seen as tantamount to a return to stylistic *académisme* (academicism) – in the words of Thierry Jousse, a critic associated to the journal *Cahiers du cinéma*, ‘the lethal moment in which a form repeats its own figures, its own rules, within a sclerotic logic; in which a rhetoric keeps on working devoid of its substance, of the life that once animated it.’³ And yet, for Jousse this despairing view of the genre can be disproved in view of its wider history; this could include both the late costume pieces by Visconti, such as *THE LEOPARD*; Ingmar Bergman’s *FANNY OCH ALEXANDER/ FANNY AND ALEXANDER* (1982); or Scorsese’s *THE AGE OF INNOCENCE*, as well as the turn taken by directors linked to the post-New Wave *jeune cinéma français* of the 1980s to historical drama and the literary adaptation since the 1990s. Chéreau’s *LA REINE MARGOT* and the later *GABRIELLE* (2005); Olivier Assayas’s *LES DESTINÉES SENTIMENTALES* (2000), or Arnaud Desplechin’s *ESTHER KAHN* (2000) can, almost regardless of their varying levels of aesthetic originality, be celebrated by the cinephilic press not as genre pieces, but in the name of the film auteur.

This denotes, as pointed out by Vincendeau, the absence of a systematic critique that identifies a specific stylistic practice.⁴ The films themselves highlight the fact that the international idiom of the period film has proved flexible enough to accommodate experimental adaptations of modernist literary works, as in Sally Potter’s *ORLANDO* (1992) or Raoul Ruiz’s *LE TEMPS RETROUVÉ/TIME REGAINED* (2000), as well as of postmodern novels, such as *ANGELS AND INSECTS* (Philip Haas, 1995) or *THE HOURS* (Stephen Daldry, 2003), which confound expectations around popular and auteur cinema. At the turn of the millennium, the period film became a profitable genre that could creatively adapt to changing industrial configurations and particular filmmaking modes, but which remained critically mired in questions of value.

The contemporary period film can be productively read as a mannerist genre entirely built onto the lingering yet potent afterlife of themes and motifs which give place to new, generative figures. By taking up this concept I want to suggest an aesthetic position that resonates with the particular problems of style and interpretation posited by the films under consideration, as well as with the critical ambivalence trailed by notions within the term’s semantic field, such as academicism, pastiche and kitsch. My appropriation of the term for the study of a particular cycle of contemporary films carries a loss (of historical specificity) and a gain, through the term’s own rich conceptual afterlife. Mannerism (with a capital m) refers to the artistic idiom that flourished in mid-sixteenth-century Italian art, and which marked the triumph and the decline of the Renaissance artistic values. However, *mannerism* (with a small m) is also a retrospective gesture that ripples well into the twenty-first century: a re-evaluation of the anti-naturalist turn in the arts that, as Arnold Hauser points out, it is ‘only feasible for a generation which had experienced a shock like that associated with the

origin of modern art'.⁵ What characterises mannerism, according to Hauser, is not simply a relationship of influence with regard to the art of preceding periods, but a:

deliberate reaching back to an earlier style, which is either regarded as a model, or is accompanied by an intentional and often ostentatious deviation from it. With that art lost its unproblematic nature, and henceforward its spontaneous, naïve relationship to earlier forms becomes rarer and rarer.⁶

Mannerism posits a distinctive reaction that can be read transhistorically and generically as a recourse to 'self-conscious stylization'; it is also specifically synchronic in its cross-fertilisation of artistic critical idioms.⁷ As a practice, it facilitates the understanding of aesthetic hybridity not simply as a property of a cycle of films, but as a deliberate *attitude* towards the transmission of the past.

The term mannerism conjures up long-running critical debates around the crisis of the (utopian) energy of modernism. Discussing the impasse of the avant-gardes in the face of the rise of the new culture(s) of mass reproduction, Clement Greenberg identifies a historical pattern that relates his moment (the end of the 1930s) to prior lapses of the artistic norm into the repetitive and the baroque:

a motionless Alexandrianism, an academicism in which the really important issues are left untouched because they involve controversy, and in which creative activity dwindles to virtuosity in the small details of forms, all larger questions being decided by the precedent of the old masters. The same themes are mechanically varied in a hundred different works, and yet nothing new is produced: Statius, mandarin verses, Roman sculpture, Beaux Arts painting, neo-republican architecture.⁸

The rise of 'kitsch' in the new cultures of mass reproduction poses, for Greenberg, a throwback to similar moments of formal stagnation in the history of the arts. One of the main symptoms is what he calls the 'confusion of the arts', and an 'imitation of imitating': the classical revival in the late-Victorian painting of Leighton and Edward Poynter; the medievalism of the Pre-Raphaelites; the historicism of Delaroche and the *pompieri* – all these late moments in plastic art mark the decline of mature periods and individual styles into academicism. For Greenberg, this means the triumph of imitation over genius; detail over concept and grand design, and fidelity over originality. Painting thus enters the play of 'realistic illusion in the service of sentimental and declamatory literature';⁹ not trying to reproduce reality but literary effects, and degenerating into the picturesque.¹⁰ Greenberg denounces the contamination of the plastic arts by narrative and, in response, he invokes past attempts to re-establish their aesthetic integrity (in particular, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's eighteenth-century treatise *Lao-*

coon, further discussed in chapter three) by calling for the inseparability of content and form, alongside the separation between artistic disciplines.

The exhaustion of post-World War II modernist cinemas led to a similar mistrust of the subsequent turn to spectacle and stylisation. In a series of articles published in *Cahiers du cinéma* in the 1980s,¹¹ Alain Bergala calls the new cinema an 'after-cinema' that encapsulates a feeling akin to that which artists from the past may have experienced of arriving 'too late' after a cycle in the history of their art has been completed, and a certain perfection accomplished by the masters who preceded them. For Bergala, mannerism speaks through recognisable symptoms: first, the replacement of style with stylisation in films that self-consciously engage with certain directors and genres of the classic era (for example, the relationship of Scorsese's or Peter Bogdanovich's cinema with Hollywood genres or the 'rewriting' of Alfred Hitchcock by Brian de Palma); secondly, the seduction of the fake and the artificial as basis for the aesthetic conception of the film image in the work of Jean-Jacques Beineix and other mainstream French filmmakers. This new mode of hyper-reality has its counterpoint in the return of the well-made script as the driving force in the period drama of the 1980s; here, French criticism meets the British debates over quality resurrected by the success of the heritage film. These films take over cinema at the point of classic accomplishment, attempting 'the reprise of an old form, already fissured, as if it were still fresh and alive'.¹²

Cahiers du cinéma's engagement with mannerism was channelled towards the strategic recuperation of the *film d'auteur* in the 1980s and 1990s, in what has been construed as an ambivalent retreat into older critical models after the journal's shift to politics in the 1970s.¹³ The retrieval of the term draws the focus onto the points of intersection between disciplines and media, of which the historical/literary adaptation inevitably partakes. In a round table organised by the journal, art historian Patrick Mauriès points out that the recuperation of mannerism harks back to the Baroque period, and to the challenge to the ideology of the organic form inherited from the Renaissance.¹⁴ Mannerist artworks privilege the detail over the unity of the whole; forms themselves stop referring to an organic reality as in the classical period, and start referring to practices consolidated by the masters. The point of reference ceases to be 'nature' and 'reality' and becomes 'literature' and 'painting'. As Mauriès remarks 'the Mannerists are never inventors of forms; they distort them. They are artists who anamorphosise already existing forms'.¹⁵ Going back to Greenberg, the 'essence' of avant-garde art would reside in the acknowledgement of the resistance of the medium to the strategies of imitation, since it 'consists chiefly in the flat picture plane's denial of efforts to "hole through" it for realistic perspectival space'.¹⁶ The avant-garde work resists perspective – the principle of figurative forms – and therefore narrative space. The mannerist work, in contrast, is essen-

tially figurative; an idiom in which the desire to preserve entails both imitation, but also an irremediable anamorphosis (via saturation) of the classical perspectival model. Mannerism betrays its models either by a conscious departure from established rules, *or* by excess of fidelity.

Mannerism can be claimed transhistorically, but it does not exist in a historical vacuum. What we could call its structural belatedness feeds into the debates around the cultures of postmodernism as a ‘late’ or, even, *after-* moment with regard to (political) modernism. The debates about the postmodern peaked in the last two decades of the twentieth century; a shift most famously summarised by Lyotard as the condition of ‘incredulity towards metanarratives’.¹⁷ In the realm of aesthetics, postmodernism became associated with movements that reach their end-point: in literature, modernist experimentation gives in to re-elaboration and pastiche; in architecture and design, functionalism is replaced by a citation, decoration and anti-functionalism in objects and surfaces, and so on (although the equation of postmodernism with anti-experimentalism or an anti-aesthetic remains debatable).¹⁸ In Fredric Jameson’s influential formulation, the postmodern emerges as the cultural dominant in the era of late or transnational capitalism. In particular, Jameson calls forth the *nostalgia film* (in reference to the glossy period aesthetics of Hollywood retro films of the 1970s and 1980s) as a form of pastiche symptomatic of the paradoxical loss of the historical brought about by new forms of memorialisation. For Jameson, neo-noir films like *CHINATOWN* (Roman Polanski, 1974) or *BODY HEAT* (Lawrence Kasdan, 1981) rely on intertextuality as a ‘deliberate, built-in feature of the aesthetic effect and as the operator of a new connotation of “pastness” and pseudo-historical depth, in which the history of aesthetic styles displaces “real” history’.¹⁹ The trouble with the retro film resides in the ‘presentness’ of the film image²⁰ and, more generally, the dominance of visual cultures that cut through the core of our relation with the past – cultures that resist ‘older’ models of interpretation applicable to written texts.²¹

Jameson’s indictment of cinematic pastiche as symptomatic of the ‘depthlessness’ of postmodern aesthetics was part of the same cultural critique that denounced the commodification of the historical past in debates about popular cinema (I will return to this question in chapter two). The postmodern aesthetic seemed imprisoned in the past, with pastiche posing an ‘imitation of dead styles, speech through all the masks and voices stored up in the imaginary museum of a new global culture’.²² However, this pervasive idea results, at best, insufficient to address the films’ increasing stylisation as the cycle progresses. If we compare *A ROOM WITH A VIEW* (1986) with *THE GOLDEN BOWL* (2000); *THE BOSTONIANS* (James Ivory, 1984) with *THE AGE OF INNOCENCE* (1993); or *MY BRILLIANT CAREER* (Gillian Armstrong, 1979) with *THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY* (1996), arguably the later films participate of a belief in historicism (and thus,

realism) as a fiction. Self-consciously speaking through the cracks and fragments of received forms of realism, they look for new ways to project the past within the constrictions of the reality effect.

The films examined in subsequent chapters all raise the issue of the dominant taste for nostalgia, recycling and re-interpretation that defines their cultural moment. However, my analysis seeks to explore the flexibility (and creativity) of a film cycle that mobilises historicity as a sign through the use of already textualised forms. The past returns as a theme in the film image, as in other manifestations of contemporary culture, through reconstruction rather than preservation, visuality rather than the written word, incorporation rather than allusion, the privileging of the fragment within known overarching narratives, and the proliferation of framed texts rather than belief in direct access to 'facts'. These aspects can be subsumed as part of the mannerist aesthetic. Here I would like to refer to the flexible definition proposed by another postmodern thinker, architecture theorist Robert Venturi, in relation to architectural practices that retrieve patterns and styles dating back to former historical periods. Venturi discusses 'mannerism, with a small m' or, 'implicit mannerism', in order to refer to 'traces of mannerism in varying historical eras and varying places and can be interpreted as either naïve or sophisticated in its manifestation'.²³ He defines mannerism as follows:

Mannerism as Convention Tweaked – or as Modified Convention Acknowledging Ambiguity. Mannerism for architecture of our time that acknowledges conventional order rather than original expression but breaks the conventional order to accommodate complexity and contradiction and thereby engages ambiguity – engages ambiguity unambiguously... So here is a definition of mannerism where convention is inherent but at times given up on and made thereby exceptionally unconventional – a definition that does not involve originality of revolution, which is for our time a bore.²⁴

What I find particularly valuable in this provocative way of reformulating mannerism as a manifesto of the popular (that is, a manifesto from and for the *rear-garde*) is its suggestive embracing of what could be called a mode of *conservative* ambiguity: an attitude towards the past that is flexible and distinctive in disavowing neither fidelity nor subversion; whose rejection of (modernist) revolutionary gestures excludes neither the suspension nor the acceptance of the conventional. Mannerism as a mode allows us to conceive *both* conformity and deviation within narrative films that trade on the conventional realism of period reconstruction – a realism built on intertextual (and intermedial) iterations. Historical, literary, architectural, pictorial, but also technological citations make the period film image a layered construct.

Pastiche and the Reality Effect

Whereas form makes speech possible, speech is subject to the restrictions of form. We could thus talk of a double consciousness in the mannerist aesthetic, grounded on both the drive towards realism through the resuscitation of old forms, and the gestures of reinterpretation that convert form into a viable idiom. Science fiction – another form of period aesthetics that entails the plausible construction of imaginary worlds in the future according to subjective investments of the present – offers examples of a similar inner dialectic. The historical and the futuristic film bear a structural relation of cultural complementarity.²⁵ Nowhere is this reversibility more evident than in an American sci-fi piece from the 1990s: *GATTACA* (Andrew Niccol, 1997). A sleek futuristic drama, *GATTACA* also references the 1940s *noir* towards a ‘re-creation’ of the future tinted with preoccupations about the class divide created by eugenic practices. It could be argued that the literal fascination with spaces and surfaces that dominates the *mise-en-scène* represents a further example of the pervasive depthlessness of nostalgia. However, the iconic and narrative centrality of the workplace in the film (both a utopian space of standardised equality and a dystopian space of discrimination) allows for a materialist reflection on the present from the distance of the future/past. The film juxtaposes a culture of beautiful and disciplined bodies with a gruesome murder; the coolness of social relations with the repressed emotions of family melodrama (through the backstory of two brothers marked by their different genetic inheritances), and a strange environment with the familiarity of the hero’s predicament. All these elements bring about the imaginary representation of the future through the modes of consciousness of the past. *GATTACA*’s emotional realism – challenging the anomie or ‘loss of affect’ that Jameson sees as part of the new aesthetics of the postmodern – stems precisely from a recentring of the human subject in our post-human, post-genome era according to romantic ideas about the uniqueness of the individual and his/her claim to transcendence.

What separates the merging of the science fiction and retro styles in *GATTACA* from the no less obvious yet equally ambiguous meeting of the English pastoral utopia and futuristic dystopia in *NEVER LET ME GO* (Mark Romanek, 2010)? In both cases the investment in an aesthetic of period realism leads to a double bind that both ‘makes strange’ the familiar images of the past and signals an uncanny return of the familiar (via *repetition*; the quoting of past styles) within a premise of historical distance.

Critics have reacted against the ways in which this tension gets sutured by means of the ‘past-as-present-ness’ of photographic representation. Cairns Craig, one of the fiercest critics of the heritage film, has argued that the authen-

ticity of these films is flawed in the relationship they set up between the historical and the contemporary. Discussing the spate of E.M. Forster adaptations at the turn of the 1990s – *A ROOM WITH A VIEW*, *MAURICE*, and *WHERE ANGELS FEAR TO TREAD* (Charles Sturridge, 1991) – Craig points out that ‘the audience is invited to understand the plot of the films as though we are *contemporary* with the characters, while at the same time indulging our pleasure in a world which is visually compelling precisely because of its *pastness*’.²⁶ The target of this critique is the allegedly teleological narrative of history provided by the popular costume film, at a time (the early 1990s) where it was perceived as part of a rising industry that could be easily packaged as representative of the ‘national heritage’ as a whole and appropriated by reactionary politics.

If clichéd forms of nostalgia thrive on generic repetition, at the turn of the twenty-first century the films (and the related critical discourses) became increasingly self-reflexive about nostalgia. International co-productions, often shot in ‘global’ English and addressed to mass audiences, have found in the European Renaissance, Regency England, or the Victorian age suitable historical backgrounds for popular films that fetishise defining or emergent moments of cultural break:²⁷ moments in which ‘the present imagines itself to have been born and history for ever changed’.²⁸ The attempt to think historically and yet in the present tense shows in the hybrid textures and sense of instability that pervade the *mise-en-scène* of the past in the films examined in the following chapters, all of which, in different ways, tackle the problematic of the modern.

Arguably, we find embedded in the genre’s remit what Bal identifies as *paranthocentrism* in practices of historical interpretation: ‘a “natural” centring of the present as the outcome of a development’, which ‘assumes that one’s own position is normal, the standard, beyond questioning, hence universal and transparent... paranthocentrism undermines the possibility of understanding the present’s historical other: the past’.²⁹ This takes us back to the restrictive understanding of pastiche as failed realism; the symptom of our inability to think about the present historically. Pastiche, however, also brings its other to the fore: the reality effect. A closer examination of the relationship between the two can throw light on the question of period aesthetics, and its relation to affect, consciousness and the politics of representation.

Richard Dyer has noted that pastiche, unlike other forms of imitation aesthetically compromised by their investment in authenticity (whether literary, historical, or both), deploys a ‘hierarchy of knowledge in play’.³⁰ In relation to the deliberately artificial reconstruction of 1950s America in *FAR FROM HEAVEN* (Todd Haynes, 2002), he points out that responses to the film operate in a recognition of a *mise-en-scène* that ‘no longer accords with our ideas of (1950s) realism, or unironic emotional intensity’.³¹ *FAR FROM HEAVEN* is a pastiche, not of 1950s lifestyles, but of the mirror held up by Hollywood melodrama to that

historical period (in particular, Sirk's melodramas). The pastiche of a genre embedded in film history allows the film to explore a historical structure of feeling delineated by what remains excluded rather than by what is made visible in the gap between then and now. In *FAR FROM HEAVEN*, pastiche *frames* the conventions of the Hollywood tradition rather than a conventional idea of the period per se, but this makes this domestic melodrama no less heart-wrenching. Dyer further points out: 'Pastiche reminds us that a framework is a framework, and also that this is enabling as well as limiting – enabling and setting limits to the exercise of transhistorical sympathy'.³² The appeal to intense feeling through historically situated styles enables us, 'to know ourselves affectively as historical beings'.³³

This productive understanding of pastiche implies a projection of our estrangement from the past, and not just of our familiarity with it. This is something that camp and queer readings of the genre, such as *CARAVAGGIO* (Derek Jarman, 1986), *ORLANDO*, or *ANGEL* (François Ozon, 2007) as well as *FAR FROM HEAVEN*, particularly stress in order to make visible marginalised cultures and identities. The preference for period pastiches that defamiliarise the past as a strategy for progressive politics contrasts with the resistance to explicitly political readings offered by melodramas that express an attachment to the past. The films examined in this book fetishise the past with unironic emotional intensity, as opposed to diffuse nostalgia, or ironic distance. Through them, I draw a fragmented map of 'presents-in-the-past' that fulfils a variety of fantasy functions in contemporary culture. However, it is the actual *texturing* of period surfaces that needs to be read in detail in order to uncover the workings of such imaginary encounters, under the invisible cloak of the reality effect.

The importance of period reconstruction as a generic identity trait of the period film and the new technological and economic contexts reinforcing its ascendancy cannot but intensify what Roland Barthes called the 'reality effect' (*l'effet de réel*) as part and parcel of the films' dominant aesthetics. Barthes contemplates the reality effect as a symptom of the language of bourgeois realism, in which the referential plenitude resulting from the overlapping of referent and signifier puts the signified under erasure.³⁴ The sign in realism is a 'degraded' sign, disguising the ideological processes of meaning production. The detail acts as guarantor of the reality effect, supporting and foreclosing the structures of realism. The reality effect thus alludes to the nineteenth-century conflation of three different epistemological discourses under the sign of realism: the historical (through examples from Michelet, and prolonging the reflections in 'The Discourse of History');³⁵ the literary (*Madame Bovary*), and the rise of the photographic.³⁶ The photographic image perfects the referential illusion; the detail, initially the trace of literary performance, becomes engulfed in the holistic coherence of the realist space, and its drive to referentiality over signification.

'Realism' thus effaces its own historical origins as one more epistemological regime of writing through the evidence of the photographic 'having-been-there' of things (to use another Barthesian expression).³⁷ This form of bourgeois realism can become akin to various forms of reification (among them, the reification of the cultural past into spectacle). The period film's descriptive mode (identified by Higson as the spectacular 'heritage space', opposed to [filmic] narrative space)³⁸ reinforces referential plenitude through the verisimilitude of the visuals. However, as the visual detail 'disappears' behind the illusion of photographic realism and classicist narrative, it reappears everywhere as the *fetish* of representation: the 'excessive' detail that both points at the real and engineers its disavowal. The historical film thus articulates spectatorship as 'a kind of dialectic between a "realist" quest for the referential, and a certain simultaneous spectatorial awareness of and pleasure in the artifice of the film'.³⁹

Barthes's critique entered film studies through the first formulations of apparatus theory. His work on realism vastly influenced the 1970s *Cahiers du cinéma* debates over the post-1968 historical film and the rise of retro films that revisited the recent past (in particular, the decline of the French colonial empire and the Occupation during World War II). For the leftist critical line held by *Cahiers* in the 1970s, the retro style was amenable to reactionary political revisionism.⁴⁰ The debates on memory and history – crucial for an understanding of the role of historical representation in the re-imagining of the national past – led the *Cahiers* critics to speculate about the 'strangeness' of historical representation in relation to the filmmaking practice of Jean Renoir (*LA MARSEILLAISE*, 1938) and, especially, Roberto Rossellini (*LA PRISE DE POUVOIR PAR LOUIS XIV / THE RISE OF LOUIS XIV*, 1966). They claimed the progressive political function of their historical films as an antidote to the fetishist 'proximity' of melodrama.⁴¹ The defamiliarisation of the past suggests, for these critics, a different form of the reality effect, marking the opacity (rather than the transparency) of discourse.

The relationship between the reality effect and the film image is explicitly elaborated in Barthes's 'The Third Meaning', which first appeared in the pages of *Cahiers* in 1970. Barthes's turn from the written text to the iconic responds to a concern with figurality at odds with the tenets of linguistic communication.⁴² In his writing on still images from Sergei M. Eisenstein's films, and in particular from *IVAN GROZNY / IVAN THE TERRIBLE* (1944-1946), Barthes discusses a 'third meaning' going beyond the levels of communication (denotation, information) and signification (connotation or symbolisation), both of which amount to the 'obvious meaning' of the sign. The third meaning or the 'obtuse meaning' is a disruptive signifier without a signified, which belongs to the semantic field of artifice. The obtuse meaning falls on the side of excess, of 'useless expenditure'; it throws off balance the transitive relationship between sign and meaning. As Barthes isolates fleeting images from Eisenstein's extremely stylised historical

film, the related fragments (the tableau and the set piece) emerge as the structuring principle of the text. The image selected by Barthes is a close-up of Nicolai Cherkassov in the role of the sixteenth-century czar, Ivan, mourning the murder of his wife Anastasia. Thrusting his head backwards, his eyes closed, his neck almost bent, Ivan presses the back of his head against the czarina's raised coffin. His sharp and narrow beard points upwards in a mixture of anger and physical pain. In articulating the obtuse meaning with regard to this image, Barthes points out the layering out of disruptive intertexts (costume, gesture), amounting to a heterogeneous, unwieldy whole:

The obtuse meaning, then, has something to do with disguise. Look at Ivan's beard raised to obtuse meaning... it declares its artifice but without in so doing abandoning the 'good faith' of its referent (the historical figure of the czar): an actor disguised twice over (once as actor in the anecdote, once as actor in the dramaturgy) without one disguise destroying the other; a multi-layering of meanings which always lets the previous meaning continue, as in a geological formation, saying the opposite without giving up the contrary – a (two-term) dramatic dialectic that Brecht would have liked. The Eisensteinian 'artifice' is at once falsification of itself – pastiche – and derisory fetish, since it shows its fissure and its suture: what can be seen in image VII is the join and thus the initial disjoin of the beard perpendicular to the chin.⁴³

This image in fact appears at least three times throughout the two-part film: the moment captured by Barthes rewrites a close-up earlier in the film, where Ivan is seen dying on his bed, and is repeated in the final scene: Ivan raises his head and covers his eyes with his hand, this time 'mourning' the sacrifice of his cousin, whom he allows to be murdered in order to keep his power and with it, the unity of Russia. The same 'excessive' gesture is interwoven throughout the narrative, conflating the themes of despair and anger, vulnerability and power, man and monster, face and mask, which inform Eisenstein's vision of the tyrant. Yet this motif produces a figure which, freeze-framed in Barthes's analysis, enhances the fragmentary quality of the historical fiction.

What strikes me from the image selected by Barthes is its closeness to what we could identify, following Peter Brooks, as the melodramatic gesture, with its essential quality of plastic figurability⁴⁴ which stresses, rather than undermines, the 'strangeness' of the presentation. The obvious and the obtuse do not stand in opposition, but supplement each other, in a continuous shoring up and displacement of meaning: 'artifice' (in the French original, *postiche* or 'hairpiece') and 'falsification' (*pastiche*) are very close – and not just phonetically.⁴⁵ The distinction collapses into the fetish, which hides the fissure consubstantial to the act of suture. This layering makes contradictory meanings coexist: historical truth and theatrical disguise, the fissure in the suture, the join that disjoins. Ivan's elongated beard is notoriously false, disclosing the scandalous 'body-too-

much' of historical fiction.⁴⁶ This fissure is visible elsewhere in the film: in the baroque compositions, extreme close-ups and highly contrasted lighting that push to the limits the possibilities of framing and blocking – not to mention in the experiment with colour in the final banquet sequence. Unfettered by the restrictions of continuity editing, the constant fissuring in the textures within the film frame is only partly sutured by an accumulation of meaning through repetition along the syntax of narrative.

My recall of Barthes's abstract third meaning in this context may sound like a covert return to aesthetic notions of 'expressivity', or even to the ineffability of the work of art. Barthes delivers the affective quality of the film's images in a manner that seemingly prevents its extrapolation into method.⁴⁷ Barthes's reading of the film stills drives us back to the aporia of the image's literariness: the gap between the specificity of figuration and the codes of the cultural, as located in the impossible yet 'necessary demand for translation'.⁴⁸ However, his textual analyses target not that which gives 'full sense' to the image, but what challenges it – thus addressing a second aporia, that which constitutes the filmic text:

[T]he third meaning structures the film *differently* without... subverting the story and for this reason, perhaps, it is at the level of the third meaning, and at that level alone, that the 'filmic' finally emerges. The filmic is that in the film which cannot be described, the representation which cannot be represented. The filmic begins only where language and metalanguage end... The third meaning – theoretically locatable but not describable – can now be seen as the *passage* from language to *signifiance* and the founding act of the filmic itself.⁴⁹

By separating meaning from narrative, Barthes locates the presence of 'other text' in the absence of the still image. The location of *signifiance*⁵⁰ in the 'excess' of the photographic signifier opens the filmic image to the heterogeneity of figurative codes, but lets the film 'escape'. The film text remains off-limits in Barthes's account of the photographic 'because it restores through factors of movement both articulation or coding to the image as well as a syntagmatic organization'.⁵¹ The confining of the figural force of the image to the frame momentarily cancels the possibility of a reading practice that addresses the figural movement of the text; this paradox at the centre of the filmic event would be later picked up by Raymond Bellour (among others), when he described film as 'the unattainable text' (1975).⁵²

The detail of the film image opens a space for ambiguity between the reality effect and the more elusive obtuse meaning. Barthes's semiologic investigation thus resonates with the preoccupation with history and visual representation in the 1970s, and the ways in which different forms the historical image could be encoded, appropriated, and reinvested with conflicting desires, and multiple

(ideological) projections. As Barthes points out, ‘by positing the referential as real, by pretending to follow it in a submissive fashion, realistic description avoids being reduced to fantasmatic [sic] activity (a precaution which was supposed necessary to the ‘objectivity’ of the account)’.⁵³ It is desire’s ‘other scene’ that Barthes would keep exploring in the ongoing preoccupation with the image at the heart of his literary criticism (in ‘The Third Meaning’ from 1970 and *S/Z*, also from 1970, up to his book on photography *Camera Lucida*, from 1980).⁵⁴ Reading in detail entails going against the grain of the macro-structures that sustain realism as an ideological system, structures that Barthes’s critical practice never ceased to undermine, culminating in *S/Z*, a ‘text-as-reading’⁵⁵ that takes Honoré de Balzac’s *Sarrasine* (1830) as ‘tutor text’ or starting point for a careful dissection of the literary myth of realism. In his own assessment of *S/Z*, Barthes compares his micro-analysis to an attempt ‘to “film” the reading of *Sarrasine* in slow motion’, recalling Eadweard Muybridge’s early experiments in decomposing movement in a horse’s trot.⁵⁶ Barthes situates his exercise in critical writing as the flip side of reading in the continuous negotiation between the centripetal force of narrative (the suspense that constrains progress) and the centrifugal (‘explosive’) force of the text. This theorisation of reading as inseparable from writing produces an alternative space that uses the detail as resistant, opaque, bringing it closer to a fantasy or figurative mode. I would like to explore next how this notion of the figure may counteract the reality effect.

From the Figurative to the Figural

The figure poses an epistemological shift in approaches to cinema’s discursive mechanisms: from semiotics and discourse theory to the categories of rhetoric (tropes of metaphor, metonymy, and irony) and psychoanalysis (condensation, displacement, representability, secondary elaboration).⁵⁷ The figure connects the literary and the filmic, as well as the narrative and poetic functions of language. Roman Jakobson defines the latter as ‘language calling attention to itself’ and points out that the poetic function ‘by promoting the palpability of signs, deepens the fundamental dichotomy of signs and objects’.⁵⁸ However, the divide between signs and objects or between the linguistic sign and its external referent becomes suspicious to post-structuralist explorations that hint at the potential capacity of the figure to destabilise such separation. Figuralness in language would seem to undermine the function of designation that informs straight linguistic uses and, by extension, a purely linguistic notion of signification. In this respect, Jacques Aumont points out that:

In spoken language, the figure is a specific turn of phrase which differs from normal discourse in that it aims to produce meaning in a more original or 'figurative' way (*plus 'imagé'*)... The figurative and the word 'figure' itself show that, traditionally, the figure – or, rather, the figural principle – is considered a sort of contamination of the verbal by the iconic.⁵⁹

Such 'contamination' is consubstantial to the varied meanings of the word. The Oxford English Dictionary provides five different meanings for the entry 'figure', which may be grouped into three interrelated areas of signification. First, a visual meaning, referring to the real and the material, such as a corporeal presence, form or shape (the figure of the body or a geometric form). There is a second visual meaning alluding to absence: an image, an illustration, or a form of representation, but also a trace, a ghost or phantasm. Lastly, figure also alludes to a written form, and a rhetorical form of expression that interrupts the discursive flow by calling attention to itself (a figure of speech, linking to the metaphoric and the poetic).⁶⁰

The term itself suggests a sliding of signification between the iconic and the verbal, which only increases when form fossilises into a coded sign – as it is the case with mannerist forms. It is this in-betweenness of the figure that makes the film text readable (figurative) and opaque at the same time (literary, self-reflexive, 'obtuse', to borrow from Barthes). Drawing on Lyotard's early study on aesthetic theory, *Discourse, Figure* (*Discours, figure*, 1971), I contend the *figural* has productive implications for thinking about the ambiguity of the mannerist aesthetic, and its relationship to fantasy.

In *Discourse, Figure*, Lyotard explores the mutual contamination between linguistic and iconic expression, which forms the basis for a deep-reaching critique of both structuralist linguistics and phenomenology. The book opens by stating that discourse carries a 'thickness' or 'density' (*épaisseur*),⁶¹ which amounts to a constitutive difference: that 'which is not to be read, but rather seen; and this difference, and the immobile mobility that reveals it, are what continually fall into oblivion in the process of signification'.⁶² 'Difference' in this context should not be understood as the dynamic of exclusion between opposed terms, but as the force that displaces this principle of binary divisions. *Discourse, Figure* sustains a mode of deconstruction that, unlike Derridean deconstruction, valorises the image as a trenchant instrument of critique.⁶³ As Aumont notes, Lyotard makes of the figural 'a little instrument of warfare against the primacy of language', refashioning it as the 'site of emergence of desire, of the drives in the Freudian sense'.⁶⁴

Discourse, Figure is divided into two sections ('Signification and Designation' and 'The Other Space'), separated by a transition chapter entitled '*Veduta on a fragment of "the history" of desire*' (with italics in the original).⁶⁵ Informed by phe-

nomenology, the first section argues that the contamination of language (the domain of signification) with spatial relations (the domain of designation) introduces a radical element of difference (disrupting the 'at-homeness' of the subject in a world ordered by linguistic perception) that has to be repressed by the linguistic system. The second section moves into the figural, a zone of libidinal energy mapped onto the primordial space of the drives and belonging to the 'other scene' of psychoanalysis. Rejecting Jacques Lacan's linguistic model of the unconscious, Lyotard rereads the Freudian dream-work and each one of its phases (the operations of condensation, displacement, considerations of representability and secondary elaboration) and manifestations (the hieroglyph), as spaces of transformation triggered by desire. For Lyotard, the dream-work 'does not think' as a language but manifests as a force that creases and deforms the operations of signification.

The hinge chapter '*Veduta*' constitutes a practical exploration of what Lyotard calls culture's 'adaptive function', with a direct import for a theory of image and writing. Lyotard argues that the discursive has historically repressed the figural (defined by the spatial continuity or contamination between linguistic order and visual perception) through separation of the written (the symbolic) and the iconic. Reduced to the role of figuring language, the visual becomes mere illustration: the mimetic illusion ('signifying' nature) contains the disruptive forces of desire. Lyotard exemplifies this shift through the evolution from the medieval manuscripts (where image and word coexist), to the establishment of perspective as the dominant model of perception in Renaissance art. The rules of perspectival space absorb their own outside, the unregulated 'open view' into the world, into the inside of the geometrical space. The result is the *veduta*: a conventional window that constructs the spatial depth – and therefore realism – of representation by providing a vanishing point into the outside. The *veduta* is the token of domestication of difference, but also a site of potential disruption, as the deconstruction of perspective in late-nineteenth-century painting would eventually prove. As a result of the Renaissance revolution, and the attendant separation between the written and visual spheres of signification, seeing has become a constrained form of reading, naturalising the (Western) rules of representation.

With its multiple strands, complex paradigm shifts, and mobile focus between the plastic arts and poetry, *Discourse, Figure* is difficult to adapt to the study of film. And yet, Lyotard's notion of the figural irresistibly branches out towards the filmic in ways that bring out the instability of the reality effect as the defining trait of the mannerist aesthetic. The figure, which initially overlaps with the figurative (the visual as codified space of reading) is rewritten into the *figural* – the elements of visual form which resist the culturally regulated exercise of decoding into the 'flat' space of reading, in favour of the 'mobility' (non-

regulated depth-of-field) of the visual. However, the figural only exists in relation to discourse and vice versa: as Maureen Turim has pointed out, 'it is a term for the formal play of art within and beyond figuration. Yet it throws these formal devices outside the restricted play of formalism, for it places them in the realm of desire and the unconscious.'⁶⁶ In this respect, the oxymoron 'immobile mobility' expresses a concern with seeing/reading that is germane to Barthes's preoccupation with the film still.⁶⁷ Although these discourses develop different modes of theorising the image, and address different forms of the image, they are all concerned with the potential heterogeneity of visual expression and the Freudian 'other scene' of desire in the discursive practices of the aesthetic. In *Discourse, Figure*, fantasy and figure go intimately together. The figural thus emerges as a suggestive concept towards a theory of the fantasy that engages with the very forms that concretise the discourses of the past.

Lytotard's central move – the deconstruction of the opposition between the 'discourse' and 'figure' (i.e. the written and the visual, reading and seeing) – results in the retrieval of the inferior, repressed term.⁶⁸ The figural, however, cannot be simply equated with the visual; Lyotard's project entails the revalorization of *seeing*, as different from *vision* (*visée*). Mary Lydon notes: although 'initially invoked as distinct from reading, and valorized as the zone of mobility (in contrast to the rigidity the language system imposes) [vision] is progressively recognized to be constructed as well and hence equally repressive'.⁶⁹ The figural cuts across the contamination and constant negotiation of discourse with its outside; literally, it represents the eruption of the 'eye' in the discourse. This move informs other theories of cinema as *écriture*, which carry out a deconstruction of the monocular, transcendental subject of knowledge of apparatus theory.⁷⁰ Lyotard's project connects its deconstructive move with the utopian impulse in the forms of the avant-garde, looking for poetic and plastic practices that retrieve seeing as a concept resistant to the perceptual models that dominate Western culture.⁷¹ Lyotard looks at different instances of figural transgression in the written text, including condensation and displacement through wordplay in Shakespearean drama, anamorphosis in Baroque painting, e.e. cummings's poetry, or Georges Méliès's cinematic 'tricks'. These examples take the notion of the figural beyond avant-garde texts.⁷² Lyotard claims that the poetic work in general (this include the cinematographic and the pictorial) are transitional spaces where the relationship between Eros-logos and the death drive is reversed. The figural lurks behind the figurative; a phantasmatic scenario of non-accomplished desire.⁷³

The work of deconstruction is thus made to bear on the act of *seeing*. The figure is at the same time form and its transgression: the product of an 'initial violence' exerted over discourse, that is, the force of repression that first motivates the scene of fantasy. Lyotard produces an extensive and detailed reading

of the dream-work through what he calls the ‘double reversal’ (*double renversement*), or ‘critical function’ of the poetic text. Thereby lies the (utopian) function of the artwork: the ‘work of truth’ (*travail de vérité*). The figure opens up the processes of discursive figuration, expressing the return of the semiotic traces of desire onto the visual/written space of the frame as a disturbing strangeness. The reversal signals difference, the irruption of the *event*; but the reversal is double: the artwork reveals a critical function insofar as it produces a ‘space of truth’ (*un espace de vérité*) as opposed to the ‘space of deception’ (*un espace de leurre*) of fantasy, which fulfils desire. In short, the traces of the unconscious subvert the inner *mise-en-scène* of the work, calling the attention to something else happening behind the scenes.⁷⁴ For Lyotard, the relevance of the artistic text for the constitution of the master narratives of psychoanalysis (for example, the use of *Hamlet* or *Oedipus Rex* by Freud) cannot be limited to the role of the work as ‘symptom’ – as reversed expression of desire – but as mediator in a process where the reversal is *once more* reversed; where the artwork poses new questions. Desire cannot be totally fulfilled through the fantasy scenario; it generates spaces of opacity in the text which, in their turn, need to be interpreted.

The notion of ‘double reversal’ suggests a way of thinking about the fantasy of estrangement and identification posed by the period film through the fragment and the figure. Fantasy has to do with textuality itself, and with the density of the images structuring different levels of consciousness and inscription, replacing the distance of historicity with the immediacy of representation. The relation between present and the past as signified by the text of fantasy knows no historical dialectic, since the past represented is nothing but a spatio-temporal composite, ordered through the secondary processes of narrativisation. The figurative layers that structure representation in narrative (establishing the discursive oppositions between present and past, and thus closing down meaning) produce a space, in a psychoanalytical sense, prone to all reversals and investments: a present-in-the-past that captures the incompleteness of either, and a double movement of displacement and return.

My analysis of the case studies seeks to read the composite visual space of the period film through the textual fissures that suture the illusion of representational plenitude. Whereas the ‘Past’ poses a non-representable figure-matrix, ‘pastness’ is endlessly reproducible, a series of textualised fragments which juxtapose modes of consciousness – where each gesture of transgression presupposes a gesture of repression. Lyotard uses two Freudian examples: first, he examines in detail the fantasy ‘A Child Is Being Beaten’ as a figure-matrix that produces different utterances (or positions) coexisting on the same temporal plane (I will return to this in chapter three). The second, extracted from Freud’s *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), has a specific topographical import to the discussion of the visual figuration of history. Freud discusses the coexistence of

three different historical periods in Rome – ancient, Christian and modern – in the same space. The different historical stages layer up in a topography where none gets totally effaced and none of them is separable from the previous and the next one: ‘there is, strictly speaking, no present in which any of the stages is present in and as itself’.⁷⁵ In a similar manner, the plenitude of the past-as-present cannot be separated from the present-in-the-past in which diverse modes of consciousness (and concomitant spaces of repression) lay on top of one another. If, as D.N. Rodowick states, ‘there is always a disjunction between ideology – as the historically specific questions, problems and conflicts defined within a culture – and the symbolic forms available to give imaginary representations and solutions to those problems’,⁷⁶ my analysis of the figure is interested in the incompleteness of such cultural processes. Fantasy sets up the stage for the return of the historical as difference between the present and its imaginary mirror in the past.

As a visual film text tightly controlled by narrative, the period film is, in itself, a space of fantasy that seemingly represses the strangeness of the past, reiterating the oedipal structures of narrative in endless visual variations. Period drama’s mannerist ‘perfectedness’ (the rounded coherence and apparent finitude of its narrative images) contains nonetheless the very ‘unfinished-ness’ of the spaces of fantasy. As Rodowick notes, ‘rather than being manufactured or contained by narrative... desire [is a] historical force that continually erodes proper forms, producing contradictions in the texts themselves, and in spectators’ relations with texts’.⁷⁷ Film does not read the past, but rather the past becomes a mask that reads *our desire* through unresolved tensions about gender and sexuality, self and culture, imaginary and actual loss.

Since every reading is a misreading (setting up a precedent for critical interpretation), Lyotard’s notion of the figural as the resistance of forms to give in to discourse can help us position the generic figures of the period film in relation to the transitional grounds of fantasy, rather than the fixed referents of mimesis. The figural thus emerges in the shifting spaces of the figure: from presence to absence; from body to ghost; from actuality to desire; but also from past (history) to present (consciousness). In all these pairs, the repressed second term reinscribes the opposition as deferral on the surface of the text. Likewise, through the house’s ghost, the tableau’s frame, and the letter’s hand, I will look for the potentiality of the figural within the narrative dynamics of familiar figurative conventions. In order to further define the link between period aesthetics and fantasy, I would like to hold on to one particular concept from *Discourse, Figure*: the transitional *veduta* or, the emblem of culture’s adaptive function.

Classical/Post-classical: Adaptation, Film Writing and the Technological Narrative

The term ‘adaptation’, far from simply referring to a text’s transposition into a different medium (film in this case) responds to a complex set of operations driven by the desire for the familiar: an act of repetition that strives for the same fullness of experience. Traditional scholarship on film adaptation has been caught in a reductive opposition between the *original* and its *illustration*.⁷⁸ The discourses on fidelity have long dominated the debates around film adaptation, setting mimesis as the utopian goal. ‘Fidelity’ inscribes the critical activity within a hierarchy of cultural values that assesses above all the adaptation’s degree of likeness to the original. In contrast, the exercise in comparison invariably points at the incommensurability between discourses and media.⁷⁹ As a result, more often than not criticism focused on fidelity gets locked into essentialist approaches to the relations between the filmic and the literary text, trying to re-create an imagined continuity on the grounds of a strong investment in notions of narrative (a core of story and characters) and memory (a core of meanings and ‘impressions’ conveyed in the writing and mediated by the formal characteristics of the text).

Unsurprisingly, fidelity has proved, in the words of Robert Stam, an ‘inadequate trope’ to describe adaptation,⁸⁰ and a source of much resistance in both the fields of literary theory and film studies. Whereas the former views with suspicion the translatability of literary aesthetics into the sphere of mass production and popular culture, the latter conceives adaptation as undermining ‘pure cinema’, and the modernist ideals of the autonomous artwork that justify the independence and legitimacy of film studies as an academic field. This self-contained vision of the different disciplines is the product of a critical heritage that is ‘Arnoldian’ in its approach to culture as a group of unique ‘great works’ that have contributed towards the progress of civilization, and ‘Kantian’ in viewing the sphere of art as specialised, autonomous, and defined by the transcendence of media-specific forms. The activity of adaptation (with its appendages of ‘borrowing’, ‘translation’ and ‘reproduction’) generates the idea of a ‘mixed’ cinema that poses a challenge to the purity of a modernist tradition, and serves the utilitarian purposes of commercial art.⁸¹

Adaptation studies are now, however, well into a (post-)post-structuralist phase where old concerns about the autonomy of the text have been displaced by new concerns about ideology, reception, market economics and taste cultures.⁸² With essay collections on film-adaptation case studies mushrooming by the dozen (some of them bearing titles like *Henry James Goes to the Movies*, *Jane Austen in Hollywood*, or *Shakespeare, the Movie II: Popularizing the Plays on Film*,

TV, Video, and DVD), the scholarly resistance to the middlebrow and the popular seems a thing of the past. As James Naremore suggests, most studies seem to fall into one of two categories: approaches that cluster around metaphors of translation, and approaches dealing with performance. The translation approaches focus on the concept of literary versus cinematic form, and pay close attention to the problem of textual fidelity in order to identify the specific formal capabilities of each medium. In contrast, metaphors of performance usually structure auteur-driven approaches to adaptation. Questions of textual fidelity are also called into play, but with an emphasis on 'difference rather than similarity, individual styles rather than formal systems'.⁸³ This classification runs alongside an opposition between highbrow and lowbrow categories of writing, with cinema occupying the lower status in the translation approaches and the higher in the performative approaches.

'Fidelity', however, plays a crucial part in the aesthetic identity of the mannerist film. Whilst a defence of fidelity may sound counterintuitive, I should hasten to add that it becomes productive if we consider the period film as the stage of competing memories and desires, yet not in the hierarchical correspondence (the 'original' hovering over the 'copy') traditionally presupposed by adaptation criticism. The consideration of the work of the adaptation as illustration of an 'original' literary work establishes an analogical, motivated relationship between the film work and its referent. The adaptation perpetuates in more than one sense the drive to seeing *as* reading. However, film 'adapts' by deploying modes of 'seeing' that preserve the experience of accessing the past through the veduta of the modern novel, perspectival painting and classical cinema, and at the same time constitute a *mise en abyme* of the reading experience inherited from these cultural forms.

Going back to Barthes, metaphors of translation and performance attached to adaptation can be more usefully recast into the mobile parameters of 'reading' and 'writing'. Earlier I explored the relationship between period aesthetics and the rhetorical and figurative mechanisms of realism. Such relationship is shaped in particular ways by the fact that the adaptation sits on the limit of a historical practice of writing:

On the one hand, there is what it is possible to write, and on the other, what it is no longer possible to write: what is within the practice of the writer and what has left it: which texts would I consent to write (to re-write), to desire, to put forth as a force in this world of mine? What evaluation finds is precisely this value: what can be written (rewritten) today: the *writerly*. Why is the writerly our value? Because the goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text... Opposite to the writerly text, then, it is its countervalue, its negative, reactive value: what can be read, but not written: the *readerly*. We call any readerly text a classic text.⁸⁴

If the classic sign is ‘a sealed unit, whose closure arrests meaning’, the texts it engenders – the classic text – is emblematic of everything that ‘closes the work, chains it to its letter’.⁸⁵ Barthes’s opposition between the ‘readerly’ and the ‘writerly’ implicitly valorises the modernist practices of writing versus the consumerist economy of the ‘closed’ realist text. This opposition echoes the critical divide between classical (and their late ‘neoclassical’ incarnations) and modernist cinemas, as well as the ideological implications of the adaptation (whether literary/filmic or in the form of the ‘remake’) as text of consensus. As Naremore points out, in the peak of the studio system ‘readerly’ nineteenth-century texts were targeted as ideal material for prestige adaptations rather than the ‘writerly’ texts of high modernism, more difficult to reduce to transferable plots. The Hollywood adaptation, if anything, underscores the kitsch-ness of classical film narrative as the industrial afterlife of the nineteenth-century novel. Even for approaches more welcoming of the ‘originality’ and vitality of the forms of popular culture, adaptations like *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE* (Robert Z. Leonard, 1940) are, retrospectively, often deemed inferior to the ‘true’ classicism represented by the studio-era Hollywood film.⁸⁶ In contemporary cinema, the standard critique of the classic adaptation still falls on its bankable status as a market trend. The adaptation thus reinforces the connotations of the ‘classical text’ insofar it relies on a textual mode of production bound to turn out a product that can be ‘read’ (consumed), but hardly ‘written’ (transformed).

However, the ‘readerly/writerly’ pair can be conceptualised differently. The classic text (the period adaptation) stages that which is ‘no longer possible to write’ (the Past) through the *signs of the past*: texts which we ‘consent to write (to re-write), to desire’ because they still lay claim to a certain ‘force’ (including performative force) in our present moment (regardless of which moment is the present). This desire is productively at work in Barthes’s critical practice, and in the colossal effort in deconstructive reading/writing that is *S/Z*. As Barbara Johnson suggests, Barthes ‘differs from himself’ in his choice of a text (in his hands, Balzac’s story *Sarrasine* is the manifestly readerly object) that does not follow logically from his preference for the (modernist) writerly text over the readerly classical (realist) work. Barthes’s effort in uncovering the fissures in the narrative edifice of *Sarrasine* makes sense insofar as it pushes to the fore his writerly exercise in criticism (ultimately, a literary cipher in itself).⁸⁷

Significantly, the crisis of interpretation reconstructed in *S/Z* is attached to the ambiguous ‘feminine’ body of La Zambinella, a *castrato* opera singer, that offers the illusion of ‘perfect unity and wholeness’ but, like the writerly text, is actually ‘fragmented’.⁸⁸ In the exercise of theory-through-practice that is *S/Z*, it becomes apparent that the writerly critical practice necessitates the classic text: the readerly provides the necessary conditions for deconstructive criticism to take place. It is the persistence of a norm that makes possible the moments of entropy, and

the pleasure of the text that allows for its interruptions – escapes towards *jouissance* – to happen. The analysis offered in this book seeks to put the same readerly ‘innocence’ under suspicion in relation to a mannerist film text, which may look whole but is irremediably fragmented. My critical readings of the case studies explore the reach and limits of the period film as writerly text, taking on board the fact that the genre expands the space of classic realism but does not give up the connection with the languages of the past – it rather depends on their recognition. These new forms of addressing the past pose questions about how realism continuously evolves, adapts, and resurfaces. The mannerist film thus can be thought of as (post-)classical realism as memory work, reconstructing the illusion of a seamless narrative through a fragmentary space of citation and inscription. The literary element does not manifest as presence but as a structuring absence; not as a fixed origin but as a cluster of traces that generate writing, in the Derridean sense of producing ‘a mark that will constitute a kind of machine that is in turn productive’ – not because it is beyond history, but because no (historical) context can entirely enclose it.⁸⁹ The productivity of this critical gesture (which defines Barthes’s move from the closed systems of structuralism to the generative processes of post-structuralist semiotics) is not merely extensive to the analysis of the image but finds its utopian object and testing limits in the phantasmatic machine of the filmic: the text without the work, but also the ‘literary’ without the book.

In the films examined in this book, ‘adaptation’ (from literary as well as historical sources) can thus be considered a mannerist practice. If the period film uses the past as an already formed cluster of images and meanings, it also expands the narratives of the past, and puts to new uses the repertoire of images inherited through the different traditions of adaptation. The period film thus comes across as a continuum: from the wide variation in critical accents allowed by the classic adaptation (for example, *THE HOUSE OF MIRTH* versus *THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY*), to the heterogeneous citational practices in *ARTEMISIA* or *TO THOSE WHO LOVE*. This shift in critical focus recontextualises the processes of memory as productive writerly formations, rather than stable, readerly objects that limit their intertext. However, it also implies a different form of reading that takes on board the ghostly after-effects of film writing in the mannerist film.

In order to look at the specific formations of fantasy generated by the reconstructions of the past, we need to turn first to the post-classical narrative forms that shape the aesthetics of the contemporary period film. If the practice of adaptation ‘participates in a double intertextuality, one literary and the other cinematic’,⁹⁰ the critique of the classic adaptation has tended to overplay the former and underplay the latter. The attribute ‘classic’ has come to connote films that follow a conventionally realist mode of representation in order to

project onto the screen a canonised work of the past, as a text set in the past. However, as the adaptation takes on the classical connotations of its often (yet not always) canonical source texts, the mannerist forms of the costume film activate the memory of an earlier tradition encapsulated by the quality film. Underpinning it, we find the standard idiom of classical *filmic* storytelling.

The critical term ‘classical cinema’ suggests the historical development of a variety of narrative and formal devices stemming from the principles of literary realism, which sustain a parallel film discourse of ideological closure.⁹¹ For Bellour, the classical Hollywood text poses a particular textual structuration, building up a hermeneutic narrative on the principle of alternation and the rule of repetition-resolution. Narrative thus implements the normative forms of desire historically consolidated with nineteenth-century realism. Bellour has pointed out the filiation of the forms of classical Hollywood cinema to the nineteenth-century novel, on the basis of a general system of fiction that broadly shows a formal unity in the functioning of both literary and film textual systems. According to Bellour, film replaces the novel in the demand for narrative in fully industrialised societies, at the price of a certain levelling of the text and its progressive standardisation:

The American cinema is a machine of great homogeneity, due to its mode of production that is both mechanical and industrial. In this sense it exists at the level of maximum narrativity which in the 19th century is that of the serialized novel – the latter being precisely the point at which literature became an industry.⁹²

Bellour’s study of classic film narrative as a closed textual system maps itself onto a scenario of oedipal castration, where the trajectory of the hero is contained within a specific symbolic framework fundamentally tied to sexual difference. His close textual analyses reinscribe the centripetal movement towards closure and evacuation of contradiction in readings that begin and end in a single fragment of a single text.⁹³ The internal systems established in the readings constitute the blueprint for the intertextual structures that generate the system of narration otherwise known as the classical Hollywood film. As Rodowick has pointed out, these structuring patterns of internal and external repetition, reconstructed by Bellour’s close textual analysis, ‘reproduce intertextually a cultural scenario of sexual difference represented by unconscious phantasy, thus extending its historical power and permanence’.⁹⁴ In this closed system ‘woman too finds herself involved, for herself, in relation to desire and the law, but in a perspective which always collapses the representations of the two sexes into the dominant logic of a single one’.⁹⁵ Janet Bergstrom’s assessment of Bellour’s way of configuring narrative suggests that his critical position ‘continues this same fascination with a particular logic of desire and the law’, according the woman a restricted place in the grand narrative of Oedipus. ‘The woman is

central... insofar as the woman's desire is the central *problem* or challenge for the male protagonist (and the director, etc). Her desire, as evidenced by her look, narrativises the possibility and therefore the problem of sexual difference.⁹⁶

Bellour's micro-analyses (alongside Laura Mulvey's canonical critique of the mechanisms regulating visual pleasure in classical narrative cinema)⁹⁷ construe the classical Hollywood film as a totalising model at the level of fantasy – i.e. the Freudian *Urphantasiën* or 'fantasies of origins' – in which the fetishisation of the body/gaze of woman is the negative imprint underlying positive narrative development. Not unlike in Barthes's *S/Z*, these early cornerstones of critical deconstruction turn castration into 'a readerly fetish, the supposed answer to all the text's questions'.⁹⁸ However, my general point is that, far from dehistoricising narrative, the use of a psychoanalytic framework in close textual readings makes visible the conditions of representation, and the relation between structures of fantasy and the modes of the post-classical period film.

The persistence of classical narrative in the post-classical text of mainstream adaptation goes hand in hand with the widespread return of literary classics in the 1980s and 1990s as part of what Timothy Corrigan identifies as the 'post-postmodern yearning for good plots and characters with depth'.⁹⁹ The readerly status of the classic adaptation in contemporary cinema seems to be only reinforced by the refashioning of the quality film into 'high-concept images of great literature' securing the stable meanings that the textually 'shallow' mainstream products and disorienting images of contemporary audiovisual culture fail to produce.¹⁰⁰ However, the consideration of the commercial adaptation as aesthetically reactionary – the token of an undifferentiated classicism – overlooks the new forms of writing which accompany the re-readings of 'the classics', and their continuous hybridisation with postmodern genres and production trends. In the Hollywood studio films (*BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA*, *THE AGE OF INNOCENCE*), as well as in international productions competing with the Hollywood blockbuster in the mainstream scene (*THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY*), the promise of a classic adaptation rests on a multi-layered surface that belies the unobtrusive *mise-en-scène* of classical narrative. These films offer distinctive takes on novels many times adapted into film and television. They thus pose an ideal terrain to investigate the coexistence of classical narrative as a persistent after-effect in contemporary film culture, mediated by the technologies of vision that shape the reflexive modes of post-classical film.

BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA is a significant example of the mannerist film at the crossroads of new economic and technological configurations. Signed by Francis Ford Coppola and endowed with the ample resources of the Hollywood mode of production, this new version of the popular literary classic is a symptomatic example of the assimilation of the Hollywood auteur film into the spectacular logic of the blockbuster. As Vicente J. Benet has pointed out, the aesthetics

of the film rests upon a double frame of reference: the horror film/the fantastic genre, and the return to the myth's roots in history via the dynamics of psycho-analytical melodrama. However, the fragmented spectacularity of the film makes coherent closure impossible – at least in terms of the organic temporality of narrative. A visual spectrum sustained by competing intertextual referents and their constant hypertextual activation comes to the fore instead, engaging the spectator through recognisable (and readable) textual fragments.¹⁰¹

BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA builds on an economy of textual excess that ties together the two registers of the melodramatic and the spectacular. On the one hand, the film maintains the goal-oriented narrative of realism (driven by romance, and aiming at the formation of the heterosexual couple), which avoids the unmotivated return of the vampire as a mere horror device. On the other, the vampire becomes a key intertextual figure, opening up this basic narrative schema to the hypertrophy of the narrative image. This means, first of all, that almost any of the set pieces that sustain the romantic narrative has the grafted quality of the quotation in a film that is full of them: the magic lantern spectacles and first public cinemas, the language of scientific and technological progress, Orientalism, Aubrey Beardsley's drawings, Pre-Raphaelite paintings – they all contribute to reproduce fin-de-siècle aesthetics as a dense patina of visual and aural textures.¹⁰² However, the fragment is also the token of temporal confusion and hyperbolic visual writing in the film, suggesting different readings that make the text (the hunting of Dracula in Victorian London and in Romania) and its urtext (the myth of Prince Vlad and the loss of his wife Elisabetha) coexist on the surface of the text.¹⁰³

The secret meeting between Mina and Dracula in a secluded cabinet separated from a ballroom only by a glass partition makes a perfectly self-contained, detached sequence, which blurs the sense of time and space through an oneiric montage of close-range images: wide-angle shots and extreme close-ups of both Dracula's and Mina's eyes lap-dissolve into glass brims, written bottle labels [abSINthe], and screens of shifting golden bubbles, through graphic matches which erode the sense of a consistent physical space. This set piece, magically suspended at the centre of the film, suggests the reversibility of past and present, conscious narrative and erotic unconscious. The frame becomes an elastic space able to contain both the image of Elisabetha (the lost bride) and Mina (the newly found lover), and blend them into a single figure (both characters are played by the same actress) inhabiting an unspecified dimension in time.

The shot thus inscribes the space of fantasy on the surface of the narrative text, through an excessive metonymic economy that works on the principle of dissolves and superimpositions.



The temporality of fantasy: Elisabetha/Mina in BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA

The convoluted temporality of the film builds on a blurring and shifting of the principles of perspectival space in narrative cinema. The shot becomes a space prone to all compressions and displacements, given by the overflowing written and visual motifs which reinforce the uncanny return of the past as *déjà vu* – both within and beyond the limits of the diegesis. Against the specular economy of classical narrative, Thomas Elsaesser suggests ‘engulfment’ as a more precise description of the strategies of visual shock and aural disorientation in the film (reminiscent of Coppola’s ‘other horror movie adaptation’, *APOCALYPSE NOW*, 1979), and of the palimpsest-like quality of the *mise-en-scène*. Although *BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA* deconstructs the ‘linear narrative/monocular perspective system of representation which film studies has identified with the classical’,¹⁰⁴ the classical narrative does not disappear, but is overwritten by its very intensification. Coppola’s film thus presents the Hollywood period spectacle as a particular case of post-classical filmmaking that is unreadable in both classical and modernist/art-cinema terms. A self-referencing text in relation to movie history, but also with respect to technology, *BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA* undermines stable identification. Elsaesser concludes that the film ‘proposes various paradigms, leaving it up to the viewer whether to be engaged as (already) a post-classical viewer within the classical mode, or (still) as the classical viewer within the post-classical mode’.¹⁰⁵

Whereas Stoker’s novel’s fragmentary sequencing is cemented by an overarching narrative structure – as Mina’s typescript account brings together the various threads of textual evidence the novel makes a seamless whole out of

heterogeneous recorded materials – the postmodern visual spectacle that is Coppola's *BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA* is held together by its reversible classical/post-classical mode of address. This reversibility suggests a logic of spectatorship constructed through a double bind of narrative linearity and figural dissemination. The post-classical film overvalues the frame as an active agent of memory and transformation; in this mode of retrieving the past the discontinuities in the composite shot throw into relief the layered textures of the frame. The novel's highly developed technological imagination and abundant references to turn-of-the-century media and textuality (newspaper scraps, telegrams, hand-written and typewritten text, long-hand and stenographic recordings, maps and phonographic recordings) become, in Coppola's film, condensed and displaced into an equally fragmentary range of visual figures and texts. The film offers itself 'as a tour de force of the transformation of textuality into spectrality', culminating with the identification of Dracula's threat with the powers of the cinema.¹⁰⁶ Not only does the first encounter between Dracula and Mina take place against the backdrop of an early public screening in London: the spell Dracula casts over Mina ('don't see me/'see me now') through his constantly shifting image (from demon to prince) uncannily encapsulates the powers of the film image over the unconscious. Likewise, the successive metamorphoses of the vampire introduce various scopic regimes marked by the use of handheld camera, undercranked silent film, skid editing, and disorienting tracking shots – all of which produce a relentless fragmentation of narrative movement. The film literally builds on the panoptic ubiquity of the monster, as well as on the self-conscious reconstruction of fin-de-siècle Victorianism as the cradle of modern technologies – amongst them, cinema in its infancy. The vampire thus becomes a mercurial figure: a sign of the cinematic as eternal return of the undead, but also of the figural force of post-classical film's desiring machines.

The reflexivity of *BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA*, while sanctioned by the poetic license of the fantastic/horror film and the textual excess of the Hollywood superproduction, suggests the wider possibilities attached to the generative power of the post-classical text, and the inscription of fantasy through the textures of the mannerist film. The forms of romantic melodrama that inform my selection of case studies (*THE AGE OF INNOCENCE*, *THE HOUSE OF MIRTH*, *THE GOLDEN BOWL*) also bring to the fore an economy of libidinal investment and textual intensification, where the literary memory *in* the text is literally 'engulfed' by the palimpsest of textures *of* the image through the figural density of *mise-en-scène* and shot post-production. The feminine is figured in the very cut of the temporal (signified by the split between Elisabetha and Mina); her body enacting the crisis between seeing and reading, which generates, as we will see, other figural moments throughout this book.

The foregrounding of visual technologies interrupts the illusion of direct access to the past by way of the proliferation of textual frames and complex layers of retrospect. It is not per chance that throughout the 1990s one of the main strands of the period film has been the retelling of nineteenth-century cultural narratives through the window of technological reflexivity. *BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA*, but also *JUDE* (Michael Winterbottom, 1996), *PHOTOGRAPHING FAIRIES* (Nick Willing, 1997) or *THE GOVERNESS* are examples of this grand return of Victorian culture in mainstream cinema. In these films, the desire for the literary that animates the narrative is supplemented by a pattern of visual continuities that makes up what Garrett Stewart calls 'the residual role of Victorian culture in the genre and technology of general film practice'.¹⁰⁷ Stewart argues that the Victorian era originated a series of transitional forms and narratives (including popular genres deriving from the consolidation of the realist aesthetic) that bridge past and present. Accordingly, contemporary films revisiting Victorian culture generate moments when 'the technological form of retrospect infiltrates its content, just as a contemporary social or psychosexual vantage invades and revises the past'.¹⁰⁸ These moments are given by the material inscription of the photographic imprint – the 'matter' of cinematic narrative – in the film text. As the filmic decoding of the Victorian psyche is mediated by the technological capture of the 'subject' introduced into culture by nineteenth-century photographic technology, the latter comes to the fore as dominant episteme in the decadent treatment of the image typical of 1990s period film.¹⁰⁹

Stewart's analysis of film Victoriana at the turn of the century brings centre stage the visual hypertext independent from – but intimately related to – the literary and the cultural. Crucially, the period film's fascination with its photographic unconscious incorporates and passes through the narratives of psychoanalysis.¹¹⁰ In this respect, Stewart's two-pronged argument, technological and psychological, has two ramifications of special relevance for my own analysis: the first one is the now classic Barthesian equation of photograph and death, and its privileged attachment to nineteenth-century culture. Stewart contemplates film Victoriana as an elegiac form characteristic of the digital era, in which the emphasis on the photographic articulates a 'growing nostalgia for the real itself, and for the way the real once gave itself up to film, first to photography and then to cinema'.¹¹¹ Not accidentally, *BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA*, *THE SECRET GARDEN*, *PHOTOGRAPHING FAIRIES* and *THE GOVERNESS* include 'photographic moments' in their plots, all of which voice some kind of intimate loss. Related to this, I will look at 'still moments' in *THE AGE OF INNOCENCE* and *THE HOUSE OF MIRTH* featuring tableau shots – the 'painterly' stilling of the film image – as indexes of protracted acts of mourning.

The second ramification – beyond the focus on the photographic moment – concerns the (uneasy) representation of the sexual body in the period film. For

Stewart, the photographic event/effect is ultimately complicit with the conservative agenda of the Victorian film and its thematics of ‘cloaked or corsetted [sic] eroticism’, as the ‘[sexual body’s] availability to the camera is further eroticised by the very mode of photographic looking from which it derives’.¹¹² However, these (photographic and otherwise) metatextual moments do not simply translate film’s self-awareness of its embedded sexual narratives into the idiom of our post-Freudian age. They partake of the more mobile terrain of fantasy, and of the dynamic of desire/repression of consciousness:

In this typical rear-view mirror of cinematic Victoriana, we watch the period struggling to live up to its – primarily sexual – destiny in becoming our own. This is why films so often gravitate either toward the cusp moment of Edwardian turmoil on the brink of the modern (ROOM WITH A VIEW, HOWARDS END) or toward a kind of layered vision that structures into plot one or more intermediate plateaus of already dramatized retrospect (ORLANDO, THE AGE OF INNOCENCE).¹¹³

This ‘layered vision’ (as opposed to the paranthocentrism of narrative) is closely related to the critical figuration of gender in relation to the present-in-the-past of the mannerist film. Stewart expands the above thesis in a comprehensive study on what he calls ‘narratographic perception’, which considers the various forms of graphic inscription coming through the photographic base of the (post-)cinematic image. *Framed Time. Towards a Postfilmic Cinema* (2007) proposes a full-fledged poetics of the photogrammatic imprint that isolates the moments of ‘time coming forth as image’¹¹⁴ outside the modernist genealogy of Deleuze’s time-image. This enables me to retrieve Deleuze’s ‘grand concept’ in parallel to a body of (rather more unfashionable) ‘grand theory’ of psychoanalytic inspiration (including Barthes’s semiologic investigation and Lyotard’s neglected work on the figural) in order to examine the genre’s deeply ingrained desire for the past through its ambiguous textual relationship with (in-)fidelity-driven modes of interpretation. The call for concepts associated with the (past) theoretical moment of post-structuralism – such as the reality effect, the figural or fantasy – at the service of close textual analysis may seem a perversely regressive (even, mannerist) move on *my* part. However, this return to a body of theory nearly contemporaneous with my object of study allows a hidden thread to emerge: femininity as sign of the crisis points in what we could call, in broad terms, a ‘classical’ textuality refigured through a mannerist mode – a central point to which I will return in subsequent chapters.

Although nineteenth-century iconography stands as the site of the past *par excellence* in the Anglo-American period film of the 1900s-2000s (and will be invoked repeatedly through this book), the mannerist aesthetic cuts across thematic motifs. Through the figures of the house, the tableau and the letter I seek to discuss how the mannerist figures work through a broad spectrum of films.

Amidst the proliferation of models of the past, we may suggest, along with Corrigan, that indeed 'audiences today may be more interested in the different textures of adaptation than in the textual accuracy of any one adaptation'¹¹⁵ – textures that absorb and transform diverse modes of textuality. Not surprisingly, the limits of the reflexivity of the period fiction involve cinema looking back not just at history, but at its own history. The contemporary period film often includes 'film-within-the-film' fragments, narratively justified by the characters' momentous visit to early cinemas, as in *BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA*, *INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE* (Neil Jordan, 1994), *JUDE OR NORA* (Pat Murphy, 1999), or boldly integrated into the fiction (in *THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY* or *FRIDA*, Julie Taymor, 2002). The self-conscious memory of the film text suggests that cinema has not only become the repository of a number of cultural practices and traditions, but that it has engendered its own models of historicism.

The rich textures of the classic adaptation are part and parcel of the pleasures offered by the heterogeneous aesthetics of the mannerist film. This profusion of textual modes throws into question, and knowingly so, the logic of presentness that has dominated critical discourses about popular spectacles of the past. Through the interplay between narrative (discourse) and the figure, the period film fuses readability and ambiguity. The mannerist mode thus opens a space between fixity and potentiality. How this mannerist mode may operate in practice will be the subject of the following chapters. But first, let us have a momentary stop to *see* and *read*; borrowing from Lyotard, let us look through the *veduta*.

Credits Roll: The Figure as Threshold

So far I have attempted to map the theoretical problems of reading and interpretation raised by the genre. But how does the aesthetic object itself respond back to the theory? One of Barthes's most prominent disciples, theorist and video artist Thierry Kuntzel, performed his own enquiry into the figural in a series of films in which, through close textual analysis, he opens up the meanings of figuration to a full-fledged theory of the 'film-work'.¹¹⁶ Following in the steps of Barthes and Lyotard, Kuntzel establishes an analogy between the Freudian dream-work and the 'film-work' in terms of the processes of condensation, displacement and secondary revision that constitute the narrative.

Kuntzel sets up a reading practice 'concerned not with the mirage of the signified, but with the filmic text it generates; and in particular the manner in which the various configurations operate to displace the text'.¹¹⁷ Textual analysis looks at the generative process that structure the text through repetition and

displacement, in a practice that oscillates between the film frame (the attention to the image, for instance the opening credits as ‘door’ to the text) and the interconnection between fragments (the ‘constellation’ or ‘floating figure which the narrative will take up again, vary, displace, transform... insert into different signifying chains’).¹¹⁸ The analysis thus shifts from the notion of film language to a figural poetics integral to the work of fantasy – which, in the classical narrative film loops back to primal fantasies that herald the (normative) formation of identity.

Kuntzel’s reading practice – alternating between the fragment and the whole – seeks to foreground the structuring processes that produce the film text as a text of fantasy. The film-work does not only bring to the fore the textural play in the film, but the signifying processes completed by the reader. This leads us back to the question of reading/writing, which at this point should be rephrased as a question on ‘seeing/reading’ the image.

In ‘The Film-Work, 2’, Kuntzel’s first stop in his detailed analysis of *THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME* (Irving Pichel and Ernest B. Schoedsack, 1932) is the sequence of opening credits showing a closed door and, in close-up, an elaborate door knocker with the figure of a centaur holding a woman in his arms, an arrow piercing his chest. Centaur, woman, arrow: a triple figure presiding over the closed door of the story until an anonymous hand enters the frame, knocks on the door, and the door opens. Credits roll.

This playful prelude is exemplary of the threshold function of the credits in the classical narrative regime. The credits pose a pre-diegetic space, which is both utterly regulated and relatively unconstrained by the demands of narrative – a space that ushers the spectator not just into the story but into a state of suspension of disbelief. The credits are the first of a series of doors into the fantastic world of the story, but they also condense into one single space the motifs that later will develop into figurative constellations of meaning: man-beast, woman-trophy, the hunter. As Kuntzel remarks, ‘the whole itinerary of *THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME* serves to render the initial figure *legible*; to progressively reassure the subject plunged *ex abrupto* into the uncertainty of this image’,¹¹⁹ as the myriad possibilities posed by this opening hieroglyph are progressively cleared up, and anchored into narrative. Storytelling thus fulfils a primary function: to transform the figural density of the opening images into narrative lines of force. Similar to the pre-Renaissance modes of writing evoked in *Discourse, Figure*, the credit sequence makes two regimes coexist: the linguistic and the iconic, the letter and the line,¹²⁰ each one penetrating the space of the other. In the temporal body of the film, the credits carry out an effect analogous to the *veduta*: the establishment of a frame or threshold that allows the outside of representation to contaminate the inside of discourse, and vice versa.

The regulated limits of the credit sequence have however become much more mobile in contemporary cinema. The threshold in the period film seeks to visualise time through a self-conscious displacement into the familiar rituals of pastness. Fred M. Wilcox's 1949 adaptation of the children's classic *THE SECRET GARDEN* opens with a similar image to the one in *THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME*: a closed door and an anonymous hand which, coming into frame from the side of the camera, introduces a key and pushes the door open. This shot cuts to the first diegetic shot (showing the sky in India, where the story begins to unfold). The door that stands metonymically for the secret garden introduces the dominant fantasy scenario of the film: escaping into an imaginary 'other world' (highlighted by a final sequence in Technicolor) that stands as the opposite to narrative reality (photographed in black and white). The symbolic potency of this image (the hidden door to the secret garden, and the heavy key that opens it) returns in Agnieszka Holland's 1993 film version of the same novel. However, Holland's *THE SECRET GARDEN* prefaces the story with a detached credit sequence in which a young white girl is being dressed up by Indian maidservants. Costume, manner and ritual are the only indicators of space and place whilst the background remains purposefully vague – we find ourselves in a dream-like state. In a characteristic move of the revisionist adaptation of the late 1990s, the colonial space emerges as the *hors champ* or 'out-of-field' of the English Gothic narrative.¹²¹ The credit sequence brings to the surface the historically repressed Other of the imperial text as part of a fantasy world: an exotic 'other' time that is both foreign and home in the play of identity and displacement set up by the tale. At the same time, the historical space of class privilege in the Victorian imperial past becomes the site of an intimate story shadowed by the mother's absence. Her loss relates to the physical and emotional impairment of all the central characters. Behind the fantasy/children's literature genre to which the imaginary of the film refers back, the twin spaces of colonial India and the secret garden acquire their emotional resonance through this absence, a source of melancholy that can only be healed through the reconstruction of 'proper' family relations.

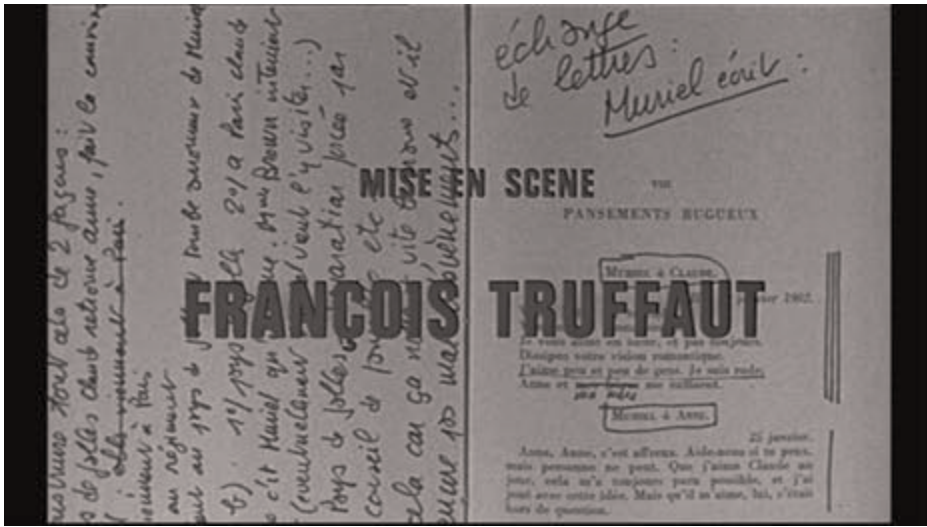
The change from boundary to passage neatly suggests that mannerism is the expression of forms irrevocably touched by time. The consistent use of images associated with the past in self-enclosed opening sequences fulfils a referential function, as well as drawing a connection between identity through past histories and forms. The mannerism of this mode of filmmaking manifests in what Pidduck defines as 'an emphasis on intimate contained spaces' belonging to the miniatures and microcosms of period drama: worlds 'bristling with self-consciousness... [in films that] gesture knowingly to the complex parallels between narrative, play within play, and social and historical intertexts'.¹²² *EMMA* (Douglas McGrath, 1995) presents us, literally, with one such microcosm. The credit

sequence features a miniature earth globe painted with small vignettes encapsulating the ‘world’ of Austenian characters and, by extension, of Austen films: an array of delicate and occasionally cloying miniatures in which self and identity are interwoven into the background of a puritanically controlled world of representation.

These self-enclosed iconic worlds refer back to a perception of the literary works of the past as finite, rounded worlds, enshrined by time. Thus, in the beginning, it was the book. The credit sequences in classic adaptations like *DAVID COPPERFIELD* (George Cukor, 1935) or *JANE EYRE* (Robert Stevenson, 1943) place the film under the aegis of the written: they identify book with film, and acknowledge the hierarchical precedence of the written work.¹²³ In David Lean’s *GREAT EXPECTATIONS* (1946), the credits are followed by the close-up of a volume opened up by an anonymous hand, whose pages are turned by a sudden wind sweeping the desolate marshes where Pip’s story begins. The editing neatly subordinates the film to the authority of the book (reinforced by a voice-over that reads the first lines of the novel’s opening chapter), and the space of the narrative proper is magically conjured up by the written word. In Jean Renoir’s *LA BÊTE HUMAINE* (1938) the symbolic and thematic centrality of the steam engine in the story of Jean Lantier is underscored by a fragment of Zola’s text backgrounded by a screen of smoke. Zola’s signature and an insert of the author’s portrait round off the credit sequence.

The presence of the book in the credit titles carries the symbolic weight of the author’s agency. The opening credits in the classical adaptation thus transform the film image into an illustration of its literary origins, underscoring hierarchy and literary authority – as well as the figurative function of the film text. In the mannerist film, the book has been condensed into the letter. Tradition and authority become baroque visual signs such as the flourish of the old-fashioned copperplate (featuring in the credits of the Hollywood adaptations *COUSIN BETTE*, Des McAnuff, 1997, or *THE AGE OF INNOCENCE*), the ornate vignettes reminiscent of silent cinema intertitles in *A ROOM WITH A VIEW*, or the modernist letter design that opens *HOWARDS END*. This new classicism contrasts with the literal imprint of the (film) author’s hand in the modernist adaptation. In *LES DEUX ANGLAISES ET LE CONTINENT/TWO ENGLISH GIRLS* (François Truffaut, 1971), the opening credits unfold through a series of static shots of copies of the 1956 novel by Henri-Pierre Roché which forms the basis for the film. The credits write over the already written space: different frames of copies of the book whose pages appear densely annotated by the film director himself.

The film boldly declares its will to be faithful to the literary text through the act of film authorship, and the opening sequence signifies a hybrid space where film and book can coexist, inflected by the intervention of the adapter. This form of intervention is also visible through the aged hand that turns the pages of the



Faithful to the book: credits as threshold in TWO ENGLISH GIRLS

book in the credit sequence of *L'INNOCENTE/THE INNOCENT* (Visconti, 1976). Visconti's last film (based on a text by Gabriele d'Annunzio) presents the book on a red velvet fabric with heavy folds; this image, whose textures evoke the rich *mise-en-scène* of Visconti's operatic historical dramas, has the pictorial quality of a still life: an allegorical *Vanitas* that carries the mark of the funereal, of ephemera.¹²⁴ Visconti's hand is reminiscent of other metonymies of the auteur in cinema – Luis Buñuel's in *UN CHIEN ANDALOU* (1928), Orson Welles's voice in *THE MAGNIFICENT AMBERSONS* (1942) or Hitchcock's distinctive profile and fleeting apparitions in many of his films. These interventions always take place in the opening scenes, working as a kind of rubric that extends the symbolic threshold of the credits and frames the work of fiction. In *THE INNOCENT*, the period film comes to life as a melancholic work, with the director's hand inscribing its own mortality.

The literary suffers yet another metamorphosis in the mannerist mode. The book turns into a myriad of intermediate objects which stress the figurative quality of the written, but also the material import of technologies of writing associated with past eras. In the George Sand biopic *LES ENFANTS DU SIÈCLE* (Diane Kurys, 1999), the credit sequence takes place in a nineteenth-century printing room, as a montage of images that dwells on the book's industrial assemblage. James Ivory's *JEFFERSON IN PARIS* (1995) opens with a series of close-ups of a wooden frame that assists a writing hand, which produces the signature 'Thomas Jefferson'. The wooden device is a primitive system for copying manuscript documents used by Jefferson at the historical moment of redacting

the United States' Constitution. These descriptive sequences maintain the link between human authorship and monumental history in an era of mechanical reproduction. Period authenticity is established through the affirmation of the uniqueness attached to the author's signature, even if postmodern period films acknowledge its pastiche quality. An example of this is the dynamic credit sequence in *SHAKESPEARE IN LOVE* (John Madden, 1999), which alternates a majestic crane shot over the Rose Theatre and the spectacle of the crowded London streets with an ironic presentation of the 'Author'. Quill in hand, the playwright furiously rehearses his signature, as the titles imprint the name of the film over a close-up of 'William Shakespeare'.¹²⁵

If the image of the hand highlights linear historical time and the momentous event, enlarged details mark the 'outside time' of memory via evocative figures that both condense the film metaphorically and displace it metonymically. Rozema's *MANSFIELD PARK* starts with a montage of moving close-ups featuring a set of quills, ink, and paper, framed at such close range that the objects become indistinct, and their shapes and textures overflow the limits of the frame. Likewise, the opening sequence in *THE ENGLISH PATIENT* (Anthony Minghella, 1996) composes an elaborate visual simile between a brush smoothly drawing lines over a parchment, and the small plane projecting its shadow over the sand dunes. Writing dissolves into the iconic, as the letter opens up to the 'deep' topographical space of the line. In *THE AGE OF INNOCENCE*, the credit sequence establishes the rhythm of the film, marked by the repetition and fusion of three visual motifs: writing, lace and flowers.



Figurality in the opening credit sequence of THE AGE OF INNOCENCE

Titles are intended to evoke the sensuality and romanticism of the period while pointing out the literary origin of the narrative.¹²⁶ However, these motifs only superficially connote *pastness*. Their resilient quality as stand-alone images func-

tions as a hieroglyph, hinting at the struggle between 'nature/feeling/visuality' and 'culture/codes/writing' at the heart of the *mise-en-scène*. The figurality of the credit sequence blurs the boundaries between the metaphoric depth of literary symbols, and the fluidity of the film-work (following Kuntzel's formulation).

The centrality of the close-up in the montage sequences of *MANSFIELD PARK*, *THE ENGLISH PATIENT* and *THE AGE OF INNOCENCE* highlights the key role of the 'affection-image'. This category encapsulates the poles of reflection and intense expression that emphasise the qualities of deep feeling, interiority and desire enshrined by the romantic universes of period cinema.¹²⁷ In the taxonomy offered by Deleuze, the affection-image represents 'the final avatar of the movement-image', where movement 'ceases to be translation in order to become expression'.¹²⁸ The affection image inscribes itself both outside and within the spatio-temporal coordinates set up by the film, in what Deleuze calls the construction of 'any-space-whatevers': affect as 'pure quality'. The close-up abstracts the object out of narrative time and space; it comes through as a fragment that refers to the potentiality of the image. As a way of retrieving the close-up from the libidinal economy of partial objects, this limit category articulates a transition from the movement-image into the time-image, which in many ways parallels Lyotard's articulation of the figural beyond the limits of transitive (narrative) desire. The affection-image in the credit sequence represents one such moment of sheer potentiality: the figure not yet subdued into the parameters of reading across the categories of narrative linear time.

The any-space-whatever produced by the affection-image meets the density of the figural through the deconstruction of the figurative work of representation. In both cases, we can talk of the dissolution of the 'flatness' of the syntax organising the temporal body of film into topographical depth: figural difference is tantamount to 'disrupting the at-homeness of the body in the world'.¹²⁹ The pure quality of these images can be rethought in terms of the displacement from presence – as they act as threshold into a 'past' that only gradually will become anchored in discursive and semiotic references. The valuing of detail thus produces moments of enhanced perception ('descriptive', where image does not translate into action) that challenge the movement-image. My focus on the figural though the fragment as figure in the mannerist film has an essential investment in the 'displacement from presence' that characterises the time-image. Whereas the credit sequence often naturalises period space, merging essentially descriptive images (time/place) into the narrative framework (as in the openings of *SENSE AND SENSIBILITY*, or *THE PIANO*), the period film's figurality often emerges in the close-up's potential to conjure up the any-space-whatever.

The overvaluation of the fragment contributes to a blurring of time that inscribes period narrative into fantasy, rather than historical time. In *THE HOUSE*

OF MIRTH's credit sequence an elegant snakepit motif unfolds and progressively covers a painted surface, heralding the sublimated 'stage entrance' of the heroine (through static, pictorial shots), as from a different time and place. Unexpected linkages also occur in the credits of *THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY*, in which the close-ups of the anonymous young women connect randomly with the over-determined close-up of Isabel Archer. In *ARTEMISIA*, credits roll over an extreme close-up of an eye reflecting candlelight, interrupting the onset of the events in the early life of painter Artemisia Gentileschi. Reminiscent of the prolonged eye close-ups that introduce the central female character in *TROIS COULEURS: BLEU / THREE COLOURS: BLUE* (Krzysztof Kiesloswski, 1992), we see the world shrink to a mere dot reflected in the centre of the eye. The universality of the biographical narrative momentarily folds into a radical manifestation of feminine subjectivity.

As a mainstream narrative genre, the period film's sense of temporality depends on the fixing of subjectivity in a point with respect to which past and present are subsequently defined. However, these credit sequences contribute to the blurring of such fixed temporal signposts, transforming space into passage of time: present-in-the-past. The fragment suggests dis-location, and the interval allows for a different reorganisation of the text within and beyond the encoding of the image. The credits disturb the operations of representation, reuniting the discursive with the visual: readable signs become, once again, visible. The mannerist overvaluation of the fragment thus rehearses the (critical) passage from the realist space into the space of fantasy through the genre's preferred figures. Such figures constitute the focus of the following chapters.

Chapter 2 – Present in the Past: The House

Nostalgia Interrupted: The House and its Ghosts

The house represents, quite literally, the home and hearth of modern period drama. Unlike the expansive landscapes of public memory that concern the epic, the house encapsulates the rituals and mores of the past, and brings into focus the ‘intimate contained spaces’ characteristic of contemporary period film.¹ At the same time, the house is a spectacular motif that has come to define the mannerist moment of the genre. Poised between the shifting meanings of ‘home’, ‘property’, and ‘museum’, the house evokes both generic predictability and contested heritages. In the following pages, I address these debates through a look at the house as a figure built on layered notions of time and place. It is the *figural* of the house, its simultaneous (fantasy) work of expression and repression that makes it both readable and ambiguous.

The films discussed in this chapter vividly evoke past lifestyles through seductive images of dwelling. The stately house and the country house in particular have become identified with a heritage film cycle that stands as a dominant cultural form typical of what Sadoff calls a ‘postmodern age of anxiety’.² Sadoff estimates that ‘in the 1980s and 1990s, the country-house film became so popular precisely because it expressed late-century angst about the nation’s pre-eminence, about economic globalization, and about the future of high culture’.³ The static spectacle of the house would thus appeal to a diffuse nostalgia that functions as a safe haven from present anxieties about national (dis)integration and class mobility.

The ideological reading of this generic motif needs to be examined, however, in light of the specific ways works of fiction map abstract notions of historical time onto material object cultures and subjective chronologies. I recall the experience of seeing space *become* time captured on stage, in the country house that functions as setting in Tom Stoppard’s play *Arcadia* (1993).⁴ *Arcadia* is set in a unique room that stands for the microcosm of the English country house, where the action smoothly switches between the early nineteenth and the late twentieth centuries. Props and characters belonging to those two separate layers of historical time converge around the same table at the centre of a furnished room. None of the objects belonging to the two different periods is ever re-

moved, but they only become visible through their narrative 'activation' through the actors' performances. Anachronism remains but a latent effect of the spectator's gaze, as past and present are locked into a space seen through the perspective of each other's historical 'other'. This ingenious device enhances the potentiality of the house as virtual veduta, both object and frame, in a poetics of period space that points at the incompleteness of the discursive structures of realism.

The house as projection of fantasies of memory, confinement and desire is the figurative backbone in a myriad of films. In the haunted chambers of the gothic house, the charged spaces of family melodrama or the complex rituals of seduction played out in the ballroom, the literary tradition meets with its extended offspring: pastiches and retellings that remap familiar spaces. Taking up a well-known phrase by Henry James, Pidduck has referred to the 'Houses of Fiction' of Anglo-American period drama in the 1980s and 1990s as a series of 'affectively charged interiors where intimate dramas of desire and mannered social critique unfold'.⁵ The house can be approached as a significant motif for a topography of the period film in which 'the complexity of historical "lived space" is bundled into the dramatic form of the house of fiction, a generic container for interiority, desire and romance'.⁶ In the 1990s, the cycle of Austen adaptations amply dramatised the contrast between emotional containment and the possibilities of a mobile femininity. Likewise, differences in tone notwithstanding, films such as *ANGELS AND INSECTS* and *WASHINGTON SQUARE* (Agnieszka Holland, 1997) evoke the class and gender-bound Victorian domestic spaces as spaces of confinement and repression.

The house in these films offers a stage for the re-enactment of past relations of power which, in being actualised, are reinscribed differently. As a narrative setting, this approach stresses the continuity between past and present (as well as the continuity between films) through the visual rearticulation of discourses about class, gender, sexuality and race through spatial (narrative) tropes. Pidduck concludes that these popular narratives make room for progressive revisions that 'interrogate the costume film's class relations from the explicit vantage point of the present... and in this respect they offer presentist, often ironic and postmodern commentaries on the past'.⁷ Within and beyond the themes derived from the modern European novel, the house offers an expressive amalgam of spatial and temporal coordinates, which registers subtle shifts in style and meaning with each new remapping. The unfamiliarity of the evoked realms of cultural history dissolves through the affective impact of embodied experience *seen* unfolding as visual spectacle. The house is thus poised between narrative and descriptive modes, as a dramatised microcosm of home as well as a spectacular house-museum.

The house in period film has been caught in a critique profoundly suspicious of the visual artefacts and practices of heritage culture. The packaging of the past as an 'experience' in museums and heritage sites transferred well into a strand of film criticism that saw the success of the 1980s British period dramas as part of a larger cultural phenomenon: the commerce of heritage. As Raphael Samuel has noted, the anti-heritage critique condemns the transformation of national history into retro styles and tourist kitsch.⁸ For its critics, 'heritage is a fraud because it relies on surface appearance',⁹ replacing 'real history' with a history of objects where no active intellectual engagement is necessary – only a distracted 'tourist gaze'.¹⁰ Guided tours through heritage properties, coffee-table books, and a gift culture drawing on Victoriana and Edwardiana have become part of popular culture, with period films and classic television serials tying all these aspects together. The period film seemed to feed the public's appetite for heritage objects, trading on an idealised vision of bourgeois living¹¹ through the display of lavishly dressed interiors and architectural landmarks.

The transcultural, migrant notion of the 'bourgeois interior' evokes ideas of class and private space emerging in European culture and literature since the seventeenth century. Julia Prewitt Brown defines the bourgeois interior as a 'medium' of transmission, which channels the bourgeoisie's expression of itself through, among other things, the articulation of space that 'refers, or avoids referring, to an "outside"'.¹² From the sense of 'enclosure' and 'security' reflected in the work of Dutch painters such as Johannes Vermeer (evoked in the painterly interiors of adaptations such as *SENSE AND SENSIBILITY*), to the 'architecturally framed' interiors in the cinema of Ingmar Bergman, Brown traces an experience – and representation – of home which, towards the end of the nineteenth century is already expressing a nostalgia for an 'earlier, more stable middle class'.¹³

The melancholy attached to a vanishing idea of home is summoned by the bourgeois interior through a reassuring sense of linear chronology and antiquarian history. The anti-heritage critique sees the house of the period film as a house-museum with clear captions that carefully signpost the objects from past eras. The house-museum sets a reassuring divide between the present and the past as well as between different pasts. However, as the house underscores the permanence and continuity of place versus the breaks of time, it also becomes the repository of melancholy. The house is not just symptomatic of the vanishing of an era (an oft-cited metaphor for our own turn-of-the-century anxieties), but also evokes the friction between worlds and modes of consciousness. The figure of the house is closely related to the uncanny, in the Freudian sense of the unfamiliar containing the familiar, that is, the discovery of something clandestine, secret or strange (*unheimlich*) at the core of that which is most familiar and private (*heimlich*/homely).¹⁴ The uncanny resurfaces thematically in the

house's gothic variations – for instance, in the various adaptations of the haunted-house theme modelled on literary sources like James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), such as *THE INNOCENTS* (Jack Clayton, 1961) or *LOS OTROS/THE OTHERS* (Alejandro Amenábar, 2001). The latter film, whilst not based on a pre-existent literary text, invokes both James and Clayton through the generic readability of the gothic house at the service of maternal melodrama. In a self-conscious 'turn of the screw' on the haunted-house sub-genre, *THE OTHERS* 'reverses' the point of view that sets the house's temporality: mother and children are revealed to occupy not the historical layer of 'presentness', but its other, as ghosts caught between the topographical past and present of the house. The reality effect is thus replaced by an 'uncanny' effect arising, not from the hesitation between imagination and reality, but from jumbled temporality altering the phenomenological perception of space.

Earnestly devoid of irony and utterly faithful to its genre, the post-postmodern aesthetic of *THE OTHERS* intimates that the reality effect that cements period aesthetics may contain its other: the possibility of reimagining the house as a liminal figure where, as in the haunted chambers of *THE OTHERS* or the living space where the action in *Arcadia* takes place, physical space becomes the repository of hybrid layers of experience and imagination. In this context, the ghost comes up as the third term in the apparent correspondence between the 'presentness' of the house as visual signifier, and the virtual 'reality' of the past that operates as signified. Ghosts sit uncomfortably in the modern imagination, yet they are not simply a throwback to the past, but the trace of chronology confounded – time out of joint: 'ghosts are anachronism *par excellence*, the appearance of something in a time in which they clearly do not belong'.¹⁵ The ghost challenges the idea of linear time (and therefore clearly defined notions of 'period'); it does not belong properly to any given space-time frame but poses a threshold between frames. We can liken the ghost to the figural as a blur in the picture that marks the eruption of the purely visible into the orderly space of the discursive.

The house in the period film has been deprived of its ghost by heritage criticism. Re-focusing on the uncanny and the ghostly means introducing time back into space. In *THE AGE OF INNOCENCE* and *THE HOUSE OF MIRTH* the present-in-the-past mode inhabits the constitutive tension between narrative and descriptive modes of figuring the house in the film text. The house covers up spatio-temporal discontinuities, promoting a space of fantasy that inevitably closes around a subject anchored in time through cultural experience. However, whilst camerawork and *mise-en-scène* overvalue the house as a fully *filmic* motif, they also transform it into a space that resists character-driven forms of classical narration. 'Description' constitutes a mode of textual figuration attached in the first place to the production of the house as affective space (the way that the house is

made knowable). Yet description also evokes time as anamorphosis of space: the eruption of the eye that exceeds the knowing subject and provokes a change in perspective *within* the limits of the narrative frame.

The passage of time and the ghosts of the past are recurrent themes in European films that experiment with the forms of period representation. Boundless camerawork and digital cinematography have allowed for the deconstruction of narrative space to reflect on history and memory. *LE TEMPS RETROUVÉ/TIME REGAINED* (Raoul Ruiz, 1999) or *RUSSKIY KOVCHEG/RUSSIAN ARK* (Aleksandr Sokurov, 2002) blur the boundaries between the house as subjective space and as the museum-space of history; these films experiment with forms of *mise-en-scène* that dissolve the notion of an anchored subjectivity, proposing instead disorienting visual experiences of space and time. They evoke, quite literally, labyrinthine structures of memory where dislocation and anachronism become the dominant textual mode; put in Deleuzian terms, they reframe the ruptures of the time-image in modernist post-war cinemas, from positions that range from exilic displacement (in the case of Ruiz) to an investment in national reconstruction (in Sokurov's project).

In contrast, in the house of fiction of popular film the boundless camera-eye reinvests the descriptive time-image with the energetic properties of the movement-image. Extended Steadicam shots produce a scopic regime that serves especially well the experience of the period house as a self-contained social space that is also *spectacularly* real: the uninterrupted tracking shot where the characters' paths criss-cross in a maze of tangled relationships at the private ball in *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE*; the tour-de-force 'flights' up the stairs that provide breathtaking prologues in *WASHINGTON SQUARE* and *LE COLONEL CHABERT* (Yves Angelo, 1994), or the montage of tracking shots that anatomise Mrs Manson Mingott's mansion in *THE AGE OF INNOCENCE* – these fragments detach visual space from the intersubjective grid of looks that articulates classical narrative. This excessive independence of the camera has led to ongoing arguments about the loss of the historical in the figuration of space.¹⁶ The decentring of the human subject in the visual regime of the postmodern film exacerbates what Higson calls the 'tension between visual splendour and narrative meaning' in the heritage film.¹⁷ Such tension opens spaces of uncertainty around period spectacle. Focusing on four films – *HOWARDS END*, *THE GOLDEN BOWL*, *THE AGE OF INNOCENCE* and *THE HOUSE OF MIRTH* – I investigate the house as a transitional figure poised, like Lyotard's *veduta*, between the phenomenological immediacy of descriptive space and the written, or remediated, experience of a cultural past. The house encapsulates, in formal as well as thematic terms, the films' desire for the past. However, this melancholic stance also contains the ruptures of the figural: the house's simultaneous evocation of the homely (*heim-*

lich) and its other; the ghosts of dispossession that haunt the narratives of ownership and inhabitancy.

Home and (Dis)Inheritance: HOWARDS END

More than any other cycle in modern period drama, the films of Merchant Ivory have established the iconic quality of the house as a symbol of the heritage film and its links with the Anglo-American novelistic tradition. 'Merchant Ivory' has become synonymous with the heritage film as a sub-genre of British cinema. The well-known artistic team includes director James Ivory, a Californian with a background of extensive travelling in Europe and India; producer Ismail Merchant (who passed away in 2005), born in Mumbai and educated in New York; and their frequent collaborator Ruth Praver Jhabvala, a German-Polish novelist and scriptwriter of Jewish descent. Jhabvala and her family relocated from Germany to England in 1939. She later married an Indian architect and moved to New Delhi and, in 1975, to New York.¹⁸ The 'Merchant Ivory' films mirror the 'wandering' character of the company, and the international heritage that shapes their production.¹⁹ United States, Western Europe and India are the three key geographical coordinates in a corpus of nearly forty films spanning five decades. Themes of foreignness and displacement recur in most of their films, which often feature characters travelling abroad and permanently looking for 'home' – stable refuges in changing social landscapes. *SHAKESPEARE WALLAH* (1965) starts with an English family working as a travelling theatre company in India, and ends with the daughter being shipped back to an England she does not really know. Verena and Olive in *THE BOSTONIANS* escape the city and find an idealised refuge at Mrs Birdseye's beach house at Cape Cod. *A ROOM WITH A VIEW* deals with English characters travelling abroad and looking for houses in the English countryside. The women in *HOWARDS END* long to escape London's 'instability' and settle in the country. *QUARTET* (1981), *JEFFERSON IN PARIS*, *THE GOLDEN BOWL* or *LE DIVORCE* (2003) feature, in different registers, American characters lost in 'old' Europe.²⁰

The company's international reputation has been cemented through a cycle of adaptations that dwell on stately manors and country houses in the British Raj (*HEAT AND DUST*, 1983), England (*MAURICE* [1987]; *HOWARDS END*; *THE REMAINS OF THE DAY* [1993]), and Italy (*A ROOM WITH A VIEW*; *THE GOLDEN BOWL*). Merchant Ivory is closely associated with fin-de-siècle and early-twentieth-century settings; in contrast, their films set in the recent past – *THE FIVE FORTY-EIGHT* (1979), *SLAVES OF NEW YORK* (1989), or *A SOLDIER'S DAUGHTER NEVER CRIES* (1998) – have had much more limited circulation and have en-

joyed little recognition. Merchant Ivory's production up to the mid-1990s established their reputation as an independent company with a focus on 'quality' projects. Graced with impeccable literary credentials (Henry James, E.M. Forster), their films in this period are small in terms of budget and intimate in focus, but boast visually spectacular locations and period reconstruction. These films largely crystallised the original critique of the heritage film:

The image of the past in the heritage films has become so naturalised that, paradoxically, it stands removed from history: the evocation of pastness is accomplished by a look, a style, the loving recreation of period details – not by any critical historical perspective. The self-conscious visual perfectionism of these films and their fetishisation of period details create a fascinating but self-enclosed world. They render history as spectacle, as *separate* from the viewer in the present, as something over and done with, complete, achieved. Hence the sense of timelessness rather than historicity in relation to a national past which is 'purged of political tension' and so available for appreciation as visual display... it is a *fantasy* of conspicuous consumption, a fantasy of Englishness, a fantasy of the national past.²¹

This devaluation of period spectacle as the symptom of a conservative turn in British culture was, as Higson himself notes in his revised version of this piece, 'very much a product of its moment'.²² The decline in popularity of the Merchant Ivory films since the mid-1990s and the termination of the partnership with Merchant's death have largely isolated the team's particular brand of period drama within the terms of the debate as they were established in the early 1990s: either dismissed as middlebrow filmmaking concerned with narrow images of class and nation, or reclaimed by progressive gender-oriented readings that value them as popular films.²³ Conducted by critics with different agendas,²⁴ the heritage film debates morphed from a polemic into a full-fledged 'theory' that circled around the mistrust towards what seemed a throwback to the dominant white and middle-class bias in 'official' forms of British cinema since the 1940s.²⁵

The critique of the version of the English cultural past delivered by the Merchant Ivory films has somewhat neglected the exercise in acculturation sustained by the team of expatriate filmmakers. Jhabvala's 1979 lecture before the Scottish Art Council, entitled 'Disinheritance', refers to her Jewish heritage and the numerous landscapes that have shaped her experience. She describes a life of being 'blown about from country to country, culture to culture till I feel – till I am – nothing... It's made me into a cuckoo forever insinuating myself into others' nests. Or a chameleon hiding myself (if there were anything to hide) in false or borrowed colours'.²⁶ Jhabvala claims her disinheritance, her lack of rootedness in tradition, landscape and memory, to be as formative for her as inheritance has been for other writers. Jhabvala recalls how she compensated

for her lack of a world of her own by 'absorbing the world of others' – in particular, immersing herself in the work of deeply rooted writers like Thomas Hardy, Charles Dickens, Marcel Proust or Henry James: 'whatever author I read last, I was ready to become a figure in that particular landscape'.²⁷ This metaphor goes beyond the mere autobiographical. It retroactively poses the origin of the desire for the past: the feeling of dispossession that triggers the fantasy of 'ad(o/a)pting' a text and, along with it, the adoption of foreign literary landscapes as 'home'. This state of disinheritance underpins the precarious or unsettled lives led by characters in several of the films she has scripted for Merchant Ivory: Olivia in *HEAT AND DUST*; Olive Chancellor of *THE BOSTONIANS*; Leonard and Jackie Bast in *HOWARDS END*; or Charlotte Stant in *THE GOLDEN BOWL*.

The theme of disinheritance is an ambiguous auteurist strand in the Merchant Ivory corpus. The construction of an inheritance through the canonical literary tradition has been regarded as an exercise in antiquarian reconstruction of the past that relies on the verisimilitude of the detail. The attention to houses and their interiors (Ivory's own background is in architecture and fine arts) that characterises the mise-en-scène of these films stresses the importance of location and atmosphere. As lingering long shots enhance heritage landmarks, the films themselves become landmarks of heritage cinema: the motor of an essentially conservative recovery of the past, understood in terms of architecture as 'preserver' of history and traditions. Similarly, the uniformity of style in the films of Merchant Ivory has become a point of reference for period adaptation as consensual 'preservation' – or illustration – rather than performative appropriation. Ivory's enterprise as a director has been compared to the fetishistic pleasure of the collector who films novels like an editor produces a book series: searching for homogeneous criteria to bring together, in an orderly and manageable fashion, extremely different works.²⁸ Thomas Leitch has argued that the stylistic consistency that overrides the differences in their sources brings Merchant Ivory close to the pre-auteurist 'Tradition of Quality', the symbolic end-point before the ruptures of film modernism in France.²⁹ Their foremost representatives, scriptwriters Jean Aurenche and Pierre Bost, were once dubbed by André Bazin 'the Viollet-Le-Duc of film adaptation', in reference to the slavish fidelity to the past in the works of said architect and restorer.³⁰ The comparison may be reductive, but the bourgeois home in the Merchant Ivory period adaptations literalises this architectural/textual analogy, reprehensible because of their 'fascination by the private property, the culture and values of a *particular* class' – what Higson calls 'a move typical of the heritage industry'.³¹ The dubbing of their films as 'heritage films' summarises the imagined desire for continuity with a (national) tradition, and the semiotic dovetailing of architectonic/spatial with literary/textual landmarks.

The importance attached to the spaces of the literary adaptation produces an ambiguous swap between the terms 'home' and 'museum': the encounter between private and public experience through the remapping of spaces captioned by official history. This opposition connects with the distinction established by Ian Goode between *inheritance* and *heritage* – where inheritance is defined as the specific search for a 'home' in a cultural legacy that might as well be divorced from the family/national heritage, or else may seek to rearticulate a received national discourse.³² As such, inheritance may be articulated in terms of political dissent (for instance, in Derek Jarman's radical appropriation of mainstream icons of national culture), personal dissent (the autobiographical as a form of memory work that relates only indirectly to 'official' national experience, as in the working-class heritage of *DISTANT VOICES, STILL LIVES* [Terence Davies, 1988] or *RATCATCHER* [Lynne Ramsay, 1999]), or as Goode puts it, through an 'intermediate speaking position that is both part of, yet critical of, the establishment, and operates between legitimate and popular culture'.³³ Merchant Ivory's period films arguably occupy a similar intermediate position. There is an underlying metanarrative about the making of home in the Anglo-American literary tradition that is not fully reducible to a reactionary and consumable projection of the national heritage. The houses of heritage drama resist their reification by virtue of the outsider position that articulates a troubling desire for – sometimes in direct identification with – the objects of an 'official' heritage tradition. Such identification raises the ghosts of disinheritance, as the house becomes the figurative centre of the exercise in adaptation/acculturation.

Houses are at the visual and narrative centre of *HOWARDS END* and *THE GOLDEN BOWL*, two films directly concerned with the symbolic and actual struggles involved in finding a home. *HOWARDS END* is Merchant Ivory's most important box-office and critical success. At the moment of its release it garnered awards and rave reviews on both sides of the Atlantic, re-establishing the presence of Britain's traditions of craftsmanship, literary quality and acting excellence in the mainstream film scene.³⁴ For Higson, *HOWARDS END* is a case in point of 'past-as-present', as it 're-invented Forster as an antiquarian rather than a modernist and his story as a costume film rather than a contemporary drama'.³⁵ However, he also adds that 'it makes just as much sense... to read *HOWARDS END* as the product of *invented* tradition rather than *inherited* tradition',³⁶ that is, as a pastiche of European styles as well as an 'authentic' representation of traditional Englishness. The credits – featuring a Fauvist painting by André Derain and stylised art-nouveau lettering, both instances of modernist art forms contemporary with the novel – introduce a slow-moving hand-held shot that tracks the trail of a woman's dress, as it glides over the tall grass. This initial shot dissolves to a long take of Ruth Wilcox, strolling dreamily in the garden along the family house, *Howards End*, on a balmy summer evening, at twilight.

As she walks gently by the lit-up windows of the cottage, the camera subtly adopts her viewpoint, looking into the house through the framed view of the window. In the warm glow of a drawing room, her family plays a board game. Mrs Wilcox strolls by the house, and as she turns her head to the garden again the camera lingers behind her, capturing a second view, contiguous to but separated from the first one – the maids clearing the dinner table.



At home in the past: Ruth Wilcox strolls by the house in HOWARDS END

This sequence, languid in pace and evocative of a lost era, makes the most of the expansive widescreen frame through deep-focus, horizontal compositions. The sequence is symptomatic of a film that is 'less goal-driven or organized around the causal logic of action sequences than it is driven by a desire to explore character and ambience, period detail and manners... The slowness of the film is in part a function of its realism, and the film-makers' bid for authenticity'.³⁷ Higson's commentary sketches the differentiating strategies of the 'cinema of heritage attractions': its subordination of action to description, and of metaphorical depth to miniaturised realism. For Higson, the descriptive camerawork and editing inherently capitalise on an 'admiring gaze', promoted by the discourses of authenticity that surround the film.³⁸

This account of the *mise-en-scène* registers a failure in symbolisation – the inability of exhausted forms of classicism to articulate historical time. However, the affective meanings of the film are deeply intertwined with the textures of the *mise-en-scène*, and with the figuration of time – a narrative space traversed by the ghost. The opening sequence of *HOWARDS END* posits a mode of perception that is partial and subjective. As Marie-Anne Guérin notes it is through Ruth Wilcox's gaze, 'the proprietor's serene eye', that *HOWARDS END* 'becomes a film'.³⁹ Through the use of culturally coded images (woman and garden, melancholic twilight time), the beginning of *HOWARDS END* conjures the feeling of 'at-

home-ness' in the past as a construct of imagination – a past identified as the 'other' of the present in terms of the affective duration of memory.

The sequence frames the house as spectacle through the eyes of a seer located both (narratively) inside and (historically) outside the diegetic world. The long take plays on Deleuze's notion of the time-image as 'a cinema of the seer and no longer of the agent';⁴⁰ a cinema where time subordinates movement, and movement becomes no more than the perspective of time:

[A]s the eye takes up a clairvoyant function, the sound as well as the visual elements of the image enter into internal relations which means that the whole image has to be 'read', no less than seen, readable as well as visible. For the eye of the seer as of the soothsayer, it is the 'literalness' of the perceptible world which constitutes it like a book.⁴¹

The long takes and slow tracking of the camera by the house, alongside the deep composition of the opening shots figure the house as the limit point between two states – lived experience and invented memory. The non-diegetic piano theme by Richard Robbins (a pastiche of two themes by composer and folk song collector Percy Grainger) underscores the smooth tracking shot that follows Mrs Wilcox's pensive stroll. The double-framing device of the window and the sharp contrast between the warm glow of interior lighting and the bluish light in the garden highlight Mrs Wilcox's perspective on the domestic scene. Her silent presence does not simply record the nostalgia for home, as signified through the pastoral image of English country living: she stands as a 'twilight' figure producing an imaginary space where the past imbues the present and the present recedes into the past. Her privileged gaze mediates between the scene of yore staged for the viewer, and the expressive gaze of the camera magically producing the literary past as 'home' – as a figure of vision invested with longing and melancholy.

Instances of the time-image recur in other European films where the narrative *mise-en-scène* works through such mannerist detours of 'elastic' descriptive time. The figure of the house in *THE DEAD* (John Huston, 1987) also endows the eye with the 'clairvoyant function' – the Deleuzian time-image – as the closed universe of James Joyce's Dublin comes to life over the course of one social gathering. In this respect, the house becomes a figure that dovetails space and time as anamorphosis: a 'blur' in the picture that forces the viewer to readjust its viewing position – to *read* the image. When one of the elderly hostesses, Miss Julia Morkan, is requested to sing the popular air 'Arrayed for the Bridal', the camera stays on her face in close-up before cutting away to the bottom of the house's stairs. The shot then dissolves into a view of one of the upstairs bedrooms. A montage sequence proceeds to frame several of the objects that fill the room in a small tapestry of details: old family pictures, pieces of embroidery,

glass shoes and other bibelots on the bedside table, a bible and a rosary. These nondescript objects condense the entire life of the old lady, whose voice floats in the background infusing the insignificant objects with meaning – each one a piece of a lived life that is reaching its end. The tune carries the ghost of tradition, of people and customs who only persist in memory. These parenthetical descriptive snapshots disclose the meaning of the sequence: not only the ghosts of the dead returning through memories, but the trace of the living *as already dead*. The sequence emerges as a *crystal of time* – in which the actual and the virtual are indiscernible. In Deleuze's words, the crystalline regime of the time-image captures the present as split in 'two heterogeneous directions, one of which is launched towards the future while the other falls into the past'.⁴² Aunt Julia's presence is registered by the camerawork as already an absence: space becoming one more dimension of time. As if through a crack in the crystal, the eye crosses over to the side of the ghost.

The long take and deep-focus photography in many of the 1980s costume dramas are instrumental in this anamorphosis of space into time. *UN DIMANCHE À LA CAMPAGNE/A SUNDAY IN THE COUNTRY* (Bertrand Tavernier, 1984) works through the crystalline regime of the time-image in the figuration of the countryside family house. As Mr Ladmiraal (an elderly painter who has lived through the days of the Belle Époque) receives the routine Sunday visit from his children and grandchildren, the house becomes a unique stage for reminiscences. The use of a literary voiceover (a 'reading' aloud provided by Tavernier himself) along with the subtle changes of light, long takes, and swift camerawork invest the rooms with the distant experiences of three different generations. Echoing the British heritage debates, the *mise-en-scène* of this film has been interpreted as an exercise in pure nostalgia: a time-travel experience into a comfortably closed past, alien to the realities of modernity and industrialisation.⁴³ This analysis, however, glosses over the construction of a conflictive space of memory. In the idle afternoon, Irène (Mr Ladmiraal's favourite daughter) leans over the window, looking dreamily at the garden. As she turns her head indoors, a dramatic change in lighting occurs and her mother, deceased years before, is seen sitting in the dusky drawing room. The mobile, deep-focus shot produces a fluid continuum between inside and outside, but also a temporal 'blurring' motivated by the different ways in which different generations experience the house. Deleuze suggests that 'depth of field creates a certain type of direct time-image that can be defined by memory, virtual regions of the past, the aspects of each region. This would be less a function of a reality than a function of remembering, of temporalization: not exactly recollection but "an invitation to recollect"'.⁴⁴ Through the fluid yet readable space the ghosts of the past come to trouble Irène, as other ghosts (Bazin, Renoir) are invoked.

The pervading fantasy of the house as a maternal cocoon is constantly thrown into question. The daughter's memories of the mother – linked to the home's bourgeois drawing rooms and garden – are both overwhelming and tinged with ambivalence, when not outright resistance. Irène's fierce independence is undermined by fears of unrequited love and broken dreams, which resurface in her mother's plea: 'when will you stop asking so much of life, Irène?' The nostalgic return to the past in the idealised refuge provided by the family home competes with the struggles of the now grown-up children trying to break out of the vicious circle posed by the family romance. During a stroll in the garden, Mr Admiral's eldest son, Gonzague, is suddenly disturbed by the proleptic image of his father lying dead on his bed. In his day-dreaming, Gonzague sees himself looking into the mirror, trying on his father's hat. The stasis of space is traversed by the passing of time – by death moving 'in the realms of life as the *Unheimliche* in the *Heimliche*, as the void fills up the lack'.⁴⁵ The anamorphosis of descriptive time in *A SUNDAY IN THE COUNTRY* obliquely textualises its repressed intertext – the short book by Pierre Bost that the film faithfully adapts: *Mr [sic] Admiral va bientôt mourir* ('Mr Admiral will soon be dead').

The house in the period film communicates the idyll of a continuous, stable familial identity shadowed by the transformative experience of time *passing*. The question mark posed by the death of the father/mother hangs over the future of the younger characters in relation to its preservation. This theme directly links the heritage film with contemporary family dramas such as *L'HEURE DE L'ÉTÉ/ SUMMER HOURS* (Olivier Assayas, 2008) – a reprising of the motifs of time, home and inheritance that is visually very close to *A SUNDAY IN THE COUNTRY* – and *UN CONTE DE NOËL/A CHRISTMAS TALE* (Arnaud Desplechin, 2008).⁴⁶ Both films use the house to take further the question of heritage versus inheritance: family homes become quietly dramatic spaces in which a sprawling web of increasingly uncertain family relations spread away from the roots of the (national) core identity marked by place and genetic bonds.

The present-in-the-past figured by the heritage house already contains this diasporic movement in potential form. *HOWARDS END*, *THE DEAD* and *A SUNDAY IN THE COUNTRY* establish a cherished memory-image of the past (which transports the spectator's gaze into a place suspended in time – a transcultural and transhistorical fantasy of home) as an essentially uncanny figure. In *HOWARDS END*, the ghost encapsulates the compulsion/fear of repetition, as well as the fear of dispossession, which arises from Victorian femininity's over-identification with the home, as its selfless 'angel'.⁴⁷ In the first meeting between matron Ruth Wilcox and 'New Woman' Margaret Schlegel, Mrs Wilcox first appears in the background of a long shot, framed by a table covered with objects, a low armchair, and the photograph of his newly-wed eldest son that stands prominently at her side. She is, literally, part of the furniture: an ethereal pres-

ence surrounded by a densely packed frame of objects and/as memories – but also a reminder of the link between selfless maternal power and ‘the fearful bondage of mortality into which every mother delivers her children’.⁴⁸ The words of pride and love she employs to talk about her sole inheritance – Howards End, the country house she received from her brother – are unmistakably conservative: she ‘truly loves (rural) England’, but decries the instability of life in London. Her agitation about Margaret’s impending loss of her home, and, in a later scene, her insistence that she comes with her to visit Howards End are underscored by the prominent sound of clocks ticking in the room – a reminder of a (way of) life about to expire.

HOWARDS END reflects on inheritance not as the passing down of an heirloom through generations of the same family, but as the reliving of it through the repetition of the same rituals. In her first visit to Howards End as the prospective *second* Mrs Wilcox, Margaret’s walk around and into the house is scored to the same musical theme that accompanied the late Mrs Wilcox’s evening stroll in the opening sequence. As Margaret retraces Mrs Wilcox’s steps (the camera smoothly tracking again along the windows) her body language reveals the same genuine sense of wonder.



Retracing the steps of the ghost: Margaret Schlegel approaches the house in HOWARDS END

A startling encounter with the housekeeper (who exclaims ‘I took you for Ruth Wilcox! You have her way of walking around the house’) confirms that Margaret is ‘possessed’ by the ghost of the first Mrs Wilcox. The door to the house mysteriously opens to her, saluting her as its true owner. The camera movement suggests the continuity of inheritance through the uncanny repetition given by the ‘truth’ of objects: Margaret will later find out that the Schlegels’ belongings, including the sword of her father, a German intellectual and military man,

‘naturally’ find their place into the small country cottage. This moment of recognition, of ‘homeliness’, has its counterpoint at the end of the film, in which Leonard Bast heads to Howards End in search of Helen, unaware that she is carrying his child. As he approaches the house on foot, the young man gets visually connected to Mrs Wilcox and Margaret through his imaginary walk in the woods. The sequence cross-cuts between Leonard’s dream-image of himself as a romantic figure, finding spiritual communion with nature, and the real, uncomfortable walk to Howards End under the hot morning sun. The house that has embraced the Schlegels reserves a different fate for him, a class outsider.

Howards End, the epitome of home, ushers in a scenario of sexual transgression. In the second scene of the film, Helen Schlegel and Paul Wilcox steal away from the house and kiss behind Mrs Wilcox’s chestnut tree – the first of three violations that take place on the grounds of the eponymous family house. Mrs Wilcox’s premature death leaves behind an unsettling remainder: a letter in which she makes the gift of Howards End to Margaret, elder sister to Helen. After Helen’s ‘seduction’, the second transgression follows: the Wilcoxes meet in the house and secretly tear up the will. The murder of Leonard Bast as soon as he crosses Howards End’s threshold – the symbolic portal into a different world of aspiration – constitutes the third and final transgression. The film relentlessly rewrites its idyllic opening sequence: the old family house effectively becomes the ‘site of all crimes’.⁴⁹

‘Where there are disputes over property, we find ghosts... where we find ghosts, there are bound to be anxieties about property.’⁵⁰ Other ghosts haunt the house, taking social commentary into the domain of family melodrama. Jackie Bast introduces the theme of working-class women’s exploitation by the male bourgeoisie (a theme that comes to the fore in the later *GOSFORD PARK*, [Robert Altman, 2001]), as the (ghostly) link between the rich industrialist and the impoverished clerk. The wealth and rootedness symbolised by the country house is haunted by visions of the Basts’ destitution and, it is implied, lack of stable accommodation, which constitute the reverse of the fantasy of home that opens the film. However, objects are framed and captioned from a unique angle (analogous to the omniscient yet self-effacing nineteenth-century narrator), which produces the best view upon the spectacle of the past at all times. Characters are defined by the houses they inhabit, and the largely stationary wide-screen views of façades and interiors present a homogenous aesthetics of vedutas that validate the realism of the representation. The film cross-cuts a little too comfortably between the richly decorated drawing rooms of the Schlegels, the darker flat of the Basts – which is meant to illustrate the degradation of living conditions in industrial London – and the Wilcoxes’ luxurious townhouses and country houses. In spite of the radically different experiences belonging to the

three sets of characters, the eye is constricted to read the carefully captioned views from the same place.

And yet, this visual preservation of the bourgeois interior dictates the ebb-and-flow of melodrama that depicts the progressive coming apart at the seams of a social world. *HOWARDS END* can be described as the story of a house that finds its rightful inheritors; likewise, the *mise-en-scène* is organised around objects occupying – or dramatically failing to occupy – their ‘rightful’ place. Like her belongings, Margaret quietly settles into her new domestic life at *Howards End* at the cost of repressing her individuality and becoming, effectively, a replica of the first Mrs Wilcox. In contrast, Leonard, like his stolen umbrella, may be able to ‘pass’, but he does not ‘fit in’ in the well-appointed liberal home of the Schlegel siblings. Whereas *Howards End* is ultimately able to naturalise the foreign and the cosmopolitan (the German Schlegels) as part of the ever changing make-up of England, it excludes the working-class characters’ aspirations of upward mobility.

Leonard’s inability to assimilate into the utopia of the bourgeois home is not the hero’s fatal flaw, but rather the sign of what Prewitt Brown calls, borrowing the term from Homi K. Bhabha, the ‘unhomeliness’ repressed by the bourgeois interior. With this term Bhabha refers to the postcolonial experience in relation to home when, due to invasions, relocations and displacements, the ‘outsideness of the inside’ becomes visible.⁵¹ The unhomely condenses the shock of recognition when ‘the border between home and world becomes confused; and, uncanily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting’.⁵² *HOWARDS END* barely registers such reversals of vision on a narrative level, but both Leonard’s murder (with the two objects most closely associated to the Schlegels’ inheritance, the sword and the books) and Charles Wilcox’s ejection from *Howards End* by the police are shot in slow motion – an atypical stylistic choice that insinuates a crack in the house’s walls under the pressure of the encounter with the world, and its reactionary resistance to it.

A sense of closure is achieved through a final crane shot that shows the house as the scene of a (precarious) alliance across classes. The last shot finds the ageing Wilcox patriarch strolling in the garden, leaning on Margaret’s strong arm, while Helen plays in the fields with her child, born of her brief encounter with Leonard. In spite of the violent break posited by Leonard’s murder, and the change in the house’s owners, nothing seems to have really changed. As the illusion of linear temporality is left undisturbed, the family house remains suspended out of (historical) time – a reading that underpins the ‘mythical quality’ of Englishness which, for anti-heritage critics, the Merchant Ivory aesthetic conveys.⁵³ The film’s ending hangs, however, on the suppressed memory of a crime: Henry’s role in Margaret and Helen’s potential dispossession (he admits

to Margaret that he ‘set aside’ his late wife’s written wish to bequeath Howards End to her) resurfaces in the last exchange between Henry and Margaret – a question resolved through the poetic justice that sees the house allocated to its rightful owners, but whose wider ramifications are left unanswered.

HOWARDS END consolidates the iconography of the genre with the house as its central figure. Yet this figure also manifests ‘figurally’ through aspects of the time-image that strain the antiquarian spectacle of heritage, mapping the tensions within inheritance onto the spatial aesthetics of period reconstruction. Whereas the house as home is retrieved as a feminine and matrilineal conception, the house as property stands as a patrilineal one. Ruth Wilcox is linked to the Schlegels in their shared emotional investment in finding a home rather than owning a house. In contrast, her husband Henry collects houses as an extension of his economic investment in the colonial enterprise. He proposes to Margaret while offering her a guided visit through one of his properties. The marriage proposal takes place in front of rows of imposing yet nondescript family portraits, which reinforce the acquisitive power of the patriarch through the signifiers of the past, now turned into commodities – but also reveals its opposite: the threat of disinheritance literally hanging over the mature single woman (which arguably prompts Margaret to accept the offer). The figure of the male collector, key to Ivory’s own ‘editorial’ approach to film adaptation, comes to the fore in another Merchant Ivory film, the last in the company’s output in the 1990s: *THE GOLDEN BOWL*.

The Collector and the House-Museum: *THE GOLDEN BOWL* and End of Period

THE GOLDEN BOWL, adapted from Henry James’s last and most baroque novel, brings to the fore the gendered dialectic between home and property, memory-space and museum-space in visually intricate ways. It has been convincingly argued that, as an adaptation of James’s work, the film fails to find a visual equivalent of the novel’s symbolic potency⁵⁴ – what Brooks calls the ‘metaphorical evocation of melodramatic states of consciousness’.⁵⁵ However, as possibly Merchant Ivory’s most mannerist reflection on the house, this figure becomes emblematic of a search for a ‘home’ in the genre, as well as of the historically situated threat of dispossession.

THE GOLDEN BOWL was neither Jhabvala’s first James adaptation (she had written screenplays for *THE EUROPEANS* [1979] and *THE BOSTONIANS* before), nor her first choice of text in the Jamesian canon. A previous project to shoot *THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY* had to be abandoned when Campion’s adaptation

(discussed in chapter three) went into production.⁵⁶ Retrospectively, *THE GOLDEN BOWL* stands as the most obvious example of Merchant Ivory's 'collector's' approach to adaptation; this sense of seriality was reinforced by the fact that the film came out at the end of a cycle of film adaptations from James's novels (alongside *THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY*, *THE WINGS OF THE DOVE*, [Iain Softley, 1997] and *WASHINGTON SQUARE*) which were released at the end of the 1990s with varying degrees of success.⁵⁷

Sadoff has remarked that what brings this cycle together is not simply the tag 'based on the novel by Henry James' but the new emphasis on sex and eroticism stretching the boundaries of middlebrow taste that had so far characterised heritage drama. She notes that what the widely different films described above have in common is the appropriation of 'mainstream discourses of sex to portray the American girl's imbroglios and entanglements in Europe'.⁵⁸ Among these, *THE WINGS OF THE DOVE* goes furthest in terms of its representation of sexual themes bathed in a 'noirish' atmosphere of seduction and deception. In contrast, *THE GOLDEN BOWL* remains staunchly faithful to Merchant Ivory's established 'look'. The emphasis on crowded interiors and overstated costumes, enhanced through high-key lighting as well as static, wide-angle shots on sumptuous heritage properties (the film was marketed through 'fitting' outlets such as *Architectural Digest*, *Vanity Fair* and *Vogue*) made the film look 'outdated at millenium's end',⁵⁹ especially in comparison with the stress on intimacy and sexual explicitness of *THE WINGS OF THE DOVE* or the more experimental approach of *THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY*.

THE GOLDEN BOWL seemingly falls between the two stools, neither art cinema nor popular melodrama, on the grounds of what Leitch calls an overriding pre-occupation with decorum as a 'frame that strains to contain the most brutal and far-reaching cultural conflicts imaginable'.⁶⁰ He also notes that *THE GOLDEN BOWL* falls along the lines of Merchant Ivory's 'fetishistic fondness for metaphors that dramatize these conflicts without resolving them'.⁶¹ In short, by the end of the 1990s Merchant Ivory was critically perceived as a byword for a cinema of objects that was affectless and over-restrained in taste and tone. However, the focus on the (male) collector and feminine disinheritance makes the film exemplary of the self-referentiality of period cinema at the turn of the century, not least for its return to an iconography of objects and houses that harks back to previous Merchant Ivory productions. Furthermore, the incorporation of heterogeneous texts – including the grafting of photographs and footage simulating early film in the vein of other, more adventurous 1990s adaptations like *BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA* and *THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY* – into the uniform aesthetics of period reconstruction suggests an increasingly fractured mode of representation. As the period aesthetic reveals its own limits, it discloses its in-built nostalgia for the filmic. The film's peculiar relationship with history (and

film history) operates through a figural logic of displacement and substitution which keeps referring back to the collector's house-museum – and its ghosts.

At the image of its protagonist – Adam Verver, presented as 'America's first billionaire', and collector of valuable artworks and European properties – *THE GOLDEN BOWL* obsessively parades its collection of sumptuous houses, presented in imposing extreme long shots at the beginning of each narrative sequence. Chapter titles signpost the narrative through the naming of houses and their proprietors ('Fawns. Adam Verver's rented castle'); the film often cuts from exterior façades to close-ups and shot/reverse-shot patterns of the characters talking in profusely decorated interiors (where most of the action takes place), thus relying on narrative continuity through editing rather than spatial continuity signalled by the uninterrupted moving shot. The framing flattens the splendid views offered by castles and houses (Amerigo's Palazzo Ugolini is first seen as a painting, which precedes the actual photographic view), as well as the composite 'authentic' period spaces. The high-angle shots within richly furnished rooms – often featuring columns and high ceilings – effectively dwarf the characters. Early in the film the presentation of Adam and Maggie Verver in their London house takes place through a crane shot that descends from the high ceiling onto the heads of Adam and Amerigo, before cutting away to Maggie. Characters and everyday objects, all become part of the house-museum, fixed by minimally mobile shots that capture the detail of the décor but confine the actors' bodies within it.



*The house-museum: father and daughter surrounded by their possessions in
THE GOLDEN BOWL*

The presentation of houses through static painterly frames creates a mode of visual punctuation. These 'thumbnails' reprise the full-frame shots of Indian miniature painting in *HULLABALOO OVER GEORGIE AND BONNIE'S PICTURES*

(1978). This early television film reflects Ivory's lifelong collector's interest in Indian miniature painting.⁶² The film features a faintly self-mocking portrait of an American collector whose obsession with Indian paintings places him as a cultural interloper in competition with the interests of the local owners; this theme prefigures the relationship between Adam Verver, the American billionaire on the hunt for European treasures, and Prince Amerigo, the rightful cultural inheritor reduced to the role of native guide who is 'bundled' into the transaction of European properties for American touristic consumption. The pictorial presentation of townhouses, castles and *palazzos* provides not an introduction to inhabited narrative spaces, but an impression of catalogue display, with views self-consciously mimicking the eye of the collector over the *mise-en-scène* of the film.

In Walter Benjamin's *The Arcades Project*, a veritable 'map in fragments' of early-twentieth-century urban culture, the collector appears as a metaphor for the evolution of historical sensibility and the temporal perception associated with modernity.⁶³ Benjamin notes:

What is decisive in collecting is that the object is detached from all its original functions in order to enter into the closest conceivable relation to things of the same kind. This relation is the diametric opposite of any utility, and falls into the peculiar category of completeness. What is 'completeness'? It is a grand attempt to overcome the whole irrational character of the object's mere presence at hand through its integration into a new, expressly devised historical system: the collection.⁶⁴

This utopia of 'completeness' underpins the mannerist aesthetic of *THE GOLDEN BOWL*, overwriting the metaphorical depth of the literary intertext with the metonymic themes of the catalogue and the collection. Adam Verver's driving idea of the museum in American City enfolds into a *mise-en-scène* that follows the Russian-doll principle: the novel gets figured through a series of museum rooms which in turn are already contained in the model replica sitting in Verver's life-size house-museum, Fawns Castle. The private family melodrama visually dissolves into the public melodrama of the economic power of the American entrepreneurial class, versus the English gentry's and the European aristocracy's claims to history and tradition. Adam Verver's ambiguous and menacing idealism is, however, not only Jamesian in inflection, but also refers back to the ambition of Charles Foster Kane in *CITIZEN KANE* (Orson Welles, 1941), a reference reinforced by the newsreel montage that closes the film, to which I will return later.

The film verbalises and adapts the novel's 'metaphorical vertiginousness'⁶⁵ into a clear plot line that brings together Adam Verver and his daughter Maggie on the one side, and her best friend Charlotte Stant and Prince Amerigo, on the other. Charlotte marries Adam in order to be close to Amerigo, her former lover,

now Maggie's husband. The film leaves unexplored the ambiguity in the father-daughter relationship and their power of manipulation over their respective spouses. Instead, it focuses on the tragedy of the 'poor' lovers, Amerigo and Charlotte, and especially on Charlotte's undoing through her marriage of convenience. The incestuous undertones of the family saga are overwritten by the melodrama of adultery. Money is always in the foreground as both Amerigo and Charlotte are presented as desirable commodities for the Ververs, not least for their sexual appeal: Amerigo is the ideal aristocratic husband for Maggie, with a long family lineage; Charlotte makes for a cultured trophy wife for Adam. The fit between owners and possessions is visualised in the London costume ball, where Amerigo's posing as a Renaissance nobleman and Charlotte's dazzling appearance as a bejewelled Cleopatra are, first and foremost, framed as utterly consumable images. Photographed 'in character', they pose as attractive (if ersatz) ornaments among the treasures at the Ververs' house-museum.

THE GOLDEN BOWL adapts its dense literary intertext through James's 'landscapes', mainly the views of moneyed Americans luxuriously living in Europe, a landscape shared by James with painters such as John Singer Sargent and James Tissot, whose society portraits constitute models for the stylised costumes.⁶⁶ The costume ball sequence at Lancaster House plays on the spectacularity of this staple motif in period drama, but also, more interestingly, on the rhetoric of anachronism – the friction between temporalities layering out the house-museum's composite space. The costumes themselves (Charlotte dresses as Cleopatra, Amerigo as a Renaissance courtier, and Fanny Assingham as Mary, Queen of Scots) stress the ubiquity of pastiche as the dominant aesthetic in the *mise-en-scène*. However, more importantly, the different layers of disguise reveal the fissures of psychological realism as the film 'shifts from epistemological melodrama, in its excesses of thought beneath the social surface, back to phenomenal melodrama, with its excesses of action played out onscreen'.⁶⁷

Through the fetishism of objects and spaces, the private melodrama of adultery becomes the *ur-fantasy* that endows with meaning the hybrid temporality of the house-museum. The different layers of history converge into the return of the repressed – the 'mythical' adultery repeated *ad infinitum*. The film opens with the re-creation of a full-blown family melodrama set in the sixteenth-century incarnation of the Palazzo Ugolini, where a nobleman executes his son and his young wife – the son's stepmother – upon surprising them together. This scene dissolves to a shot of the same room in 1905 (now ruined) anticipating the replay that is about to take place with Charlotte, Amerigo and Adam as protagonists. Likewise, the costume party bares as much as dresses up the fantasy by having Charlotte impersonate a mythical seductress and Amerigo show up as the direct descendant of the incestuous Italian prince of yore. Later in the

film, the opening sequence returns in a silent vignette: a modern Orientalist ballet (a throwback to Merchant Ivory's Indian films) that 'enacts a drama of illicit female desire, male objectification, patriarchal domination, and self-annihilation – all themes binding together Jhabvala's interpretation of the novel'.⁶⁸ The drama of two doomed young lovers and a ruthless maharajah presented to the gathering of socialites works (as one of them is quick to point out) like the play-within-the-play in *Hamlet*: a reversible structure – a veduta – that connects the play's hidden consciousness with the mirror of its own representation.

The retelling of the executions at the Palazzo Ugolini in an illustrated lecture attended by Maggie serves as a narrative turning point, closing down the circle of suspicion over the adulterous lovers. The film's nested structure has precedents in classical Hollywood cinema; in the fantasy melodrama *PANDORA AND THE FLYING DUTCHMAN* (Albert Lewin, 1951) the kitsch use of sculpture, painting and photography, deployed anachronistically, dramatises the uncanny return of a doomed sixteenth-century love affair into the present of the 1930s, dissolving the boundaries between periods.⁶⁹ Likewise, the Indian dance number provides a musical interlude that stops the narrative flow, framing both its inside – the drama of adultery – and its outside: the work of adaptation figuring an oedipal fantasy many times repeated, whose inevitable denouement is the punishment of sexual transgression.⁷⁰

If the house-museum mirrors the function of the classic adaptation as a collectible object, the narrative frame-within-the-frame is at the service of the 'moral occult' of melodrama: the domain of values 'indicated within and masked by the surface of reality'.⁷¹ In this respect, the film's pictorialism makes its figural work discursive by excess of illustration. The realisation of adultery is prefigured in Maggie's nightmare of being trapped in a crumbling porcelain pagoda, and finally unveiled in an elaborate dialogue over the cracked bowl, shot according to classical convention: 'I want happiness without a hole in it. I want the bowl without a crack', pleads Maggie. The iconic potency of these images is, somewhat paradoxically, flattened; the film's central motif, the golden bowl itself, loses its figural quality as it becomes fully readable and gets absorbed by the background: one more object amidst the plethora of bric-a-brac that litters the house-museum. The same thing happens with the actual paintings used in the film. A Hans Holbein portrait of Henry VIII (1540), for instance, is displayed to make a visual point about Adam Verver's inflexibility and the fate of his young wife – shipped back to American City to be 'buried alive' as one more object in her husband's collection. The fantasy of sexual transgression is kept on the fore, suturing the temporal discontinuities of the house. Patriarchy thus proves a 'transhistorical phenomena [that] appears unassailable in the film'.⁷²

Whereas the house-museum is deprived of its figural force by the drive to 'illustrate' the moral occult of melodrama, the ghost that traverses such illustra-

tion is ‘American City’ – bringing the memory of the film text to bear on the reconstructed fantasy of the house. ‘American City’, a construct designating the off-screen space beyond the defined limits of the museum, resists the antiquarian aesthetics and the reduction of the literary to illustration by introducing a break in the textures of the film. This break marks the eruption of the eye through photographic discontinuity. As Charlotte reluctantly looks at the pictures of American City provided by Adam, an abrupt cut grafts false found footage of the industrial city into the film text, disrupting the homogeneity of the film’s pictorial/theatrical regime of the house. Thematically, the textural change introduces a new opposition: the museum quality of old Europe versus the technological modernity of America. Textually, both spaces are incommensurable; they refer back to the gulf (and the mutual contamination) between the ‘literary’ memory *in* the text, and the archival memory *of* the text, and between two different epistemological regimes marked by the readable and the visible.

The symbolic failure of the house-museum has its reverse in the poetic irruption of the ghost that disturbs the temporal homogeneity of the collection. In this respect, American City represents the off-screen space that bespeaks the end-point of period aesthetics: the fissuring of the classical narrative under the pressure of the mannerist dialectic of textures. With regard to the double-framing of the photographic and the *mise en abyme* of the filmic that closes the film, Stewart notes the ‘structural irony’ embedded in the (late) heritage film’s modes of visual narration: cinema as ‘the insinuated future tense of a retrospective plot’.⁷³ The stylistic flourish posited by the final montage – Adam and Charlotte’s arrival in American City is immortalised by newsreels and newspaper covers – is an obvious nod to *CITIZEN KANE*. This fragment, set to a momentous final movement in Richard Robbins’s score, re-opens the film at the very point of closure, by inserting it into an altogether different history: that of silent modernism interrupted by the technological shift to sound and, subsequently, by cinema’s dominant turn to realism, largely through the practice of literary adaptation, in order to exploit its storytelling capabilities.⁷⁴

Significantly, but perhaps less obviously, this historicist turn in the film’s texturing also brings about the interruption of the compulsive oedipal narrative embedded in the house-museum with a deeply ambiguous ending. The penultimate image in the film is a newspaper picture of Charlotte, feted for ‘her brains as well as for her beauty’ upon the Ververs’ arrival in the United States. Charlotte’s frozen smile is an ominous memento mori – the last trace before her ‘entombment’ in American City as an exile-at-home; the centrepiece of Adam’s house-museum. However, the montage of newsreels and newspapers also aligns femininity with a new space of fantasy visualised through the potential of urban modernity at the very point in which, to borrow Stewart’s words, the film closes with a ‘a flashpoint of narratography *as* archaeology’:⁷⁵ a perfect

present-in-the-past that operates as a two-way projection: nostalgia and its future.

Far from simply embarking on a nostalgic quest for the past, the films by Merchant Ivory search for ways of figuring the past as 'home'. Whereas the iconography of widescreen, expansive views of the house can be absorbed as part of heritage's commerce of nostalgia, as a filmic figure the house articulates the experience of the past through fantasies of inheritance and identity. Charlotte Stant, a permanent 'guest in other people's houses', and Leonard Bast, the class interloper banished from *Howards End*, evoke, nevertheless, spaces haunted by spectres of dispossession. The association with the return to a neo-classicist tradition of quality has cut Merchant Ivory off from other histories; namely, from the outsider-as-insider views of the English great house by expatriate directors such as Joseph Losey (*THE GO-BETWEEN* [1970] will be discussed in chapter four).

Merchant Ivory's houses also open the path for the genre's forward move to an overt engagement with contemporary literary works and closer political pasts. In their adaptation of Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *THE REMAINS OF THE DAY*, the great house in question, Darlington Hall, is viewed from the perspective of Stevens, the butler, who conveys dispossession as a state of mind and a projection of a historical reality. The film alludes to the process of commodification affecting the great house, insisting not only on the house's survival as a commercial property ruled by foreign interests (the house is sold to an American millionaire) but on its various stages of re-arrangement including, as noted before with regard to *HOWARDS END*, becoming the site of (political) crimes (Britain's appeasement negotiations with Germany in the interwar period).

This motif connects Merchant Ivory's work in the 1990s – the golden age of English heritage cinema – to later period dramas that continue to explore the darker recesses of the great house, as the horizon of heritage moves ever closer to the present time. For example, *GLORIOUS 39* (2009) by playwright, director and television auteur Stephen Poliakoff borrows its flashback structure from *THE REMAINS OF THE DAY*, moving back and forth between the present day and the past lives of the English house as the theatre of operations for the forces of appeasement and the rise of European fascism. Like in the former Merchant Ivory film, the house-museum preserves an untenable way of life in the face of a new era of international conflict (the film's title refers to the summer before World War II). The excavation of the house's shameful political secrets is intimately connected to memory-work that seeks to uncover yet another story of female dispossession, that of actress and adopted orphan Anne. In the second part of this chapter, I explore further the role of moving, yet static, feminine images in relation to the melancholy that impinges on the house-museum and its histories of female disinheritance.

Melodrama and the Descriptive Mode: THE AGE OF INNOCENCE

When *THE AGE OF INNOCENCE* was released internationally in 1993, the production efforts involved in the quest for accuracy in the reconstruction of the past attracted a great deal of attention.⁷⁶ Cook noted that ‘Scorsese’s *AGE OF INNOCENCE* is suffused with fear and loss, most notably in its striving for period authenticity (always a lost cause) and in its obsession with faithfully reproducing the novel’.⁷⁷ However, unlike Merchant Ivory’s European period pieces, the re-creation of 1870s Old New York and, in particular, of the lavish rituals governing its social interiors was not re-channelled to a critique of the heritage film. *THE AGE OF INNOCENCE* presented itself as a distinctive Hollywood studio film with auteur credentials, in clear contrast with the ‘quality’ label attached to Merchant Ivory productions.⁷⁸ Instead, Scorsese’s approach to period drama was positively received for its strong sense of its past history. As Ian Christie puts it:

For Scorsese the whole point is the poignancy of knowing that we are now irrevocably on the far side of classical filmmaking. However gifted a director is today, he or she can only be a Mannerist, condemned like the artists who followed the High Renaissance, to echo and embellish the great unselfconscious works of the past.⁷⁹

THE AGE OF INNOCENCE cites a rich tradition in auteurist costume dramas. Scorsese himself has situated his film in relation to post-war European cinema (Visconti’s sumptuous *mise-en-scène*, the filigrees of Max Ophüls’s camerawork, and Michael Powell’s use of colour are oft-recalled sources),⁸⁰ but also in relation to American genre cinema, and melodrama in particular.

The film’s mannerism is synonymous with a formal excess that sets the grounds for Scorsese’s reading of Wharton’s novel. If the practice of classic adaptation implies an element of nostalgia almost by default, *THE AGE OF INNOCENCE* is doubly conditioned by the feeling of temporal displacement. Edith Wharton wrote about late-nineteenth-century New York in 1920, after World War I had radically changed the world of her youth. Her novel offers a lovingly depicted, first-hand account of a past still recognisable to her readership, yet she stands at sufficient distance from it to be able to subject it to a scathing critique. *THE AGE OF INNOCENCE* reproduces the novel’s dissection of the power of social appearances, but the film performs its own archaeological excavation by stressing the distance from rituals belonging to another era. The film’s interior settings are saturated and expansive – reflecting the aspiration to contain the ‘totality of life’ inherited from the nineteenth-century historical novel⁸¹ – but also centripetal, mapping a subjective experience of space and place. The film’s en-

gagement with Wharton's novel of manners provides a pretext for the exploration of melodramatic form in the rigid social world of upper-class New York. As Pidduck puts it, 'Scorsese's adaptation of Wharton's *THE AGE OF INNOCENCE* is a masterpiece of psychological compression',⁸² in which the hyperrealism of description is subdued to the strategies of melodramatic intensification.

The intertextual figure of the Victorian house pervades the film. An almost complementary image to the sprawling working-class urban geography of Scorsese's later *GANGS OF NEW YORK* (2002), the social world of Old New York thrives on tightly self-enclosed visions of interior space. *THE AGE OF INNOCENCE* is more than a throwback to the enclosed settings of family melodrama: it reads its source novel through the cultural fascination with what Benjamin identified as the nineteenth-century 'addiction to dwelling': the imagining of the heavily furnished and ornamented house as a shell that bears the impression of its occupant.⁸³ Newland Archer's withdrawal to his well-stocked home library and cases of books newly shipped from London; Ellen Olenska's attachment to her 'odd little house' filled with furniture and modernist artworks ('little pieces of wreckage'), and especially Mrs Manson Mingott's homebound condition – her voluminous and overdecorated body presented in symbiosis with her house – convey the way the nineteenth century 'conceived the residence as a receptacle for the person, and it encased him with all his appurtenances'.⁸⁴ However, *THE AGE OF INNOCENCE*'s distinctive figuration of the house arises from a *mise-en-scène* that overwrites the transparent regimen of vision in the classic film adaptation with a *compulsion to show* that mobilises images of dwelling for ideological purposes. Kathleen Murphy notes:

Scorsese's packed frames aren't just décor... his old New York's every public and private space speaks volumes – on morality inextricable from manners. Ranks of luminous white gloves; communal after-dinner cigar-clipping; the timely display of certain designs in china, silver, even food; walls of brownstones crowded with canvases, the *belle époque* equivalent of cave paintings or television monitors – the air is dense with communication here, in the language of flowers, of fashion, of family.⁸⁵

Whereas Old New York is a world in which form is all, *THE AGE OF INNOCENCE* is, on different levels, a film about and driven by the symbolic power of 'form'. The dense textures of the *mise-en-scène*⁸⁶ highlight the hidden force of objects and social customs to regulate private as well as social life into complex systems of signification. Unlike in *HOWARDS END*, the frame does not attempt to naturalise ritual in order to make it an invisible component of the everyday but rather underscores its 'strangeness', its lack of readability for the contemporary viewer as well as its spectacularity. In the lavish set pieces that punctuate the film (for example, the dinner at the Van der Luydens') the camera's subjective investment in objects and ritual brings to the fore their symbolic weight with archae-

ological precision. The play on the descriptive mode renews the pleasure of the representational conventions in the costume film, but also reinscribes them as coded expressions of power.

The *mise-en-scène* produces a dynamic space where the rules of Hollywood melodrama still hold true: 'the more the setting fills with objects to which the plot gives symbolic significance, the more the characters are enclosed in seemingly ineluctable situations'.⁸⁷ The stylised codes of melodrama and its intensification of experience are palpable from the credit sequence. The introduction of visual elements that represent the confines of the film's symbolic universe (flowers, lace and writing) both produce an immersion in the lush world of *THE AGE OF INNOCENCE*, as well as operating as a threshold that separates such a world from everyday reality.⁸⁸ The opening sequence develops the motif of the flowers metonymically within the social microcosms of the opera house,⁸⁹ with the last flower in the credits graphic-matching the cluster of daisies onstage, then cutting to Newland's and the men's buttonhole gardenias, and later to May Welland's bouquet of white lilies. Flowers, like letters and telegrams, are not fragments of a still life but mobile signifiers that circulate across the endogamous world of Old New York, mapping out the public and the private with a profusion of coded messages.

Individual characters appear thus tightly framed between two mirroring images: the theatrical representation and the conventional performance of gender and class codes. The drama being played out in the opera boxes is echoed and intensified by the soaring musical performance taking place onstage. This opening at the opera evokes Luchino Visconti's sumptuous historical melodrama *SENSO* (1954). However, the latent reality of a world in crisis, which interrupts the opera performance in *SENSO* and dictates the tragic course of romance, penetrates the apparently stable edifice of *THE AGE OF INNOCENCE* in a different way. Theatrical representations cast their reflection upon the house of fiction's theatre of repressed emotions. The scene of the lovers' *adieux* in Dion Boucicault's *The Shaughraun* (1874), which opens another theatre scene, is uncannily re-staged in Newland's mind in his encounter with Ellen at the isolated country cottage. Likewise, the last confrontation between Newland and May at the end of the film is presented in extreme long-shot, with actors blocked in the opposite extremes of the frame, giving a clear theatrical angle to the marital showdown.

This play of mirrors between the cinematic and the theatrical transforms the literary into another element of the airless *mise-en-scène* of melodrama. However, the film's illusion of presence is constantly fractured by the subjective perception of time. The digital matte shot that closes the visit to Mrs Manson Mingott is an example; the shot of her mansion 'in an inaccessible wilderness near the Central Park' (as anticipated by the voiceover) makes the scene take an unexpected detour through the 'memory constructed by the filmic text'.⁹⁰ In con-

trast with the painterly establishing shots of properties in *THE GOLDEN BOWL*, this matte shot is nothing short of disorienting; it produces a blatantly unreal view of the landscape of New York. The impossible shot of the house towering over a deserted view of Central Park transforms the referentiality of urban history into a fictitious element of memory.



'In an inaccessible wilderness near the Central Park': Mrs Manson Mingott's house in THE AGE OF INNOCENCE

Whereas establishing shots of period houses traditionally seek to usher the spectator into the past unobtrusively and 'realistically', this intrusive, eerie matte shot – which introduces the wizardry of digital technology into the largely traditional production design – acts as an index of contemporary visual technology, imbricating the past into the present qua fabricated representation. In this regard, C.S. Tashiro notes:

Recognizing the stylization is part of the process of historical re-creation, since such recognition adds to the emotional distance between viewer and event. By recognizing our recognition, the film shares our perspective, implicating each in the other. Three distances – spatial, temporal, emotional – combine to create a strong sense of *presence*.⁹¹

This 'sense of presence' paradoxically comprehends the myriad stylistic marks that draw attention to the fantasy quality of the world represented. The empty Beaufort ballroom comes to life when the chandelier lights are turned on, and a group of dancers materialises at the sound of the orchestra as if fading in from another dimension: 'like opening up a music box and seeing all the people appear and dance to the music; all these ghosts, the past, comes alive in a way and takes you into another time and place'.⁹² These visual effects literally bring the

past to life, but they also portray life as a failed act that has already been replaced by images and memories.

Throughout the film, the camerawork leisurely stops at paintings and objets d'art. The house and its objects work as an intermedial device in the *mise-en-scène*, adding up layers of meaning but also pointing at the reflexivity of the gaze. In particular, the meticulous use of paintings⁹³ sheds light on the cluster of signs that articulates these private worlds, as well as the aporias of the cultural discourse that once engendered them. The persistent double-framing effect not only describes characters and milieu, but also relentlessly deconstructs its object of study.⁹⁴ Midway through the scene of the visit to Mrs Mingott, the camera unexpectedly drifts off to explore the lady's house, until the framing of a canvas picturing a woman being dragged by Indians arrests the elegant series of Steadicam shots. This unexpected visual twist, synchronised with the voice-over's remarks on the felicitous union of the Archers and the Wellands, wryly comments on the element of residual violence that gives full meaning to the enactment of communal values.⁹⁵

The descriptive mode thus works within the interstices of the narrative. The surplus of signification comes from the exercise of translation of the literary narrator into the drive of the cinematic gaze qua interpreter of that world. As Lesley Stern has noted:

It is a mistake to think of this world, as many critics seem to, as being simply about the Victorian era. So much of Scorsese's cinema is about bringing together imaginative worlds and the rituals necessary to sustaining those worlds. The trick he has is to immerse us so thoroughly that we reach the *limits of fantasy* (or endurance) and forget that this is an imaginative projection; or feel trapped, threatened by the uncanny return of the same, or get caught up in a running gag that twists and turns.⁹⁶

As spectacle takes over as the primary *ideological* function of the rich interiors, it becomes the motor of narration by way of the fluid camerawork.⁹⁷ When Newland enters the Beaufort mansion in the opening ball sequence, the long, weaving Steadicam shot maps out the space, producing the impression of familiarity, of the gaze that knows its way because it *makes* its way. However, the identification of vision with power is deceiving. Newland's fantasy of control is as precarious as the tour de force that presupposes the Steadicam shot, which for a moment creates the illusion of an unending, unbroken reality coming to life in front of our eyes.

Scorsese's film rewrites its literary referent via the masculine subjectivity that organises the narrative space. The swerving camera both identifies with Newland's point of view and allows us to see more than he sees, whereas the literary voiceover, an ironic instance of knowledge, opens up a gap between vision and meaning. When Newland stops for a moment to admire the 'scandalous' nude

on display in one of the salons (*The Return of the Spring*, 1886, by William-Adolphe Bouguereau), the camera pans from his face to the painting, and back to him, in such a way that his gaze seems to produce the object in view. There is no edit – no mark of suture – only a clean arch that binds together the fetish and the subject of the look. However, the pleasure in such voyeuristic power is a mere fabrication because, as the voiceover remarks, ‘the Beaufort house had been boldly planned’ so as to make visitors confront the painting in their passage to the ballroom. It is the house that constructs the viewer’s look: the objects interpellate the desiring subject, marking the path the gaze must pursue and not the other way round. When Newland turns his back to the paintings in order to enter the ballroom, the camera lingers behind him. Suddenly panning rightwards it zooms in on one of the canvases, which holds the camera for a split second, before the shot cuts into the ballroom and the camera picks up Newland’s point of view again. In a way, these are objects that *return the gaze*: in Lacanian terms, they are the marks of the fundamental asymmetry of ideology.⁹⁸ The house debunks the fantasy of the all-powerful desiring gaze from the outset.



Play of mirrors: the Beaufort ball in THE AGE OF INNOCENCE

The room is full of mirrors and paintings that seem to multiply the guests. As the camera (apparently following Newland’s look) takes a tour around the room, the moment of Newland’s encounter with May is delayed. In this complex set piece, the composition of the mobile frame layers out space in several planes whereas the intermittent use of slow motion guides our look to the main characters. The combination of these elements momentarily slows narrative movement down; the effect is a spectacular sequence of changing tableaux. The movement-image turns, once again, into descriptive time, where period spectacle is filtered through memory. The sound design of the sequence also contri-

butes to this: the non-diegetic voiceover (which, as performed by Joanne Woodward, acts as a stand-in for the literary author) interspersed with the musical soundtrack of classical Strauss waltzes does not blend with the image, but comments on it, underscoring the time-travelling effect.

The filmic house of fiction mediates the literary memory in the text through the density of its aural and visual textures. However, beyond the nostalgia for highbrow culture and the pleasure generated by the immersion in period spectacle, the mannerist figuration of the house also does its own poetic work. As Julius Beaufort strolls by in the foreground, we see the waltzing couples behind him on a second plane, and a group of young women who sit and stand in the background under a canvas that momentarily dominates the frame. This canvas, in turn, depicts a social scene similar to the ball that is taking place. The long shot in deep focus and the slowing down of the dancers' movements underscore the circularity of culture: the women strike a composition that reverts into the painting above them. The canvas thus functions as a mirror, but a mirror that absorbs the 'originals' and produces culturally coded reflections. As the camera-eye exceeds narrative identification (Newland as the 'knowing subject'), the composition breaks classical perspective: the anamorphic gaze inscribes the mannerist stage reached by a world in crisis – as the narrator says, 'a world balanced so precariously that its harmony could be shattered by a whisper'. When the self-inflections of culture become visible in simultaneity with the actual narrative, the double framing destroys the transparency of realism. The idea of the 'original' has been cancelled out: the cinematic apparatus becomes an active agent of writing, and the period film enters a stage in which we are not in the domain of the modernist 'showing' anymore, but rather in the regime of self-conscious *reading*.

Fidelity to the Past and the Melancholic Imagination: Woman as Ghost

As Stern notes above, and like other mannerist period pieces (*THE GOLDEN BOWL*), *THE AGE OF INNOCENCE* is about fantasy as much as about *the limits of fantasy* and its uncanny reversals. Such limits are made explicit through the female characters standing on the two opposite poles of the protagonist's world. The innocent child-bride May Welland and the notorious Ellen Olenska function as further object-images of melodrama within the emotionally charged space of the Victorian house. They are complex reflections of Newland's own changing subjectivity rather than alternative points of identification. In the visual economy of the film May and Ellen are entirely defined, to use Mulvey's

term, by their 'to-be-looked-at-ness': the 'white'/brunette virginal wife versus the 'red'/blonde fallen woman. The visual fixation of their roles enhances their archetypal character.⁹⁹ Throughout the film Ellen and May share the same diegetic space, let alone the frame, on very few occasions, and their exchanges are never heard on the soundtrack. Their relation is totally mediated through Newland's gaze.

However, Ellen also carries the trace of the ghost into Newland's fenced world. Ellen's eccentricity in relation to the structures of signification that organise Old New York transforms her into the outsider as *revenant*, the trace of a beyond that returns as the Other at the core of the Same. For Newland, Ellen is a source of fascination not because she is different, but because there is something *familiar* in her being different. In their first meeting at the opera boxes, what is described in the novel as a failed encounter¹⁰⁰ gets rewritten by the film into a scene where Newland momentarily experiences the uncanny at its purest. The diegetic music gets muted, and is replaced by a non-diegetic, delicate piano theme that accompanies Ellen's remembrances:

ELLEN [close-up; Newland's POV]: I remember we played together. How this brings it all back to me [at the wave of her hand, the camera pans over the audience]. I remember everybody here the same way, in knickerbockers and pantalettes. [Newland moves to sit behind her.] You were horrid. You kissed me once behind the door. But it was your cousin Vandy, the one who never looked at me, I was in love with.

NEWLAND [close-up, profile]: Yes, you have been away a very long time.

ELLEN [close-up; Newland's POV]: Oh, centuries and centuries. So long I'm sure I'm dead and buried and this dear old place is heaven.¹⁰¹

Time seems to stand still during this exchange, until the spell is broken and the opera music soars once more through the house. Ellen is almost a spectral presence, a ghost that bears the trace of a primeval space (children kissing behind doors) apparently free from the constrictions of the symbolic, and the living proof of the existence of a 'beyond New York' that slowly comes to represent utopia for Newland. However, having escaped from an abusive marriage in Europe, Ellen misperceives New York *as utopia*. In the first part of the film, Ellen's reading aloud of the unwritten codes as an arbitrary fiction has the subversive force of the child crying out the nakedness of the emperor. Her disavowal of the symbolic authority held by the 'august tribunal, before which, at that very moment, her case was being tried'¹⁰² is an actual menace to the system of which Newland is a perfect representative.

The liaison between Newland and Ellen develops as a true love story in the purest Lacanian sense: feminine subjectivity is conspicuously absent, and desire

is triggered by a chain of partial objects: a glove, a lost umbrella, the point of a shoe, a strand of golden hair, a key... objects virtually replace the unreachable female body in a libidinal economy of perpetual deferment. However, it is not only objects that feed the narrative of desire, but the filmic image itself. Midway through the film, Newland finds Ellen alone on the pier of Lime Rock. Out of the constraining social spaces of the Victorian house, this is apparently his golden chance to make the gesture that can set them both free. Yet the static shot of Ellen on the pier, looking at the shimmering sea, destroys the reality effect, as the long shot fuses actual perception with visual convention. As with the uncanny image of the Manson Mingott house in the historical urban landscape, another post-production effect inscribes the textures of the painterly into the cinematic shot.



Present-in-the-past: actuality and memory in THE AGE OF INNOCENCE

The resulting image is, as Brigitte Peucker notes, a self-conscious compound of citations: a *Rückenfigur* in the vein of Caspar David Friedrich's Romantic paintings – a human figure captured in the act of looking, viewed from behind; but also a throwback to F.W. Murnau's visual style, and particularly the 'invasion of the frame' by a moving object that enters an otherwise static cinematic frame.¹⁰³ The shot becomes a canvas enshrining Ellen's auratic image – woman as work of art – solely disturbed by a ship slowly crossing the frame: time passing, but also (memory) time *regained*.

A tableau vivant that inscribes memory as a reflection of the gaze, this is, in Deleuze's formulation, a pure crystal-image: a time-image with an actual and a virtual side that merge, marking a moment of coincidence of subject and object.¹⁰⁴ This double image expresses in visual terms the 'present-in-the-pastness' that dominates the subjective mode of the film. Its poignancy resides in its ambiguity: this is memory in the making and, at the same time, it produces the

illusion of the past recovering its full potential. Once more, Newland feels impelled to defer the moment of consummation by making a bet with himself: 'I'll go to her only if she turns around'. This ultimate proof of romantic self-denial testifies to the relinquishment of the love object for the sake of the preservation of its image – image that is already constructed as memory. After Newland and May's wedding, the voiceover muses: 'As for the madness with Madame Olenska, Archer trained himself to remember it as the last of his discarded experiments. She remained in his memory simply as the most plaintive and poignant of a line of ghosts'. The actual possibility of fulfilment being already lost, Ellen (even her continuous travelling and intermittent presence during the film seem to suggest so) remains a permanent revenant, looking at Newland from a different temporal dimension. As Peucker notes, 'tableau vivant moments in film set up a tension between the two- and the three-dimensional, between stasis and movement, between the "death" of the human body in painting and its "life" in cinema'.¹⁰⁵ The mannerist preservation of the art image takes place through the reanimation of painting through cinema and, in particular, through the sublimation of the feminine image. The film frame as tableau embalms time; however, as painting is brought to life, the (transgressive) female body is killed off into the aesthetic.¹⁰⁶

This particular instance of the crystal-image, written as a 'spatialized configuration of time itself',¹⁰⁷ reveals the gendered inflection of the mannerist aesthetic. The melodramatic narrative is revived through a fundamental ambiguity between subject and object, present and past, which is characteristic of the melancholic imagination. 'Melancholia' is, according to Freud, failed mourning: an inability to accept the death of a desired object leading to denial that provokes its perpetual return.¹⁰⁸ Melancholy manifests itself in states of narcissistic regression in which the subject experiences pleasure through the fabrication of the loss. For Giorgio Agamben, melancholy offers the paradox of an intention to mourn that precedes and supplements the loss of the object:

Covering its object with the funereal trappings of mourning, melancholy confers upon it the phantasmagorical reality of what is lost; but insofar as such mourning is for an unobtainable object, the strategy of melancholy opens a space for the existence of the unreal and marks out a scene in which the ego may enter into relation with it and attempt an appropriation such as no other possession could rival and no loss possibly threaten.¹⁰⁹

The fidelity to the object leads to its abolition: the melancholic consecrates the loss itself, disguised behind the mask of a memory. The pier scene not only condenses the libidinal core of *THE AGE OF INNOCENCE*, its scenario of male desire and fabricated loss,¹¹⁰ but it also captures the desire for the past that feeds contemporary costume drama inscribing fidelity at the centre of the film text. Fide-

lity to the lost/loved literary object is replaced with the desire for the past – a past which, in the case of melodrama, is figured through a loss of some kind. In this respect, Ellen, as well as Charlotte in *THE GOLDEN BOWL* and, as we will see, another Wharton heroine – Lily Bart of *THE HOUSE OF MIRTH* – are subsumed within what Stewart calls ‘flashpoints of mediation’¹¹¹ that flesh out the desire for the past, even as they take the shape of ghosts haunting the house of fiction and its rituals of memory.

The reverse of woman as fetish is woman as obstacle. May’s opaque presence enhances Ellen’s difference. In the second part of the film, May appears as the perfectly tamed Victorian body: in the archery competition and other public spaces she comes across as virginal and stately, a classical Diana image matching her ‘Archer’ husband. Slowly she emerges as an increasingly oppressive maternal presence; scenes of marital harmony become increasingly unnerving and ironic. As the camera portrays a prematurely matronly May embroidering – the perfect image of the Victorian angel in the house – or clinging to her husband, a long hat needle in hand very close to the back of his neck, the tight framing conveys her suffocating presence in strongly physical terms. Like her grandmother Mrs Mingott, she is the phallic woman, securing the efficiency of the patriarchal symbolic system that constitutes her identity.

All this comes together in a final scene in which May, in revealing her pregnancy, forecloses her husband’s romantic longings of escape. As Newland struggles for the right word to cut himself free from the Victorian house of fiction, May’s body unexpectedly invades the frame in tight close-up. Her single movement (standing up) is artificially expanded in the film: a neutral medium shot of May cuts to a three-shot sequence with discontinuity between shots, which enhances the sheer weight of her body and dress.¹¹² May rises before Newland, who lifts his eyes, astounded. The jump cuts quote the time-lapse photography in the initial credit sequence: the accelerated dissolves of blooming roses covered by the grid of lace that signals the artificial nature of their beauty.¹¹³ The moment registers the magnitude of the blow Newland is about to receive. His lower angle makes him look dwarfed, trapped by the almost majestic figure advancing towards him. ‘He looked up at her with a sick stare, and she sank down, all dew and roses, and hid her face against his knee’.¹¹⁴ The scene anticipates the dramatic destruction of all his hopes even before she announces her pregnancy. Next, a bird’s-eye shot of the couple signals the enclosure of Newland within a design that surpasses his will, indicating the irreversibility of his entrapment. Like a mechanical doll moving with clockwork precision (her gesture refers back to the smooth turning of the head with which she greets Newland in the opening sequence at the opera), May comes across as the executor of the repressive violence of the symbolic, whilst the *mise-en-scène* reinstates the force of melodrama.

By dramatically expanding the action, the three-shot sequence produces a moment of suspension that disrupts the surface of the text. Like the prior scene of Ellen's embrace in the cabin, fantasised in Newland's mind's eye, the subjective vision of a character blends with the system of enunciation of the film. This moment faithfully illustrates Wharton's text, and yet it does so through the textual horizon of filmic melodrama, in which discontinuity expresses the 'fissures and ruptures in the fabric of experience, and the appeal to a reality of the psyche, to which the notions of sudden change, reversal, and excess lend symbolic plausibility.'¹¹⁵ This lends all its resonance to the melodramatic gesture, yet such gesture is articulated through the inscription of the gaze in the internal time of the image: a fractured perception produces a temporal disjunction, the present-in-the-past in which experience and remembrance merge.

The present-in-the-past that stems from the camera's eye siding with subjective perception defines a film in which the structure of the fantasy plays against the very notion of closure. This comes forcefully to the fore through the (non) ending of the climactic revelation scene: cueing Newland's averting look as he turns to the fireplace, the camera pans 360 degrees around the room where christenings, weddings and family discussions are screened as flickering shadows of ghosts. 'It was the room in which most of the real things in his life had happened'. As the (edited) panning shot produces the illusion of continuity – time figured through space – it is the presence and the change of objects (and the changing meaning of objects through the years) that come to the fore, anchoring the memory of events. This ellipsis attests 'the confining and ultimately comforting solidity of the house of fiction',¹¹⁶ its durability. However, this final detour through descriptive space as pure time also transforms the Victorian house of fiction into no more than a layer of memory images that maps fantasy space; like in *Arcadia*, the Victorian house anachronistically coexists with other mappings, other desires. Following Deleuze, 'the only subjectivity is time, non-chronological time grasped in its foundation and it is we who are internal to time, not the other way round'.¹¹⁷ The house and its objects remain while the shadows of human stories come and go. They are at the centre of the shot, fixing perception and establishing the truth of memories.

THE AGE OF INNOCENCE appropriates the language of period reconstruction and its oblique narrative economy of spatial detail through the grand-scale costume film and, particularly, via the auteurist cinephilia that feeds its dense fabric of quotations. As Pidduck notes, the film should be considered part of a cycle in which 'filtered through the prism of the past, the discourse of "exquisite anguish" reveals, and sometimes redeems, masculinity's hidden emotional world'.¹¹⁸ The sense of loss falls not only on the side of the idealised beloved, but on an ideal of masculinity (rather than the world it embodies) that the film mourns. However, as we will see, unlike the 'suffering men' in films imbued

with the expression of literary Romanticism (in *ONEGIN* and *TO THOSE WHO LOVE*) the discourse of self and renunciation – contiguous to a masochistic position – is not spectacularised. It is the non-marked term in a dialectical relationship with a sublimated feminine image, framed through the textures of the art object.

This scenario allows a two-way reflection on the relationship between gender and fantasy. I have suggested that *THE AGE OF INNOCENCE* deconstructs itself as a melodramatic fantasy through the agency of the melancholic imagination. The fabrication of loss necessitates the fabrication of the past as a complex setting of desire and repression. In the closing sequence, twenty years later, Newland – now a widower – travels to Paris with his eldest son, who presses him to go and visit Ellen. While looking up at Ellen’s window, Newland finally carries out his true choice – the choice apparently forced on him by his wife’s decisive gesture. He chooses loss over the lost object, thus being faithful to the true expression of his desire.

Time becomes central in this denouement, yet not in the way we would expect. Paradoxically, it is May’s death (and with it, the death of a world that disintegrates under the disavowing gaze of the younger generation) that leaves Newland without a structure to support his desire: time has transformed him into a lonely relic of the system that deprived him of a ‘true’ life. The ultimate irony is that May turns out to be the only witness ever to bear testimony of Newland’s love for Ellen. With the passage of time, May and the world she stands for become the only material proof of his life passion, and the sole guarantor of the truth of his memories of Ellen. “‘It’s more real to me here than if I went up’”, he suddenly heard himself say; and the fear lest that last shadow of reality should lose its edge kept him rooted to his seat as the minutes succeeded each other’.¹¹⁹ The last scene spells out the truth of Newland’s melancholy: his fidelity, not to the love object, but to the person he was in the ‘good old days’ of his youth. He is old-fashioned – meaning that he carries his world with him. Newland’s memories of Ellen are condensed in the dream image of her silhouette at the pier, but in his imagination Ellen *does* turn: the moment has been corrected by time. In this sense, Newland does not cling to the truth of his memories of Ellen, but to the truth of his *fantasies* of Ellen.

The ending in Wharton’s novel is reproduced with accuracy and yet, at the last moment, the frame is pierced by an image without referent in the literary intertext, but which is authentically faithful to the subjective economy of the film: an invented memory, a close-up of Ellen turning on the pier, smiling. The image is triggered by a ray of sunlight that blinds Newland’s eye, literally dividing the frame into present and past. The fantasy comes full circle: the imaginary close-up not only rewrites Newland’s past but the text of the past, suggesting a movement without resolution, a narration without ending.¹²⁰ His own age of

innocence remains the trace of time at its purest, 'non-chronological time grasped in its foundation'. Yet, the fundamental paradox of melancholic fidelity is the 'revenge' of the lost object for, as Deleuze states, 'the virtual survival of the dead can be actualised, but is this not at the price of our existence, which becomes virtual in turn?'¹²¹ The film closes with a final image of Newland alone. As he walks away, the camera lingers for a few moments in the deserted Paris square – he has become, in the novel's words, the last and most poignant of a long line of ghosts. It is through the perpetuation of fantasy across time that *THE AGE OF INNOCENCE* rewrites the Victorian house of fiction.

THE HOUSE OF MIRTH or, Time and Woman

THE AGE OF INNOCENCE was followed by another high-profile Wharton adaptation that came from Europe at the start of the new decade. I use Terence Davies's *THE HOUSE OF MIRTH* as a befitting coda to this chapter (and as a transition to the next), but not because of its shared literary origins with Scorsese's film. The two films bring different shades to the interpretation of the same figural questions posited around the house, its ghosts, and the pervasiveness of the melancholic imagination.

Let us, however, take a moment to step again through the threshold to the world of *THE AGE OF INNOCENCE*. Retrospectively, the opening credit sequence – a string of rosebuds which bloom and wither with clockwork predictability – can be read as an allegory for the feminine, and for the feminisation of the genre, as well as the beginning of a series of figural displacements (in the film both Ellen and May are often shot against backgrounds packed with flowers). But the sequence also suggests the Victorian fascination for the mechanical as well as the ornamental. Jennifer L. Fleissner has commented on the notion of the 'mechanical woman' (the subjection of female maternal capacities to a biological clock) in relation to Wharton's feminine iconography. Woman as clock, Fleissner asserts, 'takes over from an older, more nature-based conception of the feminine plot in literature in which the woman as a delicate flower buds, blooms and finally must shrivel and fade', noting a tension 'between the older figuration and the newer sense of female temporality imposed by the clock' in the 1905 novel *The House of Mirth*.¹²² The credit sequence in *THE AGE OF INNOCENCE* captures this tension through visual superimpositions. Sheathed in calligraphy and lace, the blooming flowers render figurally a mechanical movement of veiling and unveiling. It is this movement, and its connection with the reification of feminine experience, which defines the particular take on the figure of the house in *THE HOUSE OF MIRTH*.

THE HOUSE OF MIRTH revolves around a woman's melodramatic fall from grace in a rarefied social world. Two things become immediately apparent in the film: first, the resolute investment in the 'difference' of the past, manifesting itself in the refusal to modernise its heroine, Lily Bart, or her environments, or to turn her trajectory into a fantasy of feminine empowerment in any way. Gillian Anderson's slow, mannered performance goes against the grain of the feisty heroines preferred by popular costume films in the 1990s.¹²³ Secondly, the film represses significant areas of its source text directly concerned with the social. On the one hand, the novel's anti-Semitism is absent from the film, where no explicit mention is made of Simon Rosedale's Jewish identity.¹²⁴ On the other, the film's depiction of its heroine's tragic downfall lacks a counterpoint in the rising world of working-class women and independent professionals, which emerges at key moments of the novel but is absent from the film. In this respect, the film poses insurmountable obstacles to its appropriation by feminist readings.¹²⁵ Women's poverty and struggle almost disappear from view; they remain just a passing background to Lily's bourgeois tragedy.

The loss of social context makes the house of fiction less tangible in material terms and more menacing in its pure symbolic force – expressed through spare décor, a contrasted and sombre lighting and controlled framing. Partly due to budgetary restrictions, THE HOUSE OF MIRTH cannot and does not engage in a zealous reconstruction and *showing* of a packed world of objects.¹²⁶ Drawing on an anti-spectacular European art-house tradition,¹²⁷ Davies's film rather unfolds with the ascetic rigour of a spare chamber piece, and feels like one even in its open-air scenes. Except for sporadic tracking at key moments of the film, the camerawork is predominantly static throughout a series of airless and muted drawing rooms, which invest minute interior sounds (doors, ticking clocks, the lighting of cigarettes, the cutting of a book's pages) with unexpected weight.¹²⁸ The exhibitionism of period décor, so widespread in the period films of the 1990s, is absent from these interior spaces where characters are rarely 'at home'. Objects intrude in the frame as signs precisely mapped onto the film's strikingly symmetrical grand design. Wendy Everett remarks on Lily's visual association with lace and lacy patterns. In the opening credits, the film's key musical theme (provided by Alessandro Marcello's *Oboe Concerto in D minor*) accompanies a visual design of slow-growing intricate wallpaper patterns, which in turn reappears in Lily's veil as she emerges from the train station. More lace patterns are visible in the curtains that provide the background to Lily's elegant figure in Lawrence Selden's flat, at the beginning of the film, and which similarly frame Lawrence upon his discovering Lily's inert body at the end.¹²⁹ The delicacy of this motif, as well as its triviality and preciousness, makes it into a befitting shroud for Lily's banal existence.

Lily's imperfect assimilation to this décor is highlighted by objects whose meanings keep treacherously shifting. Teacups, books and cigarettes signpost the relationships between characters and are wielded in significant gestures. Whereas in the opening scene the teacup in Lily's hand registers the barely perceptible tremors of the undercurrents of feeling between her and Lawrence, her poised grace as she pours tea for Rosedale during his unexpected visit denotes her triumphant control over a social impasse. The shared ritual of cigarette lighting and smoking draws the erotic arch between Lawrence and Lily, yet Bertha Dorset's untimely reference to cigarettes thwarts Lily's advances on a potential husband (the rich yet dull Percy Gryce) on the train. Conversely, the topic of book collecting, which arises as a pretext for conversation couching Lily's designs on Percy, deflates the growing intimacy between Lawrence and Lily in their first encounter. Lily's apparently random question ('Do you collect Americana?') raises the shadow of her ambitions of social mobility, which prevent her from giving into romantic expectations. The vision of Lily fastidiously cutting through the pages of a volume with a penknife is both a lovely period detail and an astonishingly literal image, which her desperate cutting through the intricacies of the social maze renders crystal clear. Lily's circling around the commodities of the bourgeoisie, her trying to get control over its signs, teems with the painful sense of the impossibility for a woman without means of climbing the social ladder as owner and agent of change. All she can hope for is to be bought into that world, as one more of its ornamental objects.

The film's poignancy arises from the melodramatic exploration of time – and bad timing – in relation to the performance of femininity. Lily is, like Charlotte Stant, an uneasy guest in other people's houses with a self-confessed talent to do the 'wrong thing at the right time'. The insidious threat of dispossession underpins a character which, as Jim Ellis notes 'comes to be marked by both a pained self-consciousness and an awareness of a founding gap both within the self and also between the self and the world'.¹³⁰ For Ellis, the denaturalisation of Lily's sense of 'being' against a pervasive sense of her own performance produces a queer consciousness attributable to Davies's characteristic approach to period drama. Such performance follows, however, a very specifically *feminine* timing, which is visualised by way of the play with veiling and unveiling.

The veiling of women has perennial cultural connotations that allude to the concealment of female sexuality (in the rituals of nunnery, marriage or mourning). As Elaine Showalter notes, 'science and medicine had traditionally made use of sexual metaphors which represented "Nature" as a woman to be unveiled by the man who seeks her secrets'.¹³¹ However, free of the symbolic penetration by the male gaze, woman in period costume can become metonymically linked to, and fixed on, interior spaces in scenes that explore feminine overidentification with a house from which she is, however, disinherited. The

long shots of furniture covered by white dust sheets is an arresting visual motif that recurs in a number of films, and one that is amenable to a critique of women's visual alignment with property. For example, in *PERSUASION*, Anne Elliot is seen surrounded by draped furniture when the family's country estate is transformed into rental lodgings; in *ORLANDO*, the title character negotiates her way among the voluminous pieces in an expansive white dress that makes her look no less cumbersome; in *THE OTHERS*, the motif gets an existential, gothic spin, as Grace's fear of ghostly apparitions behind the shrouded shapes in her mansion only draws her nearer the realisation that she is the actual ghost in the house.

In *THE HOUSE OF MIRTH*, this motif adds to the deathly quietness of the house-museum. Lily's desire to escape her aunt's oppressive house, and the pressure from undesired suitor Simon Rosedale, leads her into accepting a double-edged invitation by Bertha to join a cruise to the French Riviera. This is followed by a transition sequence in which a series of elaborate slow pans, tracking shots and dissolves offer a panoramic view of the draped shapes in the empty house; this then moves to a view of the surrounding garden under the summer rain, and finally to the shimmering waters of the open sea. This sequence (underscored to the soaring chords of the trio 'Soave sia il vento' from the Mozart opera *Così fan tutte*) momentarily obliterates Lily from the shot. When she is 'unveiled' again, this time on the deck of the Dorsets' yacht, her static pose and passive figure are still under wraps in a white dress, behind the white sheets that partially shield the deck from the sun. The sequence raises the possibility of liberation and transformation, but the second act reveals a Lily still entangled in a web of intrigues where she serves almost as an ornamental distraction.

Yet Lily's veiling also highlights her potential as enigma. In this respect, two mirror moments of *mise-en-scène* anticipate Lily's destiny figurally: Lily's only time of (spectacular) glory, as model for a *tableau vivant*, and the final, and true *tableau* of the film. On the occasion of a social gathering that fuses two different passages in the novel (a family wedding and the reception given by the Welly Bryes), Lily participates in a series of *tableaux vivants*, posing as a live quotation of Antoine Watteau's painting *Summer* (1715-1716). A middle-class pastime, the representation of *tableaux vivants* was immensely popular in American society – and poses a direct antecedent of melodramas and silent film, which used the same language of painterly illusionism and sentimental gestures.¹³² Lily's unveiling hardly lasts a few seconds, highlighting the elusiveness of the spectacle. According to Elisabeth Bronfen, the literary Lily is a 'bride' – and therefore a transitional figure:

[S]he is in transition between a father's and a husband's home, shifts between various points of definition (in respect to sexual, class and professional identity) with a multi-

tude of possibilities open to her. She represents an enigma to herself and to those she lives with, for which her death serves a solution. She is an object of speculation – owing to her beauty she is the object of an erotic and aesthetic gaze, owing to her bridal liminality she gives rise to epistemological conjectures or becomes the site for risky economic transactions... [the] text revolves around the way that sight solves an enigma, even as procuring a solution also entails violence inflicted on the resolved ‘body’, which had posed as the site of the question.¹³³

Bronfen’s reading of the bride reflects the absence of a female *bildungsroman* versus the circulation and exchange of women as founding gesture in patriarchal societies.

The bride is both a patriarchal image (always construed with reference to an instance of masculine agency) and an interstitial figure that undermines the solidity of the patriarchal narrative, posing a moment of indecision. The trajectory from enigma to decipherment defines the interval between the two tableaux in the film. The first poses a hermeneutic task; the second one fixes meaning. The reification of woman into image, which suppresses her active sexual body (as seen in *THE AGE OF INNOCENCE*) is part of the melancholic gesture; the feminine is effectively fixed in its exclusion. However, this trajectory is both achieved and questioned by the tableau in *THE HOUSE OF MIRTH*, in which the crystallisation of woman into memory-image implies necessarily a second sight.

The tableau scene midway through the film also marks a transitional moment between the visual and the readable. In more senses than one, we could say alongside Barthes that ‘every body is a citation: of the “already-written”’.¹³⁴ The scene recalls the deconstruction of mysterious gendered body in *S/Z*: ‘beauty cannot assert itself save in the form of a citation’;¹³⁵ that is, beauty is always already codified through the rhetoric of art. Anderson’s costumed body not only doubles Lily’s beauty as ‘high art’, but it also short-circuits the representation. Her self-display ambiguously sits between truth and disguise, enhancing Wharton’s description of the social body as a theatre of appearances. In the novel the highly staged scene of the tableaux discloses a suspended moment of essential truth, realised in Lawrence’s eyes:

[T]he unanimous ‘Oh!’ of the spectators was a tribute, not to the brush-work of Reynolds’s ‘Mrs Lloyd’ but to the flesh and blood loveliness of Lily Bart. She had shown her artistic intelligence in selecting a type so like her own that she could embody the person represented without ceasing to be herself... For the first time he seemed to see before him the real Lily Bart, divested of the trivialities of her little world, and catching for a moment a note of that eternal harmony of which her beauty was a part.¹³⁶

The novel stresses Lily’s appropriation of the painting and the symbiotic relationship between image and model. The disguise paradoxically uncovers the

'truth', prefiguring a moment of emotion in Lawrence's sceptical eye. However, the *mise-en-scène* in the film suggests exactly the opposite: the impossibility of *signifying* truth through the visual spectacle of the cinematic Lily Bart – that is, the pure excess of the visual over the readable. At this moment, the film diverts from the novel in two ways: the painting changes (the film text replaces one signifier with another), and the editing quickly represses the spectacle of Lily's body.

For Graham Fuller, the change of paintings in the film adaptation offers a compelling interpretation of its source. Watteau's *Summer* perfectly describes Lily who, at the peak of her beauty and therefore of her (trading) powers is only one step away from the beginning of decline: 'it is an image of fecundity fulfilled, but with a warning of summer's evanescence... Lily's summer, unlike Watteau's, will remain unreaped'.¹³⁷ The choice of an allegorical painting for the film invites a critical, 'in-depth' reading of the intertextual reference. Yet where are the stasis and the pleasure in contemplation offered by the tableau? The frame does not dwell on this moment; on the contrary, Lily's full body is exposed only once (in a medium-long shot) for a split second before the curtains fall on her again.

Knowing Davies's relish for the still image¹³⁸ as a channel for the amplification of memory, it is intriguing the way his classic adaptation represses the one scene in the literary referent that, a priori, might have appealed most to Davies as interpreter. The visualisation of the scene foregrounds the disguise, the impact of the theatrical and the masquerade of femininity: it troubles the reality effect. So the frame does not hold for long, and it yields nothing: one only has to compare it with the extended tableau on the pier used by Scorsese. Ellis suggests that this tableau opens a gap in interpretation, accentuating the incongruence between Anderson's body and her performance as well as between Lily and the allegorical figure she impersonates.¹³⁹ However, the tableau's 'absence' in the central tableau scene of *THE HOUSE OF MIRTH* poses the question of its actual manifestation as the hidden structure of feeling, whose potential is only realised in the last moments of the narrative. Upon the discovery of Lily's corpse, Lawrence's first gesture is to roll up the blinds, thus unveiling the true tableau in the film. This time Lawrence does not remain an outside spectator: he steps into the tableau, blending in with the painterly frame of the representation.

In the scene of Lily's death, the frame freezes and the film image dissolves into an *objet d'art* representing the pathetic but aesthetically beautiful female corpse, complete with the man who mourns the loss. Lily Bart's death in oblivion metamorphoses from the melodramatic actuality of the image into an intermedial representation: a canvas from a distant past, with a caption that reads: 'New York 1907'. The layering of this composite image (both *visible* and *readable*)

reveals the fallacy of period realism, or what Barthes calls the preeminence of the pictorial code in literary mimesis: 'realism consists in copying not the real but a depicted copy of the real'.¹⁴⁰ In its closing sequence, the image coexists with its reading; it inscribes at the same time the actuality of the visual and the distance of the code. The tableau vivant poses a moment of juxtaposition of heterogeneous textures (the cinematic/the painterly) but also signals the anamorphosis of the gaze – an eye travelling through time.



Time inscribed: Lily Bart's death in THE HOUSE OF MIRTH

As in *THE AGE OF INNOCENCE*, the frame takes on the texture of the canvas at the very moment where the death of female subjectivity signals the birth of memory. Lily Bart's 'beautiful' death in *THE HOUSE OF MIRTH* not only gives sense to her life: it is invested with a romantic aura, and removed from the material conditions that ultimately provoke her demise. The scene of her death makes for an aesthetic, sublimated image that transcends Lily's tragedy. Like in *THE AGE OF INNOCENCE* (and, before Scorsese, in the operatic historical frescoes by Visconti), individual characters stand at the dramatic centre of complex social worlds. In these literary adaptations, the search for fidelity is confounded with a quest for plenitude of representation – which, in turn, erupts through the period film's fascination with fixed memory-images of the past, condensing a lasting moment of splendour that precedes decline and disappearance. It is not by chance that these mannerist period films are fixated on the stasis and wealth of upper-class houses in the era that preceded the break-up of World War I. As Deleuze points out:

[P]resent or out of field, history is never scenery. It is caught obliquely in a low-angled perspective in a rising or setting ray, a kind of laser which comes and cuts into the

crystal, disorganizes its substance, hastens its darkening and disperses its sides, under a pressure that is all the more powerful for being external.¹⁴¹

In these films the external pressure of history never seems to pierce the melancholic self-enclosure of the 'crystals of time'. Indeed, the impact of characters like Ruth Wilcox, Newland Archer or Lily Bart is, in the end, closely attached to a particular perception of time. They speak to us from a different temporal dimension; they remain *within the crystal*.

The house in the period film ultimately provides a potent figure for this other temporal dimension, which emerges in the interstices of the visible within the narrative search for images of 'home' in the landscapes of literary tradition, and the network of symbolic objects that structures the airless worlds of melodrama. The centrality of narratives of repression and loss suggests an important shift: from spatial figure of plenitude – liable to become the fetish of pastness and nostalgia – to the figural absences motivated by the ghosts of displacement and memory. In particular, the mode of textual excess of the mannerist film returns time and again to feminine images 'fixed' in time. The self-enclosed world of the house and the perfect image of the vanishing woman thus consecrate melancholy and loss. In the next chapter, I move on to the feminist period film to interrogate the figure of the tableau beyond the limits of the melancholic imagination.

Chapter 3 – Time and the Image: The Tableau

Still Images/Moving Narratives: The Tableau Effect

The mannerist period film presents an intensification of the textural play of the image, in the double sense of visual texturing (or density), and fabric of encoded textual meanings. In particular, the intersections between cinema, photography and painting reveal the heterogeneous spaces of cinema, stressing the mixture of visual and temporal regimes. Nowhere is this more evident than in the structural moments where still visual citations provide the film with ‘painterly’ or ‘photographic’ moments.

The use of painterly sources to reconstruct the atmosphere of a given era and validate the film’s connection with the cultural heritage is one of the hallmarks of the historical film as a genre doubly committed to both authenticity and spectacularity. The presence of painting in the period film has been integral to realist reconstructions of the past that for the most part conceal the heterogeneous nature of its visual referents. Chronological criteria are often pushed aside in the production of a figurative universe that ‘may result from a process of adaptation and of redistribution of functions affecting chromatic, plastic and lighting elements coming from various contexts’.¹ The compositional strategies that introduce allusions to Romantic painting in *THE DUELLISTS* (Ridley Scott, 1977), to French Impressionism in *A SUNDAY IN THE COUNTRY*, or to the bourgeois interiors of Vermeer as well as British landscape painting in *SENSE AND SENSIBILITY* provide diffuse vedutas that act as guarantor of the realism of the period piece.

I would like nevertheless to look at the play with the painterly, not as illusionism or imitation but as *effect*. Tableaux and deframings can function as critical strategies in the mannerist aesthetics of period drama. By tableau I refer to the various effects provoked by the irruption of painterly textures and still moments in the temporal system of the film shot, as indexes of self-reflexivity in the visual text. The emphasis on framing as artifice is often achieved through double-framing devices that introduce an immobile frame within the mobile (film) frame, usually with the inclusion of paintings or photographs in the *mise-en-scène*. However, instances of temporal and spatial manipulation of the

shot should also be considered: fixed framings, long takes, slow motion, zooms or superimpositions strain the narrative as a whole, drawing our attention to the visual textures of the film. This 'overwriting' of the shot throws into relief the tension between discursive and figural dimensions of film.

As a discursive tool, these framing effects mark the intrusion of a different regime of figuration that detaches the shot from the broader diegetic space, disturbing the conventions of narrative and spectacle. I focus in particular on questions of intermediality and temporality that make the tableau a figure of fantasy: from the clash between narrative and stasis to the impact of the mobile or variable eye on cinematic effects of anamorphosis and deframing. These questions converge around the function of the tableau as imaginary portrait in feminist appropriations of the past. Through a comparative look at *THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY*, *ARTEMISIA* and *THE GOVERNESS*, I will discuss the complex exchanges between fidelity, rewriting and feminine subjectivity motivated by the feminist gestures of the mannerist film.

A recurrent figure in the period film, the tableau (the term is inspired by the theatrical practice of the *tableau vivant*, discussed in the previous chapter) takes the presence of the human figure as its centripetal source of meaning. Popular fiction films concerned with historical characters and events often include pictorial references in the *mise-en-scène* for historical contextualisation. Canvases and *tableau vivants* enhance the genre effect in classical biopics such as *REMBRANDT* (Alexander Korda, 1936) or *LUST FOR LIFE* (Vincente Minnelli, 1956), and their use is justified to the extent that they become perfectly integrated as part of the narrative *mise-en-scène*. This convention extends to the biographies of monarchs and prominent historical characters embodied by actors characterised at one point or another as walking illustrations of famous portraits (for example, Charles Laughton as Henry VIII in *THE PRIVATE LIFE OF HENRY VIII*, Alexander Korda, 1933).² The painted portrait and the *tableau vivant* are therefore particularly significant for investigating the period film's evolving concern not only with historicity, but also with the relationship between reconstruction, figuration, and realism.

The painted portrait and the *tableau* introduce an element of disturbance in the temporality of the film text – an argument at the basis of diverse studies on the interaction of cinema and painting in modernist art cinema.³ Antonio Costa has discussed the diverse manifestations of the 'painting effect' (*effeto dipinto*) in film,⁴ highlighting the resistance to mutual assimilation when 'painting, materially fixed, but optically (mentally) mobile is translated into something that is materially mobile, but optically fixed'.⁵ Such resistance pushes to the fore the discursive over the narrative. A specific instance of this can be found in what Costa calls the 'picture effect' (*effeto quadro*). The picture effect results from film citing a specific painting, or a specific pictorial genre (for instance, the landscape

or the portrait). The picture effect provokes the interference between two modes of the reality effect: that which belongs to painting, and that which is consubstantial to cinema – resulting in the weakening of the *cinematic* reality effect, or the *tableau vivant*, a term that often carries pejorative (that is, anti-cinematic) undertones.

In the case of the *picture effect*, the metalinguistic instance manifests as a confrontation between two models, two modes of structuring the spatio-temporal co-ordinates and the lighting and chromatic values. In other words, the *picture effect* produces an effect, more or less evident, of *suspended time*, *finite* (or *complete*) *space* and of *chromatic selection*, whereas the film shot produces a sort of iconic imitation of duration, of openness of space and of chromatic variability.⁶

Costa stresses the recurrence of the *tableau vivant* in the work of modernist filmmakers – for example, the picture effect that reproduces Leonardo Da Vinci's *Last Supper* in *VIRIDIANA* (Buñuel, 1961) or the parodic quotation of Pontorno's *Deposition from the Cross* in *LA RICOTTA* (Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1963). In these cases the *tableau vivant* works as a *scandalous* intrusion in all senses of the word. The films mix the sacred and profane, using the religious *tableau* for purposes of carnivalesque inversion. The *tableau* throws into question the reality effect via the introduction of an extraneous figurative regime, provoking an interruption.

Costa's considerations around the painting effect are especially useful for addressing the mannerism of the period film. Its reliance on visual intertexts offers a gradation covering a broad spectre of possibilities from a (modernist) aesthetics of interruption to the illusionist re-creation of the past – that is, from a 'centrifugal' aesthetics of distanciation to a 'centripetal' aesthetics of immersion. In Kubrick's *BARRY LYNDON* the narrative is fragmented in precisely framed vedutas: static long shots of outdoor views or aristocratic interiors where actors and objects are rigidly blocked. The social scenes evoke the landscapes in eighteenth-century British painting (reminiscent of Thomas Gainsborough, Joshua Reynolds and William Hogarth among others) and the camera explores these views as two-dimensional surfaces: zooming out from the detail to the big picture, inscribing a mobile eye detached from subjective positioning, cutting only occasionally to shot/reverse-shot patterns.⁷ Bodies become objects trapped in the relentless succession of paintings, or slowly moving figures that traverse the frame from background to foreground. Landscape paintings, epic battles, conversation pieces, and family portraits introduce the painterly as blueprint for the film's system of representation.⁸ Yet the static compositions only enhance the disruption caused by the punitive violence (Lady Lyndon's suicide attempt or Barry's beating of Lord Bullingdon are shot with shaky hand-held camera-work) that underlies this exquisite yet brutal social order. The picture effect

bears the imprint of a historical landscape that constrains the individual hero's progress. As Michel Chion points out, 'image and text really never become one... the image in Kubrick lends itself to commentary: it does not refuse it, but it does not give itself to it either. It is the site of a singular instance of passive resistance'.⁹ The division of the narrative in pictorial chapters, as well as the relentlessly ironic third-person voiceover narration (which 'captures the image in a manner both irrefutable and unconfirmable')¹⁰ reveal the extent to which Barry's trajectory is not individual and romantic, but dependant on a broader movement, both historical and social, that becomes the true subject of the film.¹¹

In the modernist period film, the divergence between tableau and caption that de-naturalises the film image intertwines historical representation with the historicity of the medium. Rohmer's *L'ANGLAISE ET LE DUC* / *THE LADY AND THE DUKE* (2001), revisits prior experiments with anti-naturalistic painted backgrounds (in *PERCEVAL LE GALLOIS*, 1978) and silent-film intertitles (*LA MARQUISE D'O* / *THE MARQUISE OF O*, 1976) through recourse to computer-generated effects. Unlike in Hollywood spectacles, the architectural reconstruction carried out through new digital images works towards modernist distancing: the effect is not three-dimensional photographic realism but an artifice that plays to maximum effect in outdoor scenes, where actors become minuscule figures moving within ostensibly static painted views of eighteenth-century Paris. These flat vedutas, which replicate eighteenth-century watercolours, are a throwback to the painted panorama as well as to the painted backgrounds in the films of Georges Méliès,¹² as they stand visually disconnected from the more detailed backgrounds of the bourgeois indoor scenes – 'a divide that defines... two pictorial regimes that correspond to two different social classes'.¹³ This strategy rejects the closeness of melodrama, putting visuals at the service of the political thinking piece. The film adopts the viewpoint of an outsider – an aristocrat of Scottish descent whose allegiances lie with the monarchy – to cast a critical view on the Reign of Terror during the French Revolution. The frame comes to the fore as the organising principle of intelligibility, establishing a dialectic relationship between stillness and movement, bourgeois interiors and street violence, terror and politics. The film works as a cinematic *trompe l'oeil* that trumps film movement, and where narrative's reality effect is consistently undone by the emphasis on literary language.

As a filmic notion, the *trompe l'oeil* exerts a threat over the (repressive) perspectival system that banishes seeing from reading. The *trompe l'oeil* in the plastic arts implies a two-phase movement: 'the eye is "taken in" or deceived only momentarily, the entire aesthetic effect being dependent upon the eventual recognition that the painting is, in fact, a painting'.¹⁴ Ruiz's *TIME REGAINED* applies this principle to the *mise-en-scène* of the past, rejecting realism's perspectival system – and goal-oriented narrative with it – in favour of a fragmented

mise-en-scène devoid of a central, unifying subjectivity where *trompe l'oeil* effects multiply. Whereas in *THE LADY AND THE DUKE* the shot becomes a *veduta* that defamiliarises the rigid codes of historical representation, in *TIME REGAINED* space is fluid, unstable: moving platforms in the mise-en-scène destabilise perspectival relations between objects and bodies; jump cuts and superimpositions produce uncanny effects. Rather than the mise-en-scène of the past, both *THE LADY AND THE DUKE* and *TIME REGAINED* carry out a mise-en-scène of memory that questions the reconstruction. The past is thus figural rather than figurative: the eye is divided from vision; 'seeing' does not equal 'knowing'.

Painting effects in period pieces such as *TIME REGAINED* and *THE LADY AND THE DUKE*, but also in biopics such as *CARAVAGGIO*, *GOYA EN BURDEOS/GOYA IN BORDEAUX* (Carlos Saura, 1999), *LOVE IS THE DEVIL* (John Maybury, 1998) or *NIGHTWATCHING* (Peter Greenaway, 2007) typify the encounter of period drama with experimental art cinema. In these films, the intersection of cinema and painting becomes an intermedial strategy in the reconstruction of filmic authorship within the text, while implicitly questioning popular approaches to history and representation. The picture effect questions the emphasis on the frame as agent of intelligibility; instead, it seeks transformation, positioning the spectator as a mobile eye in diverse fantasy configurations geared towards the (re)construction of identity.

The Shot-Tableau: From Pregnant Moment to Hieroglyph

The tableau acknowledges both the absence of the past, its fixity, and at the same time the possibility of *reanimating* it. Popular historical cinema has exploited the picture effect through its integration into diegetic fiction. As Pascal Bonitzer noted back in 1985, the plastic value of the shot and its propinquity to painting have been reinforced by the impact of the over-constructed images of music video clips, advertisement and the new digital images.¹⁵ For Bonitzer, the function of the tableau vivant or 'shot-tableau' is dialogic, producing a passage between fiction and discourse, theme and commentary, past and present. This discourse with two voices makes the shot-tableau an oxymoronic figure that captures the 'immobile movement' of the film text, and poses a significant moment in its narrative.

The recurrence of tableau moments in filmic narratives provides an intriguing connection with prior aesthetic debates around the representation of time and space in the plastic arts. With Barthes, a connection arises between the tableau in the academic practices of the eighteenth century, and its resurgence in early twentieth-century modernist artworks such as Bertolt Brecht's drama and Eisen-

stein's film montage. Barthes retrieves the tableau as an intermedial figure (common to theatre, painting, cinema, and literature) that reintroduces the question of time into visual representation through the figuration of the 'essential moment':

Necessarily total, this instant will be artificial (unreal; this is not a realistic art), a hieroglyph in which can be read at a single glance (at one grasp, if we think in terms of theatre and cinema) the present, the past, and the future; that is, the historical meaning of the represented action. This crucial instant, totally concrete and totally abstract, is what Lessing subsequently calls (in the *Laocoon*) the *pregnant moment*... The pregnant moment is just this presence of all the absences (memories, lesson, promises) to whose rhythm History becomes both intelligible and desirable.¹⁶

In his aesthetic treatise *Laocoon: An Essay upon the Limits of Poetry and Painting* (1766), Lessing puts forward the notion of the 'pregnant moment' to grapple with the porousness of the boundary that divides the artistic 'genres'. Such boundary would confine literature to the realm of the temporal, and painting to the realm of the spatial arts.¹⁷ However, painting has long attempted to replicate historical time through mimesis or representation. The pregnant moment constitutes an attempt to conciliate (narrative) temporality with the 'essential' spatial character of the visual – that is, to domesticate the eye into the spatio-temporal topography of discourse – by choosing the right moment: 'the one which is most suggestive and from which the preceding and succeeding actions are more easily comprehensible'.¹⁸ Lessing's pregnant moment is thus a hybrid composite, an exercise in synthesis that results in a devalued form of historical representation.

With the emergence of cinema, other forms of figuring time in the image push aside the idea of the pregnant or essential moment. Cinema raises instead the notion of what Aumont calls the 'variable eye' – the mobile frame that bears the imprint of time. The cinematographic image turns to the capture of the 'fugitive instant' in a search that has been linked to the tenets of the revolution in Impressionist art, as well as to technical progress – as suggested by the new optic sensations provided by the train journey. Louis Lumière's views and panoramas participate in this progressive freeing of the gaze initiated by modern art, as they lay out the templates for narrative cinema and, therefore, for the progressive re-domestication of the variable eye into (narrative) discourse.¹⁹ The doctrine of the pregnant moment is irremediably superseded by the 'fugitive instant' of photography and cinema, and by the non-representational arts. With Barthes, however, the tableau makes a brief comeback in twentieth-century art on the grounds of its specificity as a political gesture; in Brecht as in Eisenstein, the tableau moment makes history 'both intelligible and desirable'.

When the tableau makes its entrance in popular historical film it inevitably comes across as mannerist: a kitsch remainder of highbrow culture and classical moulds oblivious to the ruptures of modernism. The ‘strangeness’ introduced by the shot-tableau conflicts with the forms of classical narrative. In this respect, it has been argued that the encounter between public history and Hollywood-style melodrama results in a clash between the commodity fetish of the public image figured by the tableau vivant, and the closeness and identification sought by melodrama’s mode of address.²⁰ However, when public history is fully re-framed as private history the over-determined moment of the tableau becomes something else: an enigma, posing a hermeneutic task for the film itself to work through. The narrative thus becomes an elaborate caption around the fetish-tableau.

For example, the final shot (and, by extension, the plot) of *ELIZABETH* depends on the intertextual recognition of Cate Blanchett as Queen Elizabeth for its effectiveness. By way of elaborate costuming, make-up and lighting, the actress is transformed into a ‘walking tableau’.²¹ Elizabeth’s mask-like royal portrait and caption as ‘the Virgin Queen’ poses an enigma to coming centuries – an enigma that motivates the film’s narrative of transgressive sexual desire and political intrigues. Other examples are *GIRL WITH A PEARL EARRING* (Peter Webber, 2003) and the biopic *VOLAVÉRUNT* (Bigas Luna, 1999), in which Francisco de Goya’s canvas *Nude Maja* (1800) and the mystery surrounding the model for this supposed portrait of the Duchess of Alba are the premise for a plot of sexual intrigues in the court of King Charles IV of Spain. These films carry out their own ‘psycho-ekphrasis’, to borrow Brooks’s term about Freud’s extended analysis of the Moses of Michelangelo. For Brooks, Freud ‘works through the narrative of putative emotions and psychological states that result in the moment of self-containment represented by Michelangelo. If his concern is altogether with the inward narrative of Moses’ reactions, it is no less a narrative’.²² Likewise, in the mannerist figuration of elaborate psychosexual narratives produced by the contemporary biopic, the tableau effect emerges as the intrinsic *origin* and not the extrinsic illustration of the themes of the past. The hieroglyph overlaps with the tableau, the obvious with the obtuse meaning.

The illustrative quality of the ‘pregnant moment’ sought by the classical historical film thus shifts into the hieroglyph in the mannerist film. As hieroglyph the tableau is an index of condensation and displacement, producing a moment of ‘arrest’ that introduces the discursive through the purely iconic, and vice versa. As Victor Burgin has noted,²³ the pair ‘pregnant moment/hieroglyph’ can be extrapolated to the shift in Barthes’s analysis from the sphere of modernist politics – the tableau as political practice, the Brechtian ‘social gest’²⁴ – into the third meaning. Through the third meaning Barthes scrutinises the film image beyond the context of narrative and looks at it as fragment, which resists the fixation of

meaning by means of the incorporation of the contingent. The third meaning brings to the surface the hieroglyphic quality of the arrested instant, in contrast with the 'maximum clarity and significance' of the pregnant moment (the 'obvious meaning'). Its self-contained quality brings to the fore the element of fantasy.

The relation between fantasy and the tableau stems from the same quality of arrest. As a visual figure of spatial and temporal compression, the tableau contains a sequence that lends itself to multiple elaborations: intertextual passages through the text that unfold not just syntactically/narratively, but paradigmatically/poetically. Burgin describes his passage through this privileged image in the following way:

I find that my re-entry into the text of the film is by a different route – one destined to take me through a different sequence of images, until I have traversed the text again, to regain another exit into the intertext, from which I shall be returned again... and again, until the *possible* passages have been exhausted, or until I find that the trajectory of associations has become attracted into the orbit of some other semantically/affectively dense textual item, some other fantasy.²⁵

The valuing of the fragment over the (narrative) whole suggests a different reading practice organised around the moment-hieroglyph – one that critically integrates the 'detour for the gaze' posed by the tableau, which 'reminds the spectator of his/her role as exterior viewer'.²⁶ The gaze splits from the eye solicited by a second image that competes with the first, producing a temporal deferral: a re-entry through a different textual interval. This temporal deferral has been exploited in films that use the tableau as the secret of the film: a shift in signification that requires the eye *to move* in order to apprehend its true meaning. The introduction of time separates the moment of vision from the moment of reading in an anamorphosis effect that tends towards the *deframing*: a change in perspective.

For Lyotard, the figure of anamorphosis produces a relationship of exteriority opposed to the projection of the subject into the text – identification replaced by commentary. This relation of exteriority is given by the 'wrong' position of the subject: the reading eye has to move in order to truly see. Lyotard's treatment of anamorphosis as a figure in the text lies in the interplay of two imbricated spaces,²⁷ where only one can be recognised at a time, as it obscures the other one. Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors* (1533) provides a paradigmatic example. A 'stain' (the distorted image of a skull) disrupts the clear lines of the representation: a 'bad' figure-form that disrupts the 'good' perspectival forms by introducing a different perspective.

The tableau's critique is thus inscribed through the signifier, and not through the signified. The superimposition of two different spaces (analogous, as we



Anamorphosis: THE AMBASSADORS (1533)

will see, to the play of the superimposition in film) hints at a critical deconstruction of realism leading to the modernist revolution in the plastic arts.²⁸

In cinema, the figure of the tableau arguably brings to the fore the play between the obvious and the obtuse meaning, the gaze and the eye: the eye momentarily escapes the perspectival machine when immobility traverses an intrinsically mobile medium. According to Lyotard, the figural appears within an already figured space whenever '[t]hrough the injection of another space, illustration shows itself as illustration, as auto-illustration.'²⁹ However, 'truth' falls not within the second inscription, but within difference itself. With regard to *The Ambassadors*, Lyotard notes:

The simple 90-degree rotation on the axis of vision is enough to dissolve representation. The truth of the latter is death. To perform this rotation is therefore an ontological act that inverts the relation between visible and invisible, signifier and represented scene... Lateral vision gives us this 'signification,' which went unseen in direct vision. But this signification is, in turn, nothing other than absence itself – death – and not a 'content': the anamorphosis instructs us that reading requires that one die to representation, to the phantasy of presence.³⁰

Lyotard's interpretation of anamorphosis can be extrapolated to the interruption that the tableau brings about when inserted in the moving-image medium. The superimposition of a different mode of representation over the 'realist' frame (requiring the eye to *move* and therefore to see) exposes the differential movement of the film-work, where narrative represses it.

The tableau in film is in itself an *a*-narrative figure which may, however, work its way into the fiction as metaphor, a secret: a representation that hides another. As Bonitzer points out, '[as] parody, homage or enigma, the shot-tableau always provokes a splitting of vision and gives the image the quality of a mystery, whether in the religious or in the detective-story sense'.³¹ Jarman's reworking of the biopic in *CARAVAGGIO* would be an example of the former, as the tableau vivant explores the mutual contamination of the sacred and the profane against the background of the sixteenth-century politics of art and patronage. The latter meaning comes to the fore in Peter Greenaway's *THE DRAUGHTSMAN'S CONTRACT* (1982), where the double-framed vedutas of the aristocratic country estate are presented as clues to the murder mystery that structures the film.

Rohmer's *THE MARQUISE OF O*, however, lends itself to a more suggestive elaboration of the meanings of anamorphosis in film. The insert of a shot-tableau reproducing the lighting and composition of the canvas *The Nightmare*, by J.H. Füssli (1781), works as metonymy of the sleeping heroine's imminent rape, as well as metaphor of the event (elided in the film narrative, as well as in the 1810 novella by Heinrich Von Kleist that the film adapts). Indeed, the figure of the incubus hovering over the sleeping woman, which is missing in the reworking of the shot-tableau, has been displaced into the gaze of the Count, who saves the Marquise during the siege of the citadel, but then rapes her in her sleep. As Bonitzer points out, the formalism of the shot that encrypts the secret event becomes the metaphor that motivates the narrative of *THE MARQUISE OF O*. The film starts with a newspaper notice: a virtuous widow and mother of two, the Marquise of O, asks for the unknown father of her yet unborn third child to come forward. The film then flashes back to the story of the Marquise who, having escaped the siege unscathed thanks to the intercession of the Count, finds herself pregnant without knowing how. Repudiated by her parents, she publishes the scandalous notice to prove her innocence.

Placed in the aftermath of the siege, the shot-tableau is strikingly anti-naturalist, matching the stylised *mise-en-scène* of fixed frames, vertical lines and theatrical lighting. The film is divided into chapters separated by written intertitles which, imitating silent cinema, summarise part of the action, thus allowing for rapid transition between episodes in which complex in-depth compositions make up a series of vignettes or ‘pregnant moments’. In contrast, the shot-tableau evoking *The Nightmare* works as a call in the text – the figure as intertextual moment that evokes previous representations of the feminine body in Western art. But the frame also does something else: it flags up the materiality of the female body – its very presence – as the absence that determines the enigma of the film. The shot-tableau of the Marquise thus becomes the ‘stain’ at the centre of a text that displaces attention from predatory male sexuality to the enigma of feminine sexuality as both scandalous and non-representable. The relative early placement of the tableau in the story allows for its interpretation as the secret that generates the narrative movement of the text, but also the (white) stain that provokes the displacement of the eye, pushing feminine sexuality to the fore. In this moral tale about vindicated virginity, the Marquise is ironically represented as pure oxymoron: both mother and vestal, tainted and pure, mobile and statuary. The entropy unleashed by the shot-tableau is brought back to order (and closure) by the Count’s version of the events. In his final declaration of love to the Marquise, he compares her to a haunting childhood vision of a swan. He besmears the creature with mud, but the swan dives into the water and re-emerges miraculously clean. However, this metaphor for the Marquise’s innocence fails to erase the eye’s detour caused by the shot-tableau: a fissure that signals femininity as the eccentric ‘textual stain’ haunting the limits of the text.

The Portrait as Fetish

The notion of femininity as enigma reappears time and again in the textures of the mannerist film as a link between popular melodrama and the traditions of European art cinema. In *THE AGE OF INNOCENCE*, several paintings that contribute to the spectacular immersion in the colours and textures of the period also construe the static image of Ellen as a disturbing outsider. Ellen’s return is provocatively ‘announced’ by the already-cited Bouguereau painting *The Return of the Spring* (in Brooks’s words, ‘a strange portrayal of resistance to sexual solicitation’,³² which seems to hint at Ellen’s predicament vis-à-vis Julius Beaufort). Her house is decorated with opaque works: Newland admires an Italian *macchiaoli* painting of a faceless woman by the sea, and a reproduction of Fernand Khnopff’s Symbolist canvas *Sphinx* (1896) presides over the moment in which

Newland openly declares his feelings for Ellen, and kneels down before his beloved. The paintings not only imply Ellen's bohemian background and tastes, but transform her into the ultimate enigma that seduces Newland.³³

Ellen's final imaginary portrait fixed through Newland's gaze, as well as Lily's body in the closing scene of *THE HOUSE OF MIRTH* – literally a *memento mori* – narrow the potentiality of the images of the past down to pre-determined meanings. These tableaux vivants evoke not the traumatic loss rehearsed by the respective narratives, but the melancholic sensibility of the period film in which, as we have seen, the feminine becomes the touchstone in the edifice of memory. As Dominique Païni remarks:

A painted portrait in a film reminds us that love results from a framing, from a flashing fetishization, without duration. In the end the film narrates only the administration of its own loss. That's why a portrait is a sign that always produces melancholy.³⁴

The sacrifice of Ellen for the sake of her image/portrait (an image of both fear and desire) recalls the uses of the painted portrait in classical Hollywood melodrama. On the one hand, we find the gothic film tradition, in which woman's subjectivity is threatened by a painted portrait, symptom of her own oedipal anxieties: *REBECCA* (Hitchcock, 1940); *GASLIGHT* (Cukor, 1944); or *EXPERIMENT PERILOUS* (Jacques Tourneur, 1944) are some examples. This strand finds its counterpoint in a series of romantic narratives focalised through a masculine point of view, where the painted portrait stands for the (unattainable) object of desire. The hero falls in love, literally, with a portrait in *LAURA* (Otto Preminger, 1944) and *PORTRAIT OF JENNIE* (William Dieterle, 1948).³⁵ As René Démonis has pointed out, the painted portrait is definitely closer to kitsch than to the work of art, but cinema blatantly exploits its phantasmatic powers, censored by the modern evolution of artistic ideology. The painted portrait summons the dead, the presence of the past in the present, the double and the uncanny in a repertoire of gendered representations: portraits of women that haunt the young heroines and constitute role models that are both admired and rejected (*REBECCA*, *GASLIGHT*); dreamlike images that awaken fantasies of 'pygmalionism' (*LAURA*, *PORTRAIT OF JENNIE*) and bring to the fore the 'ambivalence of the desiring subject, at the same time destroyer and saviour'.³⁶

The difference between the double-framing of the film image through the inclusion of a painted portrait in the *mise-en-scène*, and the double-framing through the transformation of the image into a framed portrait establishes the distance that goes from the classical image to the mannerist image: the former absorbs the strangeness produced by the inclusion of painting in the frame; the latter plays on the picture effect, effectively arresting the image. The tableau vivant of Ellen on the pier, in particular, is a direct descendant from the mannerist reworking of the portrait theme in the film that both culminates and outlives

the classical Hollywood cycle: Hitchcock's *VERTIGO*.³⁷ A modern-day detective fiction, *VERTIGO* uses period motifs – the portrait of Carlotta which, from its museum setting, seems to exert a fatal attraction on the mysterious Madeleine – in order to stage a two-part narrative about a detective's *cinematic*, variable eye, haunted by the enigma of woman as a series of still portraits.

For Païni, the portrait appears as a founding gesture in Western culture, and therefore a common link in all the visual arts. Playing with the etymological connection between 'portrait' and 'return' in the Italian word *ritratto*, as well as *retracer* meaning both 'retelling' and 'redrawing', he reads *VERTIGO* as

Scotty's restitution of a lost face, which makes of the film as a whole a portrait, a *mise-en-scène* that identifies with the act of portraying insofar as such act has its origins in the act of representing from a contour, drawn from the projected shadow of a profile.³⁸

The portrait as restitution overlaps with the fabrication of the portrait as a *mise à distance* in which woman is reduced to a rhetorical figure, a mere projection of the eye. In the moments in which Madeleine appears still, often in profile, her figure finely cut against a soft background, the image of woman takes on the value of a sacred object; even if individualised, her portrait – and by extension, the portrait of the star – represents an idealised type.³⁹ This fetishisation of the female image acquires all its meaning through the truncated two-part narrative and its movement of uncanny repetition. The Pygmalion theme incrustated in the variable eye comes to the fore when one model is replaced by another. The portrait of woman then becomes a sign that gestures towards the void – the absence of a referent. Madeleine's portrait is one such *trompe l'oeil*, reintroducing the threat of a lack defused by the fetishist attachment to the image.

VERTIGO fully enters the mannerist phase of the classical Hollywood narrative: the apparatus calling attention to itself, the realist narrative bursting through its seams. As Mary Ann Doane points out:

Realist painting involves a process of taming or reassuring while the *trompe l'oeil*, on the one hand, fascinates or thrills and on the other threatens... Binding together knowledge and belief [fetishism] acts as a defense against a castration which signifies to the subject his own structuring lack... In the *trompe l'oeil*, however, fetishism as a defense is broken down into its elements and analyzed, forcing a gap between knowledge and belief, indicating the re-emergence of lack and unveiling the subject's unity as fundamentally contradictory.⁴⁰

As it is often noted, *VERTIGO*'s uncanny structure (famously involving the tragic loss of one woman and her sinister 'return from the dead', forcing the sacrifice of a second one) is a textbook example of the cinematic framing of woman as partial object in the narcissistic male eye. The film equally poses the 'framing' of

the phallic gaze par excellence – the detective's gaze – as both plotter and victim of its own set-up. However, this two-part mechanism is subject to a temporal disjunction: a shift in knowledge experienced by the spectator but hidden to the organising consciousness of the film, the all-powerful (at least, in the first half of the film) eye of the detective. Such disjunction has been coded as 'suspense', Hitchcock's trademark signature. However, this temporal disjunction also foregrounds the tableau's structural disjunction, implicit in the already discussed figures of the *trompe l'oeil* and the anamorphosis: figures which appeal to the eye as a (re-)reading tool by introducing time as a corrective of vision.

The excessiveness of the feminine in this and other examples of Hollywood mannerism – 1950s melodrama being the towering example – extends to the drama of the 'lost woman' as motor of the melancholic imagination in *THE AGE OF INNOCENCE*. What opportunities are then left for the feminist reader (as cultural rewriter) to engage with the persistent enigma of femininity, classically signified through the tableau and the portrait? As Doane has pointed out, the image's *closeness* – the lack of distance or gap between sign and referent – characterises both the hieroglyphic and the 'hieroglyphic of femininity'. In the Freudian narrative of sexuality, woman and her body are involved in the same lack of distance, and the same ready identification of the female self with castration. The masculine self, in contrast, develops a spatial distance (disavowal of castration) that rapidly becomes a temporal distance in the service of knowledge, allowing him to progress towards a position of mastery ('the subject supposed to know'). Woman equals closeness to the body, to what is in open view – or rather to what it is not (the penis).⁴¹

In this configuration, masquerade entails the *manufacturing* of a lack in the form of a certain distance between oneself and one's image. Masquerade, as developed from Joan Rivière's classic analysis,⁴² has proved crucial for a theorisation of sexual difference and of femininity as an effect (be it textual, performative and/or visual): womanliness as mask that can be worn or removed. For Rivière, masquerade exteriorises the hysterical wish to include in oneself the Other's gaze: 'an anxiety-ridden compensatory gesture, as a position which is potentially disturbing, uncomfortable, and inconsistent, as well as psychically painful for the woman'.⁴³ It is only in subsequent revisions that the theorisation of femininity as masquerade becomes a strategy. As Doane puts it:

Masquerade... attributes to the woman the distance, alienation, and divisiveness of self (which is constitutive of subjectivity in psychoanalysis) rather than the closeness and excessive presence which are the logical outcome of the psychoanalytic drama of sexualized linguistic difference. The theorization of femininity as masquerade is a way of appropriating this necessary distance or gap, in the operation of semiotic systems, of deploying it for women, of reading femininity differently.⁴⁴

Therefore, masquerade results from *two* different moments of perception: the *feminine* moment and the (second) *feminist* moment – two different forms of consciousness that involve both immediacy and a later moment of reflection given by historicity. Where it was a symptom, related to ‘being’, masquerade becomes a strategy, related to ‘reading’ (and a metaphor for spectatorship).

This separation can be found in the dialogic structure of the tableau – a figure at the service of the double consciousness of the period film. Femininity is, inescapably, masquerade in the same way that the past is always inescapably ‘interpretation’ or ‘reconstruction’. This makes the period film a negotiation between two moments, locating historicity precisely in the intervals of performance, between being and mask. In this respect, *THE HOUSE OF MIRTH*, like other period dramas that lay their foundations on the association of women with death (*THE WINGS OF THE DOVE*, *PICNIC AT HANGING ROCK* [Peter Weir, 1975], or *PHOTOGRAPHING FAIRIES*) registers this movement ambiguously: woman’s death and her rebirth into a beautiful painterly image are integral to the formation of a melancholic subjectivity, which crystallises in Lily’s performance. The barely glimpsed strangeness of the first, literal tableau (which encapsulates her alienation from her own role) and the realised and captioned image of her death offered in the second tableau cruelly delimit her (aborted) trajectory.

Whereas the picture effect in *THE HOUSE OF MIRTH* frames the feminine as a symptom of the melancholic imagination aligned with a queer sensibility, the figure of the tableau provides a context for the investigation of the feminine within films that oppose portraits in movement to the reifying capacities of the shot-tableau. The tableau can be read as an ambiguous yet disruptive gesture, emphasising the frictions in the dovetailing of literary imagination with its visual articulation. These films rejoin the conservative ambiguity of the mannerist film with elaborate scenarios of fantasy where the tableau can be re-inscribed – and investigated – as (self-)portrait.

Portraits and Tableaux in the Feminist Imagination

The films under discussion – *THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY*, *ARTEMISIA* and *THE GOVERNESS* – all touch on the notion of *portraying* – not as static figuration, but as a dynamic notion involving mobile figures against often defamiliarised backgrounds of the past. These films, as their titles make apparent, are portraits of women as historical characters, romantic heroines, and artists; they are representative of a strand of period drama that focuses on reconstructing women’s histories from nineteenth-century novels, biographies, paintings or photographic snapshots.

These and other fictional female portraits, such as those offered by the international period films *ORLANDO*, *THE PIANO*, *LITTLE WOMEN* (Gillian Armstrong, 1994), *SENSE AND SENSIBILITY*, *WASHINGTON SQUARE* (Agnieszka Holland, 1997), or *LA VEUVE DE SAINT-PIERRE* (Patrice Leconte, 2000), produce an image of women's cinema at the crossroads, poised between a feminist tradition and a post-feminist popular culture. 'Postfeminism' is a problematic term that has come to question the viability and even the desirability of feminism(s) in contemporary media culture, where, as has been noted by Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra, 'certain kinds of female agency are recognizably and profitably packaged as commodities'.⁴⁵ However, we must be careful before periodizing the postfeminist moment in a linear fashion, as superseding previous feminist cultures. Rather, postfeminism may usefully refer to the tension between the legacy of the historically specific vocabulary (and histories) of (second-wave) feminism, and the retreat into former (prefeminist) conceptions of femininity.⁴⁶ I will use the term to refer to the renewed engagement with the narratives of feminism from the scene of the contemporary consumerist cultures, including popular genres like the period film. These films subordinate attentive historical reconstruction to a variety of reading gestures, reimagining women's role in social and literary history. As such, they constitute a belated engagement with the icons and figures of femininity inherited from cultural history, but also with previous models of feminist appropriation and representation in film. The mannerist aesthetic dictates a relationship with the past that should neither be understood in terms of 'fidelity' and 'authenticity', nor in terms of radical break. Rather, 'pastiche' and 'rewriting' emerge as the key terms in these portraits of women, and in the (discursive) limits given by the portrait's visual *frame* (of interpretation).

The contemporary period film is highly pliable to the politics and investments of women's cinema. In the early 1990s, the crossover success (from art house to mainstream hits) of *ORLANDO* and *THE PIANO* achieved what Teresa de Lauretis considers one of the accomplishments of women's cinema: to defy 'aesthetic notions implicit in high art and avant-garde practices, while systematically critiquing the dominant forms of cinematic representation which are, after all, those of popular cinema'.⁴⁷ As an instrument for a feminist critique, women's cinema undermines the binary thinking that links progressive to avant-garde, and popular to reactionary – as do the forms of the period film. More crucially:

The feminist critique of representation might have intended to destroy, or to deflect, the lures and pleasures of narrative pleasure and identification, but it has also meant, and realized, a shifting of the ground of intelligibility and pleasure. And by shifting the very ground of representation, it has effectively unsettled the standard frame of reference of cinema – the standard frame of visibility, what can be seen, and eroticized – and altered the conditions of representability of the social subject.⁴⁸

As the tableau-figure quite literally textualises ‘the standard frame of visibility’, figural analysis can uncover the relationship between historical representability and contemporary consciousness. But how and to what extent may postfeminist culture produce the grounds for such an epochal shift, as suggested by de Lauretis?

Ever since the second wave of feminism in the 1970s, both feminist theory and women’s cinema have returned time and again to the scene of history to retrieve marginal subjectivities erased from official accounts, and explore the diverse configurations of the gendered subject in relation with dominant artistic traditions. This is what modernist feminist texts achieve in exemplary manner. One of the most celebrated is Sally Potter’s *THRILLER* (1979), which deconstructs highbrow art – Giacomo Puccini’s opera *La Bohème* (1896) – and classic narrative aesthetics with the tools of the thriller, finding in them a cultural formation built on the (sensationalist) repression (or killing) of femininity and difference. *THRILLER* unfolds as a murder investigation in which Mimi, the protagonist, is both the victim and the (meta-)detective: ‘I am trying to remember, to understand. There were some bodies on the floor – one of them is mine. Did I die? Was I murdered? If so, who killed me and why? What does it mean?’ Mimi’s/Potter’s questions are shaped by the counter-cinema politics of the 1970s. In *THRILLER*, adaptation functions as an oppositional practice that frustrates oedipal narrative structures by making intelligible the alienation of woman within them. In the 1990s, the above questions still resonate but their answers need to be reconstructed within the potential for repetition and difference afforded by the period genre’s conservative framework.

The turn to the past by way of historical narratives and period adaptations figures prominently among such responses. Alison Butler has cited the *THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY* alongside other international films that excavate women’s past histories, such as *DAUGHTERS OF THE DUST* (Julie Dash, 1991), *SAINT EL QUSUR/THE SILENCES OF THE PALACE* (Moufida Tlatli, 1994) or *ANTONIA/ANTONIA’S LINE* (Marleen Gorris, 1995). For Butler, these films offer explorations of women’s culture that highlight ‘the pleasures of specificity and of a systematized understanding of femininities... they emphasize the historical presence of women rather than their theoretical absence, and... resist dissolution into generalities’.⁴⁹ Beyond the marked differences in production practices and contexts of reception, the period film makes up an enabling space for women’s experience, linking women’s past and present against the backdrop of patriarchy and female community.

Although it is difficult to disassociate the genre from the commercial, if specialised, end of mainstream cinema in the early 1990s, the critical and box-office success of *ORLANDO* and *THE PIANO* represents a short-lived spell of feminist experimentation. In these films, gender and sexuality come to the fore not only

in relation to the buried histories of women but in the light of prior feminine literary models, from Emily Brontë (whose *Wuthering Heights* is an oft-cited intertext for *THE PIANO*) to Virginia Woolf.⁵⁰ Stella Bruzzi highlights the literary lineage of Campion's *THE PIANO* (and of her previous *AN ANGEL AT MY TABLE*, 1990) as part of a broader trend in feminist criticism and practice: 'since the 70s women have been unearthing forgotten literary works, creating an alternative cultural canon, reinterpreting male texts and forefronting experiences deemed peripheral'.⁵¹ Bruzzi has argued for two models of reclaiming the past in the work of women filmmakers: a 'liberal' and a 'sexual' model, which would work along the lines of the distinction, in literary criticism, between a feminist critique (focusing on the representation of women in canonical literature; posing woman as a political *reader*) and a gynocritics (dealing with the more self-contained and experimental practices of woman as *writer*).⁵² The liberal model coincides with the first wave of social feminism, with films like *MY BRILLIANT CAREER* bent on rereading the hegemonic histories in order to find 'a political and ideological affinity between the struggles of women in the present and figures from the past'.⁵³

The sexual model can be mapped most clearly onto the 1990s (although Bruzzi cites antecedents like Liliana Cavani's *THE NIGHT PORTER*, 1974), and onto the momentum generated by *THE PIANO*. Campion's film unearths hidden aspects of feminine sexual identity, but also complicates feminist narratives with a representation of female sexuality that tests the limits of liberal feminism.⁵⁴ Whereas the classic costume film had been considered a 'feminine' genre – one where women viewers could find themselves at home, whether in melodramas, romances or comedies of manners – *THE PIANO* and *ORLANDO* resolutely avoid easy generic labels, presenting women's history as one of uneasiness and resistance. If classical heroines had been granted a limited degree of freedom within the taming spaces of gardens and drawing rooms or, on the contrary, had enjoyed fantasy scenarios of adventure and social mobility, these examples of contemporary women's cinema dwell on the effort and costs involved in the attainment of such mobility:⁵⁵ women's empowerment cannot be taken for granted.

Late (and critically less successful) 1990s films *THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY*, *THE GOVERNESS* and *ARTEMISIA* arguably continue the exploration of feminine past(s) in this vein; all three films notoriously dwell on scenarios of sexual objectification and abuse that expose not only the mechanisms of patriarchal oppression, but also the taboos of feminine desire. If the contemporary period film is to be considered postfeminist it is not because it has forgotten the lessons of feminism, or because it regards them as obsolete. On the contrary, the mannerist aesthetic shows a renewed engagement with the formative narratives of feminism – the struggle for women's self-expression, the identification between women artists now and then – while filtering them through the politics of romance.

In this respect, the figure's investment in the past as displacement or dis-location produces a particular form of historicity mediated by fantasy. In psycho-analytic terms, 'fantasy' refers to the conscious and unconscious formations releasing the desire that has been repressed or censored by the psychic mechanisms of the subject. Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis define fantasy not as an object of desire but as an 'imaginary *scene* in which the subject is a protagonist, representing the fulfilment of a wish... in a manner that is distorted to a greater or lesser extent by defensive processes'.⁵⁶ Film provides generative matrices of fantasy that facilitate the translation of social representations (public fantasies) into subjectivity and self-representation (private fantasies).⁵⁷ Fantasy is not, however, a straightforward decoding process that ends with the subjection to the ideological work of narrative: it involves an active encoding process that starts in the text itself, and in its mechanisms of writing and address.⁵⁸

In the classic Freudian formulation 'A child is being beaten',⁵⁹ the fantasy unfolds as an elaborate scene producing an unstable subject configured through the successive/simultaneous scenarios of voyeurism and identification. The fantasy stages the subjection of desire to the sanction of the Symbolic order, and develops as a series of transactions between masculine and feminine identifications. These transactions prepare the way for the oedipal and the castration conflict, which – according to Freudian doctrine – will be resolved into the production of normative identities: an active sexual position in the case of boys and a passive one in the case of girls. However, as D.N. Rodowick has pointed out, 'the phantasy is... the product of an explicitly ideological struggle between desire and the Law that is never resolved. Rather, the very architecture of phantasy is an unconscious evasion of the demands of patriarchal law.'⁶⁰ This analysis suggests that fantasy can be explored as a scene of potentiality, and not solely as the imprint of the ready-made scenario of secondary elaboration. Fantasy can generate multiple scripts in continuous negotiation with the closing down of meaning effected by narrative desire. The operations of reading produce a framework that restores the conditions of intelligibility of the text – conditions subject to the historical and cultural matrices of spectatorship, yet offering each time around renewed possibilities of representability.⁶¹ Fantasy is thus an essentially fluid, ambiguous formation; as such it offers a framework to investigate how the figure in period aesthetics permits a work of revision, whose processes need be completed and textualized through the spectator's positioning. In this respect, fantasy opens a door to potentially utopian meanings since 'the uncanny recurrence of phantasy always represents an attempt to restage the Oedipal drama of desire and identity, to rewrite it and to have it conclude differently'.⁶² Past and present cease to be stable, mutually exclusive points of reference. Fantasy allows us to get beyond the question of identification, and

move into the wider possibilities of identity as a *composite*, hybrid entity, negotiated through competing and overlapping textual layerings – and through the discontinuities, as well as the continuities, between ‘past’ and ‘present’ as signifying structures.

Women’s cinema’s specificity is located in its modes of address and rewriting, and the ways it inflects the idiom of the past through disruptive reading gestures. Rather than staging a linear narrative bookended by what woman was and what she has become, these period films set up the past as a complex scene of fantasy with fluid limits and unpredictable outcomes, which strives to articulate utopian meanings.

Deframings: THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY

THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY – Jane Campion’s 1996 adaptation of James’s novel, co-written with Laura Jones – baffled critics and audiences alike. After Campion’s previous critical successes with insightful portraits of women on the edge,⁶³ expectations ran high for Campion’s first foray into the classic adaptation from a canonical male author. However, THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY turned out to be an unpopular film. Its images responded neither to the parameters of psychological depth dictated by the literary model, nor to the expectations raised by Campion’s own previous work. Like Newland Archer in THE AGE OF INNOCENCE (their related names pointing at the common genus of both literary works), the filmic Isabel Archer is a strongly defined individual whose inner journey of self-discovery lands her into the trap of the ideological networks that rule her social world. However, whereas Scorsese’s film reads its intertext with the grain, searching for a synthesis between literary and filmic forms, Campion’s film underscores the impossibility of such synthesis from the viewpoint of sexual difference. James’s proto-modernist melodrama becomes the springboard for a reflection on the problematic inscription of feminine subjectivity within the romance narrative, necessarily disturbing the cohesive portrait produced by perspectival realism.

THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY clearly intends to reverse the subaltern/hegemonic relationship of the adaptation with its source work by appropriating the novel from a position that declares itself overtly peripheral. In Campion’s hands, the adaptation of James’s novel becomes one more chapter in the retrieval of a feminine sexual history, pushing to the fore the sense of continuity with the director’s previous work over the adaptation’s ‘desired’ continuity with its literary model. Notably, the black-and-white credit sequence works as a prologue to the film itself, and as a site of authorial inscription. This prologue briefly presents a

group of young women in two different sections: first, in a sound montage of disembodied voices that improvise comments about love and kissing; secondly, in an extended sequence that ‘portrays’ several women, alone and in groups, posing for the camera. Both voices and bodies convey an idea of difference and individuality – distinctive (Australian) accents, diverse racial identities, idiosyncratic ways of addressing the spectator – but also a sense of strength in female bonding. Their straight looks into the camera traverse the mirror of representation, blocking identification and conveying control over their own performances.

In strong contrast with the optimism of this sequence, and with the idea of a ‘community of women’ (debunked, as we will see, by the conflictive relationships between women in the film),⁶⁴ the diegetic space (in colour) opens with a long close-up of Isabel staring anxiously around her. She is ‘blinded’ to the camera that slowly zooms in on her face, progressively narrowing the shot down to a tight frame around her eyes. Isabel’s close-up belongs with other female faces that trigger off first-person narratives in *Campion’s* films, while refusing to give in to the pressure of the camera-eye. In *AN ANGEL AT MY TABLE*, the young Janet Frame resolutely walks in extreme long shot towards the camera, which cranes down until it is level with her face. Janet looks hesitatingly into it, turns around and runs away. ‘This is the story of my childhood’, an adult female voice informs us in voiceover. The temporal distance between image (past) and sound (present) suggests the command of a female ‘I’ over her own autobiography as well as her capacity for acting as the interpreter of Janet’s journey. Likewise, the first shot of Ada McGrath at the beginning of *THE PIANO* (a subjective shot of the morning light obscured through the fingers that cover Ada’s eyes) seems to express fear and helplessness before the world, but her detached, abstract speech (what she calls her ‘mind’s voice’) asserts Ada’s perfect control over her own story: ‘my father says it is a dark talent and the day I take into my head to stop breathing will be my last’. Her initial words quite literally anticipate the denouement of the film, for it is indeed Ada’s strong, strange will that induces her, against all narrative odds, to drown herself – and then return to the surface. The heroine’s refusal to speak paradoxically empowers her voice; the woman is not only the protagonist but she appoints herself as the only possible interpreter of her life story. The sharp opposition between present and past at the beginning of *THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY* expresses not only the contemporary relevance of the novel, but points to a thread of historical continuity articulated through the syntactic continuity between Isabel Archer and the young Australian women, and the paradigmatic relation initially established between her, Ada and Janet. From its very beginning, *THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY* openly declares its intention to win the lady at the centre of James’s ‘House of Fiction’ for *Campion’s* own portrait gallery of (contentious) feminist heroines.

The credit sequence can be read as a response to the well-known preface to the novel. As Pidduck has pointed out, 'to change the ending, add contemporary prefaces, direct addresses to the camera, interpolated scenes or "queer looks" ... to the canonical text is part of the pleasure of feminist costume drama', marking the feminist intervention of films like *ORLANDO*, *MANSFIELD PARK* or *WASHINGTON SQUARE*.⁶⁵ However, Isabel's introduction cuts short the dialectic dimension established by the contemporary prologue, as well as undermining her portrait as an assertive (proto-)feminist heroine. The opening scene in the film after the black-and-white contemporary-set credit sequence is Lord Warburton's proposal of marriage to Isabel, with the particularity that the climactic moment of the proposal has already taken place. Lord Warburton returns to the secluded grove in the garden where Isabel has taken refuge to add that, should she accept him, she would be able to choose her place of abode since 'he has plenty of houses'. The proposal in the garden is a staple trope in the romance narrative; however, romantic love is here intertwined with property and confinement, marking a dramatic impasse for the woman. The close-up on Isabel's haunted eyes is the truly climactic moment of the scene, both as the precarious site of identification and as object of enquiry.

Ruffled and distressed, Isabel cannot escape her historical predicament through a metatextual twist of the narrative (as in *ORLANDO* or *MANSFIELD PARK*) nor does she return her look defiantly to the camera – she does not talk to it with the freedom that her contemporary 'sisters' do. Isabel has lost her voice in a twofold way: in her inability to *speak* (there is no voiceover articulating her thoughts) and in her inability to *look*. The urgency of Campion's project consists in its ongoing interrogation of the limits of realist forms when it comes down to the expression of feminine subjectivity and desire. The portrait in the film is figured not as a point of dialectic encounter but a site of tension between the limits of what is expressible within the literary construction of the heroine's consciousness, and the investment in Isabel's visual 'portrait of a modern woman' – a mirror for contemporary choices and dilemmas.

Campion's film unfolds as a critical rewriting of James's fiction. The opening minutes in the film establish a dialectical relation between the master text and the adaptation based on the filmmaker's explicit self-inscription in James's monumental work. The credit sequence stands in the same relationship to the film as the 'Preface' holds to James's novel; therefore, it reads as Campion's own response to James's well-known introduction. In the preface, the author asserts his authority over the text in quite explicit fashion:

'Place the centre of the subject in the young woman's own consciousness', I said to myself, 'and you get as interesting and as beautiful a difficulty as you could wish... To depend upon her and her little concerns wholly to see you through will necessitate, remember, your really "doing" her'.⁶⁶

In this introduction, James talks about the construction of his novel in terms of ‘a structure reared with an “architectural” competence’ and supported by the exploration of its central character. Isabel figures as the ‘centre of consciousness’ and as such is ‘endowed with the high attributes of a Subject’.⁶⁷ James’s preface defends psychological interiority as a source of knowledge, but an interiority that is monitored from a premise of narrative control. In contrast, Campion’s filmic writing makes itself visible especially in the spaces of difference that fill in the silences of its literary model – the vanishing points where Isabel ‘escapes’ as a conscious subject. Aborting the pleasures of romance and melodrama, the ‘interesting and beautiful difficulty’ that drives the film’s particular inquiry into femininity is the progressive definition of Isabel as both subject and object of fantasy.

How does the film carry out this inquiry? Unlike the promise of an architecture of interiority made by the literary referent, Isabel’s cinematic portrait puts the emphasis on the body as hermeneutic strategy, and on its relation with the frame. This is announced from the start with the shot that closes the opening credit sequence (an extended hand with the title of the film written all over its palm and middle finger). The body bears a discourse of the contingent, the specific, in conflict with the universality of the realist narrative forms. The film openly explores the tension between the ‘presence’ of the actor’s body, and the frame as interpreter and ‘fixer’ of the body in the past. The rewriting of the novel through the visual motif of the portrait throws into relief the transgressive (i.e. political) potential of the feminine body. Versus the centripetal force of the tableau to fix the human figure as centre of meaning, the film develops as a series of portraits in movement, systematically off-kilter, and occasionally distorted or out of focus, in contrast with the *mise à distance* that fetishises the female figure in the classic portrait. The constant push towards deframing destabilises the portrait, capturing the peripheral, the trivial detail, the hidden and the banal within the limits of the frame. In the process, the film stretches to breaking point the classicist forms of period drama.

THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY plays up the motif of the tableau/portrait as a precarious, shifting figure, haunted by its reverse: the deframing. Like the close-up, the film deframing suggests fragmentation and distortion of perspective – the trace of motion that characterises the variable eye of cinema:

‘*Décadrage*’ [deframing] is... an ironic-sadistic framing premised on the nomadic arbitrariness of the frame and the violence of its imposition on whatever reality it articulates or cuts out. This is a modernist technique – framing as perceptual displacement, as cutting off. If Renaissance perspective leads its spectator into the space of painting, the modernist destruction of perspective excludes its subject from any meaningful entry into representation; its *décadrage* destroys the idea of the frame as window-frame, and the idea of the subject.⁶⁸

The notion of the deframing comes across forcefully throughout the film, both as a formal and as an ideological strategy. In the opening sequence, Isabel's reaction to Lord Warburton's proposal is, literally, to flee (back to the house). Her quick pace is captured through a succession of tilted and off-centre shots, as her tumultuous pass upsets an idyllic picnic on the Gardencourt lawn.



Deframings: Isabel Archer runs away in THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY

This sequence sets a pattern as the first of a series of 'escapes': Isabel rushes across the garden, the camera close on her heels, following the trail of her dress. This shot reappears again midway through the film (Isabel tries to avoid Osmond but he steps on her dress, making her fall), and in her final return to a wintry Gardencourt, where Isabel flees again, confused by the forceful attentions coming from another, more pressing suitor, Caspar Goodwood.

The 'deframing' of the classical realist portrait should be connected with the interstitial – and possibly 'ironic-sadistic' – reinterpretation carried out by the adaptation. Rather than identifying with its literary source in the manner of Scorsese's *THE AGE OF INNOCENCE*, Campion's film notoriously plays around the 'silences' of the source novel. As Rebecca M. Gordon notes:

While James approaches the deeply familiar novel and its characters and renders them 'strange', Campion renders that strangeness visible... By exhibiting still-familiar moral and ethical choices as sexual repressions and perversions in costume, Campion 'shows' the spaces where traditional gender ideology fails, suggesting the places where it has always failed, and thus creating a gap in our film-audience sense of reality.⁶⁹

Eschewing the flamboyant dramatisation of James's psychological melodrama (as in *THE GOLDEN BOWL*), the film concentrates on the interpretation of Isabel's (historical) consciousness and desires in contemporary terms. Campion has argued that her aims were 'to make the situations physical, develop the sexual elements that were only suggested, give Isabel some fantasies'.⁷⁰ Whereas the metatextual strategies of a modernist film like *THRILLER* pull apart the mechanisms of romance and the imprisonment of woman in the (to respect the 1970s critical frame of reference) classic realist text, *THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY* translates this strategy into the grafting of actual fantasy fragments that interrupt the framework of the realist narrative. These fragments provoke a deframing of the conscious subject, bringing to the surface the difficult ideological configurations that colonise the feminine unconscious, and underscoring romance's fascination with images of domination and submission.⁷¹

One such set piece is the erotic fantasy that Isabel indulges in after refusing Goodwood's advances. In the novel, Isabel is inebriated with the feeling of power and 'the satisfaction of having refused two ardent suitors in a fortnight'.⁷² The cinematic Isabel steps into a sort of hypnotic trance in which she pictures herself lying on the bed, while Goodwood and Lord Warburton sexually arouse her by fondling and kissing her body. The scene is wrapped up in a languid musical theme by Wojciech Kilar, which delimits it as an interval of suspension within the main narrative, while naturalising the fantasy within the realist space. The spell is broken by the presence of Ralph within the frame as the passive spectator of Isabel's 'seduction'. The scene discloses Isabel's sexual agency as affected by the scenarios of male desire previously staged in the film; scenarios that Isabel can flee time and again, but to which she can not oppose her desire in her own terms. Confronted with Lord Warburton's and Goodwood's desire, Isabel's only recourse to pleasure is the masochistic enjoyment of her passive reification by the men's gaze. Hers is the desire for her vampirisation and, in fact, the *mise-en-scène* bears a resemblance to *BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA*, where another music-box theme by Kilar shrouds the rape of Jonathan Harker by Dracula's brides.⁷³ This fantasy scene not only comments on Isabel's masochistic relations with her suitors but also opens up a parenthetical space. For a brief moment, *by watching herself being watched* by Ralph – the only masculine character who holds a non-antagonistic position with regard to her desire – Isabel transcends the scenario of her own seduction.

As de Lauretis points out, narrative entails the reproduction of Oedipus: a configuration that puts woman in the place of object/boundary/space, marking out the space the hero (male/human/subject) will traverse:

Film narrative... is a process by which the text-images distributed across the film (be they images of people, objects, or of movement itself) are finally regrouped in the two

zones of sexual difference, from which they take their culturally preconstructed meaning: mythical subject and obstacle, maleness and femaleness.⁷⁴

When woman happens to be the subject of identification, the classic narrative is configured as a journey that leads inevitably towards closure, where a modern Oedipus will find her (the journey prefigured in the classical 'woman's film'). Woman performs the role of 'good object' and her image gets firmly embedded in narrative coherence. *THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY* walks the fine thread between the search for the stable meanings produced by the principles of realism, and the possibilities for subversion accorded by the codes of narrative pleasure. Campion exploits the latter by remaking James's novel into a film that at many points is 'narrative and Oedipal with a vengeance, for it seeks to stress the duplicity of that scenario and the specific contradiction of the female subject in it'.⁷⁵ In other words, the film presents 'vanishing points' where the oedipal narrative can be denaturalised by means of the extreme polarisation of gender positions.⁷⁶ The portrait gets distorted through parodic excess and metatextual interruptions, but this does not necessarily shatter the surface of the portrait-mirror as point of identification. The film inflects the forms of contemporary period drama through interpretative gestures that transform the past into a mirror of persistent fantasies. The film thus performs as a composite space that reflects on the pleasures of the romance narrative – femininity as subject of fantasy – as well as introducing the second, feminist moment of critical revision that positions the feminine subject as a self-conscious spectator of the fantasy. The result is a portrait from two different viewpoints, which reflects the tension posed by unresolved questions inherited from past traditions.

Isabel's portrait brings into focus the contradictions that surround the articulation of female desire within the structures of power in patriarchal societies. When Ralph warns Isabel that marrying Osmond equals to being put in a cage, Isabel gleefully retorts 'If I like my cage, that needn't trouble you'. Her defiant response (as she stands against a background of iron bars) brings her close to other female characters in Campion's films, 'truculent individuals' who embark in sexual relationships stemming from situations of exploitation and abuse – in *THE PIANO* and in the outrageously parodic *HOLY SMOKE* (1999) romance builds upon sexual humiliation and physical violence.⁷⁷ Murphy has defined the film as a 'concatenation of horror movie, fairy tale and re-fashioning of Eve's mythic Fall', suggesting how the literary tradition of the bildungsroman that lends its structure to the film rings hollow in the context of Isabel's journey:

In perhaps the cruelest sense, *nothing* happens in *THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY*. A woman's world simply ends, winding down to wasteland: dead zero. Not by accident, as *PORTRAIT*'s innocent abroad launches into her world tour, she pockets an ominous 'ticket', a scrap of paper on which is written *NIHILISM*.⁷⁸

THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY promises a coming-of-age tale that never takes place. Instead of 'building' her as a character, the film progressively reifies Isabel in visual terms, as a result of her sterile, life-crushing marriage to Osmond. In the second part, the *mise-en-scène* becomes increasingly dark and baroque, and Isabel progressively 'ladyfied'. Her heavy attires and hairdos contrast sharply with the unruly red hair and self-effacing black frocks (possibly alluding to the mourning for the loss of her parents) that she dons as a young girl.

Silences and narrative ellipses abound, and the society tableaux become studies in female terror. At the end of a sequence showing the preparations for a social gathering at Osmond's Roman mansion, his daughter Pansy and Isabel gracefully sit at each end of a long settee, while Osmond stands up behind them. The framing composes a dignified portrait of a genteel family, which hides the secret of violent domestic relationships. Violence sometimes erupts into the text. In the ball scene, the frame is directed towards the anecdotal disturbance of young women fainting and being carried out of the ballroom, whereas Pansy thrives as the 'perfect lady': a mechanical doll whose docile complying with her father has intimations of abuse. Madame Merle on the one side, and Pansy on the other, stand as potential mirror images of what Isabel may become: respectively, a reject and a precious, if inert, collector's object in Osmond's museum.⁷⁹

One of these ellipses refers to the one-year interval between Isabel and Osmond's meeting in Florence, and her reappearance as Osmond's betrothed after her journey to Venice and Egypt in the company of Madame Merle. Osmond's calculating act of seduction climaxes in his courtship of Isabel in the subterranean chambers of the Palazzo Farnese at Caprarola, a dramatic setting where darkness alternates with pools of sunlight filtered by the grilled openings in the ceiling. The circular chamber becomes a metaphor for the descent into the unconscious. A jarring cut from close-up to extreme long shot makes the camera track swiftly around the chamber towards Osmond and Isabel, flashing along the way on a skull hanging on the wall. The camera-eye is literally forced to rotate in order to be able to 'read' the truth of the scene – Osmond's seduction as a conflation of Eros and Thanatos. This scene gets rewritten in the film-within-the-film 'My Journey'. A parodic fragment that chronicles Isabel's trip to Venice and Egypt with Madame Merle, the sequence unfolds as a series of 'sights' (frames/postcards) that illustrate Isabel's 'grand tour' in the manner of the spectacles of early cinema.⁸⁰ This short film, however, redirects the curiosity for 'the exotic' into a sense of growing strangeness, constituting a hieroglyphic made up of miscellaneous visual and sound references that throws the main narrative – visually and dramatically – into suspension.

'My Journey' breaks down the notion of journey/narrative, posing sexual difference as a problematic source of subjectivity, and therefore of narrative con-

trol. Its images undo the operations of suture by means of jump cuts, dissolves and superimpositions, opening up the temporal and spatial structure of the narrative. The female body, transformed into an icon, is the only consistent visual link throughout the journey, but Isabel's body becomes a surface several times overwritten with superimposed images: the sea waves on her face and body, and her striped parasol – used by Osmond as a mesmerising wheel – spinning on her eyes. As Marc Vernet points out, the superimposition is both a ghostly figure of absence and a figure of penetration, which breaks up the shot in three different ways: by flattening the narrative space, by distorting perspective (and therefore the illusion of depth that makes up the narrative space), and by introducing a deframing effect.⁸¹ Isabel's wide open eyes reverberate with fascination for 'the Orient' but her gaze is blind, never bringing forth a coherent space. Her face does not disclose her inner thoughts. On the contrary, it reverts to its outside, to Madame Merle, Isabel's spectral double who stands behind her as the shadow of the sinister puppet master who pulls the strings – Osmond. The Orientalist images remain but a metonymic displacement for the 'colonised' female subject.

'My Journey' is put together as a pastiche with the dream logic (and humour) of surrealist film in order to present feminine subjectivity as radically disjointed. In this faux silent film, the voice appears as a fluctuant, disembodied entity. The soundtrack contains a miscellany of music and sounds; however, there is only one shot where the voice is in synch: the extreme close-up of Osmond's mouth, reminiscent of *CITIZEN KANE*. This shot comes through as a cinematic fetish, a sort of ur-voice that utters 'I'm absolutely in love with you' – the signifier of male desire as the origin of narrative. The female voice, as in trance, becomes pure echo, compelled to incessant repetition. The feminine gaze that allegedly writes her own story (*my* journey) gets trapped by the hypnotic power of the cinematic apparatus (the parasol's spinning wheel) as bearer but not producer of meaning. At the end of the fragment, Isabel's body is literally engulfed by Osmond's gaze and voice (in a zoom-out on Isabel's naked body juxtaposed over Osmond's face). Isabel faints, and a fade-out follows. The collapse of subjectivity thus becomes the collapse of signification.

This fragment is a playful but unresolved experiment within the controlled textual whole of the film. The short film literally functions as a textual symptom that refuses to comply with the orderly body of the film adaptation. The short quotes a mix of references that do not hark back to the literary work, but to the different textures of the film medium that mediates the representation. Like in *THE GOLDEN BOWL*, the citation of key modernist works (from *UN CHIEN ANDALOU* to *CITIZEN KANE*) and the use of (fake) archival footage signifies the limits of the reconstruction work carried out by the *mise-en-scène* of period drama.

These quotations work as a metatextual boundary, stressing the cannibalistic drive of period aesthetics with regard to past styles.



*Engulfed: superimpositions in the film-within-the-film 'My Journey' in
THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY*

Denying the possibility of an unmediated discourse of interiority, the film offers the spectacle of the female body as a denaturalised object. Woman (whether Isabel or Charlotte in *THE GOLDEN BOWL*) may be aligned with modernity but her look, lacking a space of her own in the inherited historical narratives, is bound to be negatively inscribed in the space of excess, almost as an ambulatory anachronism. As Madame Merle says to Isabel, 'a woman, it seems to me, has no natural place anywhere' – in other words, there is no historical site from where the female look is able to produce, as such, a coherent narrativised space. This absence of the female gaze is counteracted by the visibility of the female body as spectacle, parodied in the last shot of a naked Isabel literally plunging into the depths of Osmond's eyes. The collage effect produced by the visual and temporal juxtapositions suppresses the distance between the gaze and its object in the shot. With classic perspective cancelled, the deframing completes the deconstruction of the sense of self conveyed by the classic portrait.

THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY returns to its own primal scene in the end, with the solitary figure of Isabel sitting on the fallen tree at Gardencourt, suddenly stalked by an intruder. However, it is at the very point of closure that Isabel – and the film text itself – performs one last escape act from the bleak determinism exacted by the fidelity to the master text. *THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY* refuses to

honour one of the most notorious nineteenth-century aesthetic traditions: death as a stabilising resolution, which transforms woman into the most perfect of portraits. Isabel's last portrait is a portrait in movement. She flees from the garden towards the house, and the shot sequence rewrites the opening scene: a long shot in deep focus as she hurriedly enters through the main gate into the lawn, followed by an insert of her heavy skirts floating behind her, and a final shot reframing Isabel from the back as she strides up to the entrance of the mansion. The switch to slow motion underscores Isabel's last escape – the cinematic apparatus becoming most visible precisely at the moment of narrative violation: the cinematic Isabel is left out in the wintry landscape, facing an uncertain destiny out of the shelter of the Jamesian architectural narrative.

The open ending sees Isabel refusing to go back to the questionable way of Eros (Goodwood pressing her to accept his help) as well as rejecting the path of Thanatos – the straight path of the Law, which leads back to her buried life as Osmond's wife in Rome (the option favoured by the novel's ending). The final ambiguity in which the film lies suspended is liberating insofar as it leads back to the silence of the cinematic image as ultimate guarantor of meaning. *THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY* finishes on a note of hope but, at the same time, it testifies to the impossibility of a resolution to the oedipal conflict within the romance narrative. Campion's film self-consciously restages the figure of the portrait to bring attention to its discursive frame through multiple figural deframings. By recalling past feminist discourse, yet containing its radical strategies within the limits of the classic adaptation, Campion takes an ambiguous aesthetic turn that works against the grain of the 'liberal feminist preference for female agency and redemptive closure'⁸² characteristic of the popular period romance. In contrast with images of the feminine that act as index of (masculine) loss, this portrait signals a different attitude towards the past: it re-maps the space of fantasy posed by the romance narrative and mourns the losses strewn along the way in the historical emergence of a feminist consciousness.

Double-Framing the Mythologies of the Female Artist:

ARTEMISIA

The last stage in my discussion of the tableau and the portrait as figures in period drama reverts to their thematisation in two films *about* painting and photography: Merlet's *ARTEMISIA* and Goldbacher's *THE GOVERNESS*. The former is the biopic of Baroque painter Artemisia Gentileschi – sometimes credited as the first woman painter in the history of art. The latter is a fictional romance about a Jewish woman with a passion for photography passing for a Christian govern-

ess in Victorian times. These films self-consciously use the *mise-en-scène* of period reconstruction in order to deploy contemporary discourses on gender and feminine subjectivity. At the same time, they subscribe to staple romance narratives, articulating the trajectory of their independent, self-sufficient heroines through sexual awakening and heterosexual attachments.

In these late 1990s films, the reclaiming of women's past that characterises previous instances of 'liberal' costume drama has become the intertext of 'sexual' costume drama. Both *ARTEMISIA* and *THE GOVERNESS* reframe the basic narrative of the liberal model – the struggle for women's self-expression; the identification between women artists now and then – through plots that intertwine sexuality with creativity. However, what makes these films distinctive is their exploration of visual technologies as (borrowing from de Lauretis) technologies of gender which, controlled by artistic and scientific hegemonic discourses, act as 'structures of exclusion'.⁸³ The use of what Lynette Felber calls 'mixed media'⁸⁴ or, using the vocabulary of new media theory, 'remediation',⁸⁵ is now found in instances of popular film narratives where the plastic arts are thematised. Contemporary films about female artists stress the *mise en abyme* of the medium as representation by using the motifs of framing and posing to stage gendered notions of the subject where its own process of fixation (en-gendering) becomes visible.

ARTEMISIA and *THE GOVERNESS* are animated by the same impulse that propels feminist theory's return to narrative: 'a rereading of the sacred texts against the passionate urging of a different question, a different practice, and a different desire'.⁸⁶ Authentic historical documents (Gentileschi's canvas *Judith Slaying Holofernes* (ca. 1620); portrait photography in the nineteenth century) become points of reference but also hieroglyphs that admit more than one interpretation. The work of rewriting in the films is concerned with the decoding of their cultural referents – whether canonical paintings or 'old photographs' – in narrative scenarios that climax on the myth of origins implied in the moment of creation. Rather than posing as 'biographical journeys', that is, narratives concerned with the evolution of the artist developing in linear historical time, these films foreground a synchronic structure that sustains the phantasmatic scenario of the woman artist's sexual and creative awakening. *ARTEMISIA*, in particular, works only imperfectly as a (classical) biopic, disregarding chronology in the presentation of Gentileschi's works and concentrating on just a short period in her life. Both this film and its openly fictitious counterpart, *THE GOVERNESS*, refocus the biopic as self-portrait: both literally – a great emphasis is placed in the way the artists portray themselves – and metaphorically, with the films imagining their subjects through coming-of-age stories that climax in reflexive self-portraits of the woman as artist. In these films, figurality manifests in double-

framed images that mediate in the fantasy structures that sustain the pleasures of repetition and difference in the biopic.

ARTEMISIA tells the story of Artemisia Gentileschi's (1593-1652) breakthrough as an artist in 1610, whilst an assistant at the studio of her father (the painter Orazio Gentileschi). At the centre of the film is her sexual liaison with Agostino Tassi, a painter engaged by her father to teach her the techniques of landscape painting at a time when formal training at the Academy was denied to women. Agostino introduces Artemisia to the use of perspectival instruments for the purposes of framing and composition. She, however, is only interested in the painting of the human figure, and uses Agostino as model for her canvas *Judith Slaying Holofernes*. They become lovers, but when Orazio discovers them together he brings Agostino to court on the accusation of rape. Artemisia's canvas is then used as proof of her sexual experience, presenting her as the seducer of Agostino. The young woman is confronted with the evidence of Agostino's past as an adulterer and a womaniser, but refuses to back Orazio's claim and force Agostino to marry her as reparation. In order to exact the truth about her virginity, Artemisia is tortured with fine cords tightened around her fingers. To stop the mutilation, Agostino admits to having raped her and is sentenced to prison. Artemisia recovers and prepares to leave Rome.

ARTEMISIA (and, as we will see, also THE GOVERNESS) is clearly indebted to the sexual narrative of THE PIANO as well as to its figurative universe. The central motif of the perspectival grid planted by the sea powerfully recalls the strangeness of THE PIANO's token image – the piano stranded on a desert beach of the New Zealand shore. In ARTEMISIA, the drawing grid reframes the natural landscape as the landscape of history, but also as the landscape of fantasy, by interposing an object that organises the symbolic relationships, not only between characters, but also between the natural landscape and the 'written' landscapes of historical film. However, the film's circulation as a historical biopic raises the issue of the 'authenticity' as dominant interpretation. ARTEMISIA was caught in a controversy regarding the archival records that it purported to dramatise (the transcripts from the rape trial) and was, as a result, summarily charged with misrepresenting what was factually a sexual crime as a 'romantic' love story.

This line of criticism was defended by Mary D. Garrard's intervention at the time of the film's American release. Garrard, a specialist in Gentileschi's oeuvre, represents a feminist discourse that casts Gentileschi in the role of the 'female hero' of canonical painting, drawing close links between biographical contextualisation and interpretation of her paintings.⁸⁷ On the eve of the film's New York premiere, Garrard and art historian Gloria Steinem, outraged at Miramax's intention of using the conventional 'based on a true story' tag in the promotional poster of the film, circulated and later posted online a tract⁸⁸ that con-

trasts the account of the painter's life in the film with the 'real Artemisia Gentileschi'. With headings opposing 'THE MYTHS' to 'HISTORY', the tract is symptomatic of the 'drama' of adaptation that happens when the film's crass popularisation comes into conflict with the doxa of established historical records.⁸⁹ Garrard's interpretation of the trial puts forth the image of an articulate Artemisia, openly denouncing her rapist and fashioning her art as an (un)conscious response to her vulnerability and outrage in a masculinist society. In contrast, the film presents, according to Garrard, an 'inversion of the basic facts of the story' that 'inappropriately sexualizes what are really artistic interests' and transforms the character into an 'artistic ingenue grateful to her sexually exploitative teacher'.⁹⁰ For Garrard, the sexualisation of the artist in *ARTEMISIA* concludes with the stereotypes that have contributed to the marginalisation of women artists in canonical histories of art.

Garrard's demolition of the film is consistent with the problems posed by the critical evaluation of the biopic genre from the viewpoint of the historian. The artist's film biography sustains the view of the individual artist as ultimate source of meaning of the work, a myth which prevails in both humanistic and psychoanalytic accounts of art history, as well as literary history.⁹¹ On the other hand, the discourses of art history need to separate themselves from popular accounts of the lives of artists in order to secure their legitimacy. In this respect, the biopic faces similar problems of secondariness and popularisation that affect the reception of adaptations from literary works. According to Griselda Pollock, cinema's incursions in artists' biographies have systematically incurred the commodification of art through the conventions of the romanticised biography, and of the construction of the mystery of artistic genius.⁹² Pollock's analysis of Vincente Minnelli's *LUST FOR LIFE* exposes the classic Hollywood biopic as a narrative that establishes a straightforward cause-effect relationship between biographical incident, external context and the art work through *mise-en-scène*:

In *LUST FOR LIFE*, the spectator is positioned as viewer of pictures produced by photographic representations through which Van Gogh is placed as a figure in his own landscape paintings. At the same time, these landscapes are offered as externalised, visualised images of the artist's 'inner' landscape. These dual processes not only foreclose notions of the production of art as a signifying system but propose that the meanings of works of art are available to direct visual experience which can be represented unproblematically, simply reconstructed in a film. Through the narrative organisation of a filmic biography, lavishly illustrated and illustrating, what is realised and confirmed is the construct of the artist as the effect of his works, the hero of the story, the character whose 'truth' is to be sought and visualised, reconstructed and made plain.⁹³

'Reconstruction', 'visualisation' and 'illustration' are the key elements in the allegedly straightforward, reductive account of the relationships between cinema and painting through the myth of the artist. However, an account solely concerned with the ideological superstructure of the classic narrative biopic fails to comprehend the ways in which the collision between cinema and painting in the textures of film complicates such direct relationship.

In relation to this argument, the main criticism levelled against *ARTEMISIA* was its biased or gendered description of artistic creation. In this respect, the category of 'mad genius' that has become a commonplace in both historical and popular narratives has 'little to do with clinical pathology or definitions of sanity, but circle[s] around categories of difference, otherness, excess'.⁹⁴ When discussing female artists however, the notion of mad genius takes on an altogether different inflection:

Clearly, the conflation of the artist's biography and works of art by that artist functions very differently if the artist is a woman or a man. In the latter case, his art appears to give us access to the generic mystery of (masculine) genius; in the former case, blurring life and art merely confirms the pathology of the feminine, saturated by her sex, of which she becomes emblem and symptom. Her biography, therefore, is always made to hinge around a powerfully sexual male figure.⁹⁵

Pollock points out the regularity with which the mainstream biopic works on a mixture of daring sexuality, overwhelming passion and tragedy, bound to crystallise around the woman artist's relationship with a (usually older) male artist doubling as mentor and lover. This scenario sustains what Susan Felleman, in an illuminating critique of Merlet's film, calls 'the myth of origins': a fantasy in which the work of art figures as 'the progeny of sexual passion... the child of the artist-parents'. The biopic thus often involves 'a young woman artist who is apprenticed to an older male, a relation of power and gender that is at the same time entirely realistic and profoundly mythic'.⁹⁶ This would apply to films ranging from *CAMILLE CLAUDEL* (Bruno Nuytten, 1988) to *FRIDA*. However, we also need to consider that the contemporary female artist's biopic tends to put the emphasis, not on tragic lives but on 'survival' scenarios. This is certainly the case in *FRIDA*, but also in *SURVIVING PICASSO* (James Ivory, 1996) and *POLLOCK* (Ed Harris, 2000), in which the mythic artist's female partner, a priori overshadowed by his 'genius', nevertheless emerges as the most resilient of the two, and an artist in her own right.⁹⁷ The survival narrative pervades the rewritings carried out by these biopics. Likewise, *THE GOVERNESS* and *ARTEMISIA* contradict the notion of the woman artist as the 'sacrificial victim' on the altar of myths that bind (deviant) female sexuality with creativity.⁹⁸

The accusation that the film muffles the 'reality of history' and the threat posed by *Artemisia's* paintings to the established social order raises, in turn,

questions about the threat posed by works of fiction that adapt historical characters to academic orthodoxy. We should ask, with Pollock, *what does feminism desire in looking at work by women artists?*⁹⁹ This question is equally relevant when looking at the popular texts that provide their own feminist readings outside the discourse of scholarly feminism. The film adaptation of the proto-feminist cultural construct 'Artemisia Gentileschi' was caught in the double bind of being *required* to function not only as an illustration of the paintings themselves, but of the feminist narratives that have facilitated their inclusion into the canon. As Susanna Scarparo has noted, the attacks on the film on the basis of its lack of historical accuracy unveil a parallel history – that of feminist writers' self-identification with Artemisia as a model for their own struggle.¹⁰⁰ To find alternative ways of understanding the film's relation with history, it is necessary to turn to other discourses less concerned with the hierarchies of fidelity and more with the visual dynamics of popular culture, so we can read *back* into the film the terms of its own feminist project – and its shortcomings.

In this respect, in an analysis that deconstructs the hierarchies between specialist and popular discourses, Richard Burt regards Merlet's ARTEMISIA as one example among many 'afterlives' (academic and non-academic) of Renaissance cultural myths, including novels, fictional biopics, romances, historical and pornographic films. Art-history and connoisseur accounts about Artemisia Gentileschi should be approached, accordingly, as part of an *excess* of discourses that destabilise feminist histories.¹⁰¹ For Burt, popular afterlives of female artists offer a complementary side to academic discourses, setting the terms for a critique of the 'heroic' feminist (academic) narratives of the 1970s¹⁰² through the prism of fantasy and loss. The feminist narrative constructed by Garrard and others, which represents the painter as a 'female hero' through the impact of trauma (her rape providing the ultimate explanation to her defiant portraits of women) is but one construction of the myth 'Artemisia Gentileschi', which layers the portrait of the artist as period-drama heroine. Burt suggests that, whilst 'redemptive' academic histories seek to retrieve female heroes without loss, romantic narratives about women artists reinvent them as loser characters who 'do not desire what they are supposed to desire, whether their desire is prescribed by patriarchs, feminists, or queers... their desire is represented as enigmatic, lacking, even perverse'.¹⁰³ The popular biopic redeems aspects of the past (such as the relationship with men, whether fathers or lovers) that are problematic for the new master narratives set in place by feminist art histories. Burt concludes that 'facts' are accessible only through fantasy, since 'the biopic's liberation from chronology and turn to romantic fantasy is precisely what allows for something to happen beyond the predictable and the programmatic.'¹⁰⁴

This argument makes room for a reconsideration of the historical period film from 'waste product' of academic feminism to one of its mannerist reprises,

which only highlights the continuities between mass-media and academic constructions of one particular matrix: 'Artemisia Gentileschi'. Nevertheless, this emphasis on intertextuality needs to take on board the fact that ARTEMISIA refers to Artemisia Gentileschi as a historical figure textually (*not* sub-textually), keeping the transcripts of the rape trial as main reference point. As an example of a commercial and popular yet self-reflexive art cinema, ARTEMISIA is a conservative yet ambiguous text that addresses the viewer on two different levels simultaneously: it explicitly relies on mythical cultural structures and demands to be read *realistically*. It is thus necessary to take into account not just the structures of fantasy that sustain the fiction, but the inevitable return of 'history' as its symptom. In order to compare the film's reading of 'Artemisia' as a fictional reconstruction of history, with 'Rosina' (main character in THE GOVERNESS) as a historical subject imagined through fiction, we need to look at the figure of the tableau as a formal device that produces an open scene of fantasy.

Vision, Blindness and the Displacement of Trauma

Pollock cites the 'hungry eye' as a synecdoche for the woman artist qua (cannibalistic) desiring subject, 'desiring to see, to know, to participate in the jumble of expressively naked bodies, in the mysteries of representation'.¹⁰⁵ The hungry eye works as a powerful signifier of not just the artist's vision, but of the sexualisation of aesthetic experience. Artemisia's desire to understand the human body is mixed with adolescent sexual curiosity. Felleman notes:

The film conceives Artemisia as passionate looker, or voyeur: she shamelessly provokes a youthful male companion to undress for her; peeks into Tassi's windows one night and gleefully watches the orgy she espies; and generally is shown as hungry for visual pleasure. The almost demented, eroticized gaze attributed to Artemisia in this film seems to suggest a psychosexual pathology, scopophilia, sexual pleasure in looking. Interestingly, ARTEMISIA attributes this usually male 'perversion' to its female protagonist, even as her agency is eclipsed by the film's tendency to translate her from subject to object. The film wants to have it both ways: to imbue its heroine with (an entirely anachronistic) sexual license and visual subjectivity and at the same time to offer her up as an object of desire.¹⁰⁶

This emphasis on looking relations (along the lines of Mulvey's critique of visual pleasure in classical cinema) constitutes a metanarrative that pervades the reception of the film. Likewise, Pollock stresses 'the repeated dislocation of woman as eye and woman as seen', which attests to the film's failure to portray its subject through a cinematic semiotic practice that can articulate a contemporary

feminist critique.¹⁰⁷ This collapsing of vision into the dominant figure of the gaze obliterates the other two lines of force in the film: the corporeality of the body – especially the body at work – and the voice as source of inscription and interpretation. In contrast with the dyad subject/object of vision, this triangular relation is instrumental in the dynamic construction of the double consciousness of the film. It helps establish the temporal dissociation between ‘seeing’ and ‘knowing’ that gives rise to the already discussed second ‘feminist moment’ in the narrative.

The opening sequence already states the interrelation between all three elements, as the credits roll over an extreme close-up of an eye where candlelight is seen in reflection. The host of little dots shining at the centre of the dark pupil *punctures* the eye. This image (reminiscent of the opening close-up in *THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY*) establishes the artist’s radical subjectivity as origin of the narrative – a body metaphorically reduced to a giant eye. The next shot however does not establish the field of vision, but cuts away to a black screen. The first of a series of short voiceover monologues is then heard in the soundtrack: ‘a pointed finger. Draped material. A raised hand. A leg which isn’t a leg but an arm. A confused ballet of gigantic bodies. The sweeping movement of limbs’.¹⁰⁸ Artemisia’s voice imaginatively describes the murals that she observes in the chapel at the convent school in Rome. Artemisia’s free-floating voice occurs six times in the film, establishing a counterpoint to her mobile eye, but also producing a space both inside and outside diegetic reality. The soundtrack undermines the two-way relationship of ‘illustration’ between image and discourse: the overtly poetic monologues attempt to capture the dynamic movement of bodies as imagined by the painter. Unlike in biopics such as *SURVIVING PICASSO* and *FRIDA*, the verbal descriptions refuse to narrativise painting, preserving its ‘strangeness’ as a domain of shapes and colour in perpetual movement, resistant to symbolisation. At the same time, the artist’s voice is figured as an anachronistic, modern intervention, creating an interval between the moment of vision and (historical) reflection – between the closeness of the eye and the power to *see*. The huge eye is implicitly blinded, and the gaze is located somewhere else, in a different time, space and mode of consciousness.

This abstract opening is immediately followed by a sequence in which the young woman practises her drawing skills by studying the only human body she can possibly have access to: her own. In the secrecy of her convent cell, Artemisia draws her naked body with the sole aid of a mirror and a candle stolen from the chapel. This scene has been criticised as one of the instances of objectification of the female body in the film.¹⁰⁹ However, it also conveys urgency and painstaking dedication, suggesting a form of visual pleasure that is rarely seen in film: the concentration and defiance of the body at work. The scene exposes the feminine body but *signifies* a body unavailable to the erotic

gaze; an active body, not in contemplation or abandonment, but indifferent to the viewer and bent into a task. The shots of Artemisia examining parts of her body in the mirror and forcing her body into tension do not just offer themselves to the viewer but produce an awareness of an outside – as well as an internal – gaze.

Mieke Bal's distinction between the 'gaze' and the 'glance' as 'viewing attitudes or modes proposed, encouraged, but not enforced by the work' is relevant to the scene in question. In her analysis of a series of nude sketches by Rembrandt, Bal distinguishes the 'gaze' that conflates model and figure, effacing the traces of the labour of representation, from the 'glance' that emphasises the viewer's own position as viewer. This distinction, embedded in the visual text, is extensible to the ambiguity of the *mise-en-scène* of Artemisia at work. For Bal, the indifference of the body at work constitutes in itself a resistance to voyeurism: 'the very fact that the choice between glance and gaze is emphatically proposed to the viewer is in itself an obstacle to the smooth, self-effacing gaze. This is the paradox of self-reflexive art'.¹¹⁰ In this scene, the body gets displaced into a mobile close-up of a hand, the painter's hand, a motif suggesting outward action and production instead of interiority and identification.¹¹¹ The scene is all about the structural necessity of looking (in order to be able to know, as synonymous with action) and the impossibility of *not* looking. When the symbolic economy of Christian ideology (signified through the presence of a crucifix in the background) precludes women's open access to the view of the naked body, narcissism *and* voyeurism become the royal road to knowledge for the young woman painter.

The film encourages throughout the association of *posing* with work: a literal effort produced by the body under pressure, but also a form of resistance to the transparent, appropriating gaze, which comes to the surface in the film image as *tableau vivant*. ARTEMISIA's emphasis on the body contextualises the artist's creative work as a professional activity regulated by academic prescriptions, patronage, rivalries and rigid hierarchies that exclude women from positions of power and knowledge. 'Work' (the paid effort patronized by those who can afford having their portrait painted, as Orazio tells Artemisia) is the necessary counterpoint to the production of 'art' (the effort done for oneself). Thus, ARTEMISIA re-maps terrain already covered by PASSION (Jean-Luc Godard, 1982), LA BELLE NOISEUSE (Jacques Rivette, 1991) or CARAVAGGIO in its grasp of the economics of art, as well as the dynamics of power underlying the painter/model relationship. Directly after the title of the film appears printed on the screen, the camera cranes back to disclose a *tableau* – the Annunciation – framed, lit and performed by live models according to the rhetorics of Counter-Reformation Baroque art. At its centre, the boy in the role of Archangel Gabriel hangs from ropes pulled by assistants, among them Artemisia herself. Orazio, in front of the

canvas, orchestrates the representation and demands ‘just a little more effort’ so he can finish the work. The scene recalls Godard’s *PASSION*, which presents onscreen the space of production usually kept offscreen (the camera and film crew), and reframes the space of representation through live reconstructions of classic paintings. In the same spirit, *ARTEMISIA* continuously shifts the emphasis from the individual artist to the workshop – a metaphor with all the trappings (the collective effort, the hustle and bustle of people and machinery, the orchestration by one artist) of the film set.

There are other kinds of work going on in *ARTEMISIA* alongside the production of art: forms of (gendered) work which do not distract from the main narrative, and yet challenge the holistic reading of the film, driving the eye to the detail. While Orazio ‘creates’, women at work surround him: his wife sews, indifferent to the male model posing in the nude, Artemisia puts the finishing touches on a commissioned portrait, the maid sweeps the floor. In the scene in which Agostino gives Artemisia a lesson about landscape painting, not only are their bodies double-framed by the perspectival grid, but so are those of the peasants working in the background, gathering fruit from the trees and gleanings from the ground. Work is not always confined to the margins of the frame: in the church where Orazio and Agostino work on the frescoes, the frame also captures other kinds of work. Two people skinning a rabbit share the frame with Orazio and Artemisia, who complains to her father about Agostino’s ‘stealing work under your nose’. Modelling, above all, *is work* – work entailing a gender-bound and class-bound hierarchy of power. The young anonymous man posing in the nude for the painting of St Joseph does professionally what Artemisia forces Fulvio, a young fisherman, to do for free, as she assumes ‘naturally’ the superior position of the artist. Furthermore, the *mise-en-scène* highlights the underlying parallelisms between the workshop and the brothel. Local girls are paraded naked in front of the painters as objects to pick and choose (and implicitly, be ‘used’ and discarded), whereas at the local brothel women perform as *both* sex workers and models for erotic drawings. From the beginning, Artemisia fully grasps these dynamics. When Agostino, in their first encounter, takes her for a model, she responds angrily: ‘I only pose for my paintings!’

Posing takes on a further dimension through a period artefact – the wooden painting grid used by artists as an aid to perspectival composition – that works primarily as a narrative motif, but also as a mobile visual figure within the frame. The effect is one of double-framing, whereby the painterly images that validate the period reconstruction also produce a *mise en abyme* of the film image as representation. As Pollock reminds us:

Perspective, more than a useful skill, represented not merely a technology for the production of the illusion of space on two-dimensional surfaces; it was a discursive

construction of a world and a way of establishing an ideological relation to that world, measured, mastered, displayed, legible, rational, mathematically calculable. Perspective rendered visually represented space symbolic.¹¹²

The recurrent motif of framing and posing visualises ambiguous symbolic relations, and the reference to the techniques of academic painting is dramatised by the battle of sexes. The *mise-en-scène* aligns masculinity with the principle of scientific realism whereas practices that deviate from the norm are associated specifically with feminine positions of resistance (a principle at work in ARTEMISIA and, as we will see, also in THE GOVERNESS). The struggle between Artemisia's interest in close-range painting and the normative rules of perspective becomes the symbolic struggle for the frame (of representation): the frame of painting, and the *film* frame of reading, is the arena where gender/power relations take place – where vision is *engendered*.

Agostino is not portrayed as a mentor nor a superior artist for Artemisia to look up to. Significantly enough, none of his canvases are shown in the film, reflecting the fact that his production, unlike Orazio's or Caravaggio's, would leave no trace in Artemisia's formative years. He admits to knowing nothing new about colour; he rather instructs Artemisia in complying with the established norms of academic painting. In his first lesson in perspectival technique, Agostino takes Artemisia outdoors and he asks her to stand in front of the grid and close her eyes, much to her incredulity and distrust. Like in Osmond's seduction of Isabel in THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY, her gaze is replaced by the hypnotic effect of the master's voice: 'The earth invades the composition. It occupies almost all of the centre... On the horizon, the earth creates a boundary, holding the sea back. And the sun... the sun dances on the water, creating a shimmering path that comes to meet us wherever we are'. Agostino's poetic re-creation of painting as image in movement is germane to Artemisia's deeply cinematic vision, and she falls under his spell. Throughout the scene the painting grid doubles the film frame, introducing a closed space that inscribes a hierarchy of symbolic relations rather than the 'window open to the world' that Artemisia at first misperceives the grid to be (upon first spotting Agostino on the beach, working with the grid, she exclaims: 'he is outside, but he looks at the world through a window'). Agostino's poetic speech creates for Artemisia the illusion of complete realism – *simultaneous* seeing and reading. However, at this moment Agostino's voice literally supplants Artemisia's eye, and the grid frames her, containing her like a cage.

This sequence lends itself to ambivalent readings. Felleman justly notes that the sequence is all about female objectification,¹¹³ as the woman artist's vision is collapsed with her 'to-be-looked-at-ness'. But this is, perhaps, not all that there is to it. A slow pan isolates Artemisia in the film frame for a moment, and then

reframes Agostino standing opposite and contemplating her through the grid. This blocking of the actors in a medium close-up precludes the camera's full alignment with the man's point of view. Artemisia's eyes may be closed as she is trapped inside the grid, but there's another grid at work which frames Agostino as hypnotiser, inducing her to see what she only sees with her mind's eye, in a moment of sensual connection between teacher and pupil. The double-framing of the image enacts the workings of romance as a *mise-en-scène* of vision and blindness. The seascape that Agostino describes is withheld from view – only the struggle for the mastery of representation remains in plain sight. By wanting to master the rules of perspectival (academic) painting, Artemisia enters the symbolic as the perfect subject of ideology – that is, blinded. *Seeing is not knowing*. The moment of interpretation (the distance that allows for a feminist critique) can only come with second sight.

The first 'lesson in vision' produces a moment of suspension that throws into relief the mechanisms of fantasy and the unstable positioning of the feminine subject within it. In a later sequence organised around the painting grid, Artemisia draws Agostino to her terrain – the studio – where he agrees to pose as Holofernes. This sequence effectively reconstructs, by means of the *tableau vivant*, Gentileschi's most famous painting: *Judith Slaying Holofernes*. The theme of Judith and Holofernes refers to the murder of the Assyrian general Holofernes at the hands of Judith, a Jewish widow who, bent on saving her people from impending massacre, ensnares Holofernes and beheads him in his own tent. For Barthes, the biblical story of Judith and Holofernes offers a *récit fort* (a story which offers at the same time 'a good structural performance', and a 'sensual and/or moral emotion') but also, an 'available structure' in which the events remain the same, but the characters' psychological determinations change. The theme has been inflected differently in each one of its various figurations (drama, poems, novels, opera or figurative paintings) while preserving a common background: the ambivalence of the link, both erotic and deathly, which brings together Judith and Holofernes. As Barthes points out, what makes painting different from other forms of narrative art is that 'since the *before* and *after* of the narrative event are not figured, meaning remains suspended among several possibilities'.¹¹⁴

By using the grid as second frame within the film shot, the *mise-en-scène* forms a painterly *tableau vivant* that injects the ambiguity of the myth into Artemisia and Agostino's doomed relationship. The film provides the 'before' and 'after' missing in the painting's narrative, yet the *tableau* is not staged as a 'moment of truth'. Instead, the *tableau* provides the stage of fantasy, with Artemisia consciously role-playing and unconsciously rewriting Judith's story: occupying an outside 'spectatorial' position one moment, joining Agostino on the side of the spectacle the next.



Double-framings: the stage of fantasy in ARTEMISIA

This inside/outside-ness of the feminine gaze produces the moment of double consciousness in feminist biopic: of being within and outside history, of performing as both re-enactment and rewriting. As Elizabeth Cowie has argued:

The fantasy scenario always involves multiple points of entry which are also mutually exclusive positions, but these are taken up not sequentially – as in a narrative – but simultaneously or rather, since the unconscious does not know time in this way, to take up any position is also always to be implicated in the position of the other(s).¹¹⁵

The ‘tableau moment’ goes beyond illustration: it discloses the imaginary theatre of fantasy that underlies the realist representation, in which the feminist gesture of appropriation passes through the woman’s objectification by the romance narrative. The film text presents framing and posing not as opposites that exclude each other, but as fluid performative positions in the fantasy of female empowerment. Artemisia holds an active gaze in control of the framed image, but the double-framing of the shot puts her into the position of both subject and object of desire. The biopic thus reinstates the pleasure of the feminine gaze *in control* over the scene of her own objectification.

In this scene, the film image emerges as a textured space that is both readable and reflexive, inscribing the double consciousness of the mannerist film: its layering of the present over the past, of the fresh look on the bodies in movement over the codes of historical representation. However, the past also deconstructs the present, showing that the implications of the romance narrative are part and parcel of the pleasures of an active female gaze. The figure of the tab-

leau stages the tension between historical re-constructions of femininity and the ambiguous claim for visual pleasure that transcends such constructions. Nevertheless, the scenario of fantasy is subject to the return of the historical, which determines the textual limits of revision. The film is ultimately a productive feminist rewriting because of its vanishing point into 'the Real': it affirms the heroine's access to knowledge at the expense of the self-containment of the fantasy, which would entail full disengagement from the difficulties of the historical intertext. The historical returns as symptom in the final scene of Agostino's trial, in which the rational and universal principles of perspective are revealed to be instrumental in an ideologically corrupt system. My contention is that Merlet's film does not cancel the possibility of an 'ethics of reading' (as proposed by Pollock)¹¹⁶ by denying the rape, as critics like Garrard have argued. Rather, the film displaces the textualization of trauma into the trial scene, in which Artemisia's fingers are mutilated as punishment for her silence.

Artemisia's rape takes place at the hands of the patriarchal legal system, piercing fantasy's protective shield. Yet the film asserts the possibility of a feminist intervention as a necessarily *delayed* moment, constructed in the distance that mediates between seeing and knowing, between the historical text and its contemporary rewriting. Shocked by the discovery of Agostino's past sexual offences, Artemisia's silence at the trial contrasts vividly with her 'historical' eloquence, as registered in the trial transcripts and noted by art historians. Whereas the historical Artemisia constructed by academic discourse openly and heroically accuses Tassi of deceit and rape, the 'contemporary' Artemisia of the romance film addresses the viewer through her refusal to reinforce her role as victim, and resists being sold into marriage as reparation for her father's honour.

The distance between seeing and knowing is textualized in the disjunction between gaze, body and voice, inscribed by the figure on the surface of the text. In the closing scene, Artemisia goes back to the seashore with Agostino's painting grid. Looking through the grid, she repeats his description of the two hills that he sees from his jail cell (where his point of view through the window bars reproduces the same perspectival grid). Yet the landscape she (and the spectator) sees does not correspond with this description: it is in fact closer to the seascape of water, sunlight and sky which Agostino induced her to imagine in his first lesson in perspective. This final scene suggests that, even if the film favours romance over history, Artemisia now has gained the necessary 'perspective' to actually see with eyes wide open the carefully contrived illusion produced by the *veduta*. This is a landscape of memory, not reality; a landscape not seen, but read through time.

THE GOVERNESS or, the *Woman in Camera*

THE GOVERNESS, a British romance film about a fictional artist, has remarkable similarities to the biopic of Artemisia Gentileschi. The comparison between the two films highlights the recurrence of tableau moments in popular period films that deal with the legacies of feminism. The tableau in THE GOVERNESS registers the porosity between history and fiction in a different way. The film reportedly began as a journal that writer-director Sandra Goldbacher wrote from the point of view of the title character.¹¹⁷ THE GOVERNESS takes place in the mid-nineteenth century, and centres on Rosina da Silva, a Jewish woman living in a close-knit Sephardic community in Victorian London. After the murder of her beloved father, she decides to adopt a false name (Mary Blackchurch) and pass as Christian in order to take employment as governess with a wealthy family living in an estate on the Scottish Isle of Skye. While tutoring the Cavendishes' rebellious young daughter Clementina, Rosina grows increasingly fascinated with the experiments on photography conducted by her employer, Charles Cavendish. She starts working as his assistant, until she accidentally discovers the solution that makes possible fixing images on photographic paper, whose formula had been unsuccessfully pursued by Charles. This finding brings them closer and, as Rosina's passion for photography grows, the photographic apparatus becomes the instrument that mediates their erotic and emotional attachment. Rosina poses for Charles in artistic compositions that she herself stages. Eventually, she takes a portrait picture of him in the nude while he is asleep, which she offers to him as a love gift. Charles grows afraid of Rosina's desires and aspirations, and when he publicly attributes her discovery to himself alone, Rosina feels betrayed. She discloses their affair and her true identity to his family, and decides to return to London and become a professional photographer.

THE GOVERNESS embraces the romance genre less ambiguously than ARTEMISIA, working as a pastiche of themes and images from Victorian culture. Goldbacher's film offers a variation on New Woman literature from the turn of the century, while falling back on canonical nineteenth-century referents. In particular, the motif of the governess evokes a range of literary intertexts from Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) to *The Turn of the Screw*, with Clementina and the adolescent Henry Cavendish taking up the role of the gothic 'corrupt' children. Visually, the film is clearly indebted to THE PIANO, with which it shares the theme of displacement (Skye replacing the untamed landscape of the New Zealand shores), and the strong-willed woman at the centre of a sexual triangle. However, it is the feminine viewpoint from the marginalised Jewish community and the central photographic theme that allow THE GOVERNESS to establish its

own distinctive mannerist variation on popular re-creations of Victorian culture.

The Victorian era constitutes a recurrent setting for postmodern rewritings of the past, having been rediscovered through cinema and other forms of popular culture as a moment of both stability and change, which lends itself particularly well to the articulation of modernity:

[T]he postmodern engagement with the nineteenth century appears to link the discourses of economics, sexuality, politics and technology with the material objects and cultures available for transportation across historical and geographical boundaries, and thus capable of hybridization and appropriation... [T]he cultural matrix of nineteenth-century England joined various and possible stories about cultural rupture that, taken together, overdetermine the period's availability for the postmodern exploration of cultural emergence.¹¹⁸

Photography in *THE GOVERNESS* concretises one such imagined moment of cultural rupture. Taking as main intertext the perfecting of the new technological medium and its professionalisation, the film locates the moment of emergence of a modern feminist consciousness alongside the imagined birth of portrait photography. The 'photographic scene' in *THE GOVERNESS* exploits the visual reflexivity implicit in the embedding of the still moment of photography within a filmic narrative. The motif of photography mediates a series of technological, cultural and sexual narratives inherited from Victorianism by self-consciously foregrounding the gaze as a figure.¹¹⁹

The figuring of the feminine gaze first appears in the opening scenes, as Rosina returns from the synagogue to the lively atmosphere of celebration at the family home. Upon crossing the threshold to the room where family and friends are congregated, a shot/reverse shot structure provides us with Rosina's viewpoint peering through a stained-glass screen. Rosina's look sutures the spectator's to her outsider position in English society, as we enter the unknown and 'exotic' world of Jewish culture. The view comes through the shot's double exposure and blurring colour filters, which provide a potent figure of 'difference' within the text. Whilst the coloured glass anticipates the photographic lens, the distortion effect in the initial images of the Jewish community already signifies Rosina's aesthetic eye – her ability 'to capture the beauty of her people' that will in the end define her as an artist-photographer, versus Cavendish's scientific practices.

The photographic theme contextualises the fictional story in the broader historical background, but the portrait/tableau as figure produces a web of meanings that stem from the characters' positions of power with regard to the photographic apparatus. Through the emphasis on framing and posing, the film articulates a series of binary meanings (voyeur/spectacle, artist/model, teacher/

pupil, science/art, Self/Other) that come together in the all-encompassing dyad masculine/feminine. Rosina's empowering is given by her appropriation of the technological means of production, by her progress from confinement and disguise – from being Jewish *in camera*, so to speak – to 'coming out' as a Jew and as an artist, both in front of and behind the (photographic) camera. Her identity is forcefully asserted when she takes the initiative to photograph Charles while he is asleep. Similarly to Artemisia's use of Agostino's body for the enactment of her version of *Judith Slaying Holofernes*, this charged scene has Rosina undressing her lover and going behind the camera to frame the man through her 'aesthetic' eye. This scene has been criticised for its reductive vision of feminist politics: it reverses the status quo but ultimately reinstates gender power relations.¹²⁰ My contention is that this gesture has more complex consequences if we interpret the photographic scene, again, as the scene of fantasy. The terms 'posing' and 'framing' do not exclude each other but are complementary, and mark the continuity between oedipal romance and acts of resistance, repetition and difference in the fiction film.

As seen in *THRILLER*, the preoccupation with 'posing' has long been part of the deconstruction of gender in experimental feminist filmmaking. According to Doane,

the subjects, whether male or female, inevitably appear to assume a mask of 'femininity' in order to become photographable (filmable) – as though femininity were synonymous with the *pose*. This may explain the feminist film's frequent obsession with the pose as position... which we see as the arrangements of the body in the interest of aesthetics and science. In their rigidity (the recurrent use of the tableau in these films) or excessive repetition... positions and gestures are isolated, deprived of the syntagmatic rationalization which, in the more classical text, conduces to their naturalization.¹²¹

Posing in *THE GOVERNESS* is certainly naturalised by the plot, yet it acquires an ever shifting number of meanings.¹²² Rosina wilfully poses for Cavendish's camera on a number of occasions; the rigidity of position demanded by the lengthy time of exposure in primitive photography transforms her mobile body into a reified image, the object of various tableaux vivants as well as the motif for still-life compositions. However, 'posing' also refers to Rosina's penchant for acting (at the beginning of the film she plays at being an actress with her sister Rebecca), and to her posing as the Christian Mary Blackchurch – with the added element of transgression signified by her 'passing' for the Other. Posing thus signifies the passive (masochistic) pleasure in the oedipal romance narrative and the objectification of woman into image, yet at the same time it connects with the terms of 'play', 'performance' and 'masquerade', resisting essentialist or fixed notions of gender.

This layering of meanings becomes apparent in the ‘tableaux’ scenes, in which Rosina stages her own gendered persona for the benefit of Charles’s camera-eye, entering an erotic game that climaxes in a sequence in which Rosina dances and poses as Salome. In choosing to perform Jewish characters of biblical inspiration, the layers of her disguise multiply (in one scene she poses as Esther, herself passing for gentile in front of King Ahasuerus, in the Book of Esther). Rosina’s hidden Jewish identity becomes an exotic mask, increasingly fetishised by the camera, but also a text that is already overwritten with the ‘types’/citations she chooses to perform. The masquerade of femininity opens up the ironic distance between woman’s body and her image, and this is what the photographic tableaux in *THE GOVERNESS* achieve: the image not as naturalised representation, but as a framed textual space that deconstructs the reality effect with its palimpsest of citations.

In the Salome sequence, posing momentarily brings the narrative to a standstill. In this set piece (punctuated by light flashes and scored to ‘orientalist’ music) Rosina is framed in different positions – including a classical ‘Venus’ pose, her back turned to the spectator and her naked body reclined over red draperies, offering itself to the viewer in a manner reminiscent of Ingres or Velázquez. The jump cuts bring together a mosaic of high- and lowbrow references: from painting to the erotics of the peep show (underscored by the intercutting of masked shots showing Cavendish’s eye peeping through the hole of the camera’s viewfinder). The complexity of the set piece derives from its masking effects and superimpositions, which construct the space of the shot as a fissure in the realistic space of the narrative – the phantasmatic scenario producing a moment of poetic reversal.

The superimposition throws into relief the hybrid nature of the filmic image as mark of embodiment, absence and symbol (writing). It appeals to the technical (making visible the ‘photographic’ effect in the film frame) but also to the magical, producing composite images that make the invisible visible: the ghost.¹²³ The superimpositions in the set piece of *THE GOVERNESS* call to mind the film-within-the-film in *THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY* and *BRAM STOKER’S DRACULA*’s hallucinatory spaces. In the chain of shot-portraits, some shots carry the imprint of Rosina’s eyes superimposed over her body.

The ‘ghostly’ presence of Rosina’s eyes facing the camera over the ‘blinded’ gaze of Rosina-as-model cancels the space of separation that establishes the discursive stability of the gaze. The figural emerges as ‘the other scene’ of realist space – the (hieroglyphic) space of condensation and displacement. As noted by Lyotard:

[T]his property of unconscious space (a property it shares with the libidinal body) – its capacity to contain several places in one place, to form a block out of what cannot possibly co-exist – is the secret of the figural, which transgresses the intervals that

constitute discourse and the distances that constitute representation... The phantasy is figurality, difference, challenging every set system of oppositions... But we also know that in some sense it is a 'writing': a repetitive configuration, a sieve in which to catch and 'clarify' all the material... that bombards the subject.¹²⁴



Subject and object: photographic superimpositions in THE GOVERNESS

Rosina's gaze and her face's 'quiet domination' are imprinted in the space of the tableau (signalling the 'fixity' of the body in time and space) as a trace simultaneously from the past (the lost object, the object of mourning) and the future. The mise-en-scène of desire works as the staging of fantasy, dissolving the separation between positions: subject and object merge in a theatrical representation where pleasure comes, again, from the feminine gaze's control over the scene of its own objectification.

The mise-en-scène re-enacts a fantasy scenario of seduction. By short-circuiting the narrative dynamics of the gaze, the film text condenses both the active gaze and the passive object – the two opposite forces separated and distributed by narrative desire into the space of storytelling – into an unexpected moment of density that poetically deforms the text. These moments of breakdown, which recall the fantastic film, signal the feminist reader's effort to break away from the closed narrative logic of psychological realism. The juxtaposition of two images (and therefore the projection of two different perspectives into one frame) destabilises the realist space with the 'compression' of exclusive and yet simultaneous positions: behind and on camera, artist and model, then and now. The sequence transforms Rosina into both the (narrative) subject and (visual) object of a fantasy scenario which, like Artemisia, she is able to control.

The stress on posing and passing recalls the critique of gender as a series of discontinuous performative gestures cemented in hegemonic historical narratives.¹²⁵ Popular film, however, resists the most radical aspects of this critique and instead asserts the search for identity driving the re-enactment of the past. The textural density in *THE GOVERNESS* posits a figural breaching of the pre-determined, overwritten space of the period reconstruction. The photographic interruptions, however, enter the discursive as symptoms of loss. In *THE GOVERNESS*, mourning drives photographic obsession, and Rosina's self-discovery through art is intertwined with her sense of family and tradition. The ghosts in the photographs lead back to the more familiar ghost of the lost father and the forefathers of Jewish identity, who guide Rosina in her search of beauty in photography. In her dreams, Cavendish takes the place of the father as shaman, imposing his hands on her brow and 'magically' raising her in her sleep. The figure of the father and, at the end of the film, the memory of the family and community lost to the cholera epidemic become constitutive of her sense of self, anchoring her photographs to the historical.

The intersection of painting and photography with cinema is instrumental in the reconstruction of feminine identity through the historical scene as reimagined by the romance narrative. By using a figure that reproduces the position of the woman filmmaker working within a male-dominated establishment, woman as sign becomes woman as producer. In both *ARTEMISIA* and *THE GOVERNESS*, the displaced feminist consciousness – woman as historical subject – is overridden by the textual identification of the woman artist with the artist-as-filmmaker. Both films end (as does *THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY*) with the realisation of loss through portraits of their respective protagonists in mourning – mourning for the loss of their families, of their lovers, and for the necessary loss of innocence that precedes experience. Free of Cavendish's influence, Rosina poses for her own camera. *Artemisia* is also 'photographed' for the last time, framed by the perspectival grid, against which she presses her hands, forming a frame with her fingers that asserts 'her' vision within the bigger frames of the grid and the shot. These endings constitute perfectly portrait moments: long takes allow the camera to slowly zoom in on the women's eyes, asserting their power and individuality through the phantasmatic support of the technologies of vision. Despite the density of the mannerist *mise-en-scène*, the films opt for linear narratives that ensure the 'fixity' of the classical portrait. In this configuration, the woman artist emerges as a historical figure in possession of the knowledge and self-expression of (post)modern femininity. This is the woman artist as self-portrait – an entirely anachronistic but utopian gesture signified by *Artemisia*'s literal gesture with her hands, reminiscent of a symbol of 1970s feminism.¹²⁶ In these closing images, the double-framing of the shot becomes instrumental in the inscription of the double consciousness that aligns the distant

heroine's eye with a feminist contemporary eye – ultimately, the filmmaker's eye.

THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY, ARTEMISIA and THE GOVERNESS take the mannerist period film to the intersection between art cinema aesthetics, feminist politics and popular narratives. All films move with extreme fluidity between the historical film and the romance film, between visual media and literary traditions, and between image as cultural memory and image as fantasy. The appropriation of the tableau, a figure fetishised by the contemporary period film, marks the convergence of visual and narrative pleasure towards the constitution of a specifically feminine position, which is active and mercurial. The displaced feminist consciousness – woman figured as historical subject – is transcended through the textual identification of the woman artist with the artist as filmmaker. At the same time, the three films posit an impasse for liberal feminism. The films unfold as scenarios that spectacularise woman's body and re-enact past traumas, and their (masochistic) romance narratives can be interpreted as a self-defeating deconstruction of the liberal feminist model.

The critical enquiry into fantasy makes room for questions around the production of gender, and the en-gendering of knowledge structures in history and art. The strategies of feminist criticism need to be adapted to address the varied responses offered by the contemporary imagination of period drama to our enduring fascination with both visual pleasure and narrative cinema. Within the conventional frame of romance, the mannerist period film produces a figural space poised between reconstruction and anachronism, which blurs the boundary between the two. The tableau and the portrait are variations of one and the same reflexive figure, which disrupts the continuity aesthetics of realism and reveals the workings of fantasy and desire. Through the active interventions of Artemisia and Rosina in their own stories, the films reimagine the past in order to construct 'an alternative imaginary for women, in which they might figure as historical agents'.¹²⁷

Nevertheless, the portrait is always delimited by its deframings and double-framings: potential readings that are subject to the return of the historical as that which determines the textual limits of revision. The deconstructive THRILLER scrutinises woman's death as a beautiful, suspended moment integral to the ideological structures of classical aesthetics. Mimi's dead body, 'frozen' in arabesque, and Lily's aesthetic corpse 'frozen' into a picture effect in THE HOUSE OF MIRTH are, respectively, a hieroglyphic and a transparent rendition of one and the same pregnant moment central to Western culture. THRILLER historicises woman's repression of subjectivity into different figures that defamiliarise received notions of femininity, rendering them strange: the speechless woman, the woman in the mirror, the woman posing. These figures, which recur in THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY, THE GOVERNESS and ARTEMISIA, have become textured

images, the locus of the scene of fantasy, and as such they can be read 'back' into the concerns driving the deconstructive strategies of the modernist, 'anti-pleasure' 1970s feminist film. These strategies still hold true – but transformed and adapted – in mannerist narrative texts that take issue, directly or indirectly, with the difficulty of woman's self-representation.

The intersection of figurative aesthetics with feminist politics in the 1990s period film produces works that (unlike Potter's 1970s experimental piece) develop a *sutured*, not disjunctive, relation with other intertexts. In *THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY* the constraints of culture and history over the female body are made visible through the physical trajectory of Isabel Archer, whose portraits in movement and moments of stasis introduce parody and interruption into the narrative frame. In the (false) biopics *ARTEMISIA* and *THE GOVERNESS*, the writerly space of the past is reconfigured through the anachronistic gestures of self-portraiture. The tableau and the portrait introduce an intermedial figure of (dis)continuity (between cinema and photography, the painted and the filmic). These hybrid forms of inscription set up the scene for a construction of femininity that is positioned in direct relation to fantasy, enlarging the frame of intelligibility beyond the mimetic/realist relation with hegemonic accounts of the past. Ultimately, the mannerist period film tells us not so much about possible ways of thinking 'woman' historically, but about the historical as imagined stage for the struggle to access self-representation.

Chapter 4 – The Scene of Writing: The Letter

Textual Erotics: Reading the Letter as Object and Figure

So far we have seen how the figures of the house and the tableau bring to the fore specific forms of filmic figuration involving camerawork and framing, and through them, the production of space and time. Intertextually as well as intratextually, they do not only make for moments of visual enjoyment, but also of hermeneutic ambiguity. This is even truer of the letter, the last figure that I will address in this book. The letter is a recognisable narrative motif in the *mise-en-scène* of the period film. It stands as an irremediably quaint object that evokes the period film's fascination with the rituals and artefacts from the past. The generic image of letter-writing links the period film to the sentimental fictions and psychological models inherited from the realist novel. The visual concreteness of writing and the aural presence of the word are self-conscious reminders of the literary roots of much of the genre, even if the memory of the literary itself is reified by the lasting conventions of the classical narrative mode.

The letter, and especially the love letter, conveys indirectly the affect of period romance. However, as a vehicle for the expression of desire, the letter is also a performative figure that carries an utterance through time and space. Hamid Naficy has noted in relation to epistolary film narratives that 'the very fact of addressing someone in an epistle... transforms the addressee from an absent figure into a presence, which hovers in the text's interstices'.¹ Classical narrative relies on this illusion of presence, yet the letter begs the exploration of the 'writing effect' – the interstitial inscription of absence which draws attention to the texturing of the cinematic shot.

Due to its polysemic ambiguity between material object, text and sign, the letter encapsulates perhaps the most concrete manifestation of the figural in the period film: it *literally* demands of the spectator to 'read' the cinematic image and to 'see' (and hear) writing embedded in the aural and visual textures of film. This mutual contamination fulfils iconic and narrative functions in films where the letter, more often than not, emerges as a figure of time conventionally absorbed by the spatial economy of period reconstruction. However, the letter

also creates networks of intersubjective relations which nurture the temporality of melodrama. I will follow the thread of the classic motif of the *letter that arrives too late* across three films that propose visual variations on this motif. In Martha Fiennes's *ONEGIN*, and Isabel Coixet's *TO THOSE WHO LOVE*, two independent films from the UK and Spain, respectively, the 'letter that arrives too late' gestures towards a transnational literary tradition linked to European Romanticism, as well as to the itineraries of the love letter through classic Hollywood and modern European cinema. In *TO THOSE WHO LOVE* the intervention of a child, who both enables and precludes the encounter between lovers, visualises the course (and the curse) of the letter as a figure of deferral and loss. The child's hand triangulates intimate two-way exchanges, making visible the interrupted trajectories of the letter, and its ability to turn the spatial markers of period realism into markers of time. To flesh out the role of the child's hand, I will also take a close look at *ATONEMENT*, a film where the intercepted letter functions as an intratextual figure of traumatic interruption and, at the same time, an intertextual palimpsest of the genre's unaccomplished histories.

The letter triggers various forms of sonic and visual displacement marked by the irruption of writing in the image, and writing *as* image. The diverse forms of figuring the letter connote both the performativeness of the written, and the self-reflexivity of the literary. Through the motif of the letter, writing becomes one more layer in the textures of the period film. The soundtrack, and more specifically the expressive use of voiceover narration, conventionally merges the moment of writing and the moment of reading. In the love letter, the voiceover of the sender projected over the image of an addressee engrossed by reading, or the parallel montage of both, construe the idea of correspondence as perfect narrative transitivity and, eventually, the projection of the love impulse as the mutual recognition in the other. The letter thus fills the part of a metonymic index for the subject's plenitude and self-knowledge, reinforced by the haptic qualities of the handwriting, a process imbued with the aura of authenticity.²

BRIGHT STAR (Jane Campion, 2009) gives a new lease of life to this somewhat tired motif. In this biopic focused on the short-lived love story between Romantic poet John Keats and Fanny Brawne, the letter provides the spectator with a site for identification from where the past can be reimagined in the present tense. Travelling love letters opened by trembling hands and drawn to the chest, cheeks and lips infuse the film with a delicate eroticism. The quills that scratch the paper composing letters and poems indistinctively become, alongside soft fabrics and hand-made gifts, part of a closeted, feminine culture that deviates from the predominantly masculine tradition of the literary biopic. The letter in *BRIGHT STAR* appears as a surface mimetic with nature, suggesting what Laura Marks calls a haptic visuality: 'an understanding of vision as embodied and material' which, like the figural, relies on the phenomenological fil-

tering of visual information.³ The film embraces this idea. Its non-hierarchical valuing of active hands (sewing, writing, handling books, cooking or caressing) weaves a sophisticated 'memory of touch' alluded to by the poet himself. In *BRIGHT STAR*, the haptic and the optical thus keep sliding under each other. In a set piece involving missives exchanged by the two young lovers in their first period apart, a letter in close-up is juxtaposed to an extreme long-shot of Keats on the seashore, a diminutive, solitary figure facing the open sea. This self-conscious evocation of an iconography of the sublime, of man confronting nature, familiar from the plastic arts and the philosophy of the era, is reinterpreted as a merging of writing, an optical, striated space, into the smooth surface of water (again borrowing from Marks's categories) followed by a close-up of Fanny kissing and caressing the paper. This is the trajectory the film experiments with: from a visual to a tactile regime of reading the word.

Inevitably, and melodramatically, letters establish an interior rhythm in the film that ultimately refers to the proximity of death as its inevitable outcome. Fanny likens Keats's letters to air in her lungs, anticipating the feelings of choking and gasping for breath that she experiences when she hears the news of his death. The exchange of letters echoes the shifts in the seasonal cycle that structures the narrative (from autumn to summer) but also the organic natural cycle bookended by disappearance (the death of the poet's brother Tom at the beginning of the film, and then Keats's own death at the end). The letter's time-marking function finds, however, its best analogy in the sequence in which Fanny's elation and subsequent depression manifest through the spectacle of the short-lived butterflies that find a temporary home in her bedroom, before their corpses litter the floor.

This visual focus on the love letter, often captured in tight close-up as a conduit for feeling and sensation, relocates the biopic from the monumental time of literary history to the sphere of the domestic and the intimate. Breaking a time-honoured cliché, the uninitiated young woman is not the one sucked into the artist's world, but it is rather the artist who is drawn to the domestic simplicity of the community of women and children fostered by the Brawne household. The last letter in *BRIGHT STAR* is the account of Keats's death, filtered through a discourse that is twice removed from the voice of the poet. His last words are reported by his travelling companion, recorded by the poet's friend Brown and read aloud to the Brawne family, including Fanny herself. During this instance of indirect discourse the sequence cuts away to a long shot of the deserted Piazza d'Espagna in Rome at the break of dawn, where Keats's coffin is transported down the square's steps and lifted onto a carriage. The account of the poet's death, including his last words, reaches Fanny from beyond the grave. With this temporal mismatch, which breaks the two-way movement of *correspondence* between the lovers, the letter highlights the melodramatic temporality at the

heart of a film that by and large rejects melodramatic plotting, and puts the intensely private love story between John Keats and Fanny Brawne into historical perspective at the moment of its conclusion.

The letter both arrives too late – a staple trope of melodrama – and *arrives at its destination*. These twin phrases, whose implications will need to be unpacked, suggest a disjunction between writing and subjectivity. The ultimate addressee is the spectator, whose involvement results in the pleasure of tears which powers melodramatic convention.⁴ What follows is a close look at the letter's figuration that seeks to unravel the complex networks of fantasy, and reconsider the modern period film through its trajectories of romance, delay and interruption.

The Letter that Arrives Too Late: Figuration and Melodramatic Temporality

BRIGHT STAR's affective use of the letter relies on haptic sensation, producing a sense of immediacy balanced on the presentness of expression and identification. Yet the love letter sustains this illusion of presence upon the deferral of self-expression. The letter produces a representation of self as a cipher, as the letter sits on the ambiguity between actuality and absence, on its 'in-betweenness' between material object and rhetorical figure.

Classical film narrative has naturalised this dual status. Let us revisit a well-known example: LETTER FROM AN UNKNOWN WOMAN (Max Ophüls, 1949) starts with a letter that pianist and womaniser Stefan Brand receives from a woman he does not remember. The letter is a functional device in the narrative, triggering the plot, but it is also a trace, a ghost conjured up through the words 'by the time you read this letter I may be dead' and materialised through a disembodied voiceover. The film's end discloses that Lisa, by then a vivid presence that engages the spectator through the tale of her unrequited love for Stefan, is dead. Her voice, however, travels in time. The letter introduces the flashback as a momentary suspension of the spatio-temporal frame of the narrative – an adjournment of action with tragic consequences. Lisa writes: 'I must find the strength to write now, before it is too late'. However, when her words reach Stefan, it is too late. The letter subjectivises the narrative (which starts, in Lisa's words, the day of the 'birth of her consciousness') but also reifies woman as enigma, as 'object of spectacle and the gaze, and as a lost object, confined to the past, unknown'.⁵ The impact of Lisa's letter, mediated through the voiceover and the flashback, lies in its import for the reconstruction of the masculine self. The letter allows Stefan to find himself *outside* himself – to reconstruct the truth

about his own life by way of the narrative fragments mirrored back to him through Lisa's perception. The voiceover/flashback device has, above all, a 'testamentary' dimension since 'the ultimate lesson of it is that when we put all the pieces together, the message that awaits us is "death": it is possible to (re)construct one's story only when one faces death'.⁶ Lisa's testamentary narrative delivered from beyond the grave thus performs as a fantasy of symbolic closure, where death stands at both ends of the communicating thread. The film, which opens with Lisa's imminent death, closes with Stefan's redeeming 'suicide' by walking into a duel he is bound to lose. The letter that arrives too late sustains the fantasy of deferred desire at the core of the sublimation of romantic love in Western culture.

The letter's symbolic function in the narrative also generates a supplementary figural dimension. The occurrence of the letter in the structures of classical Hollywood melodrama (for example, *THE LETTER*, William Wyler, 1940; *LETTER TO THREE WIVES*, Joseph Mankiewicz, 1949) disguises its writing effect into the image. In *LETTER FROM AN UNKNOWN WOMAN*, the letter mobilises a series of stylistic choices: Lisa's memories are projected through the threshold of the dissolve and by way of an extended voiceover into the bracketed space of the flashback. The letter itself comes as an insert into the sequence of shots that momentarily subverts perspectival space. The insert literally steers Stefan's look off its course, precipitating his death.⁷ Likewise, the irruption of writing into the image posits a potential rupture in the homogeneity of classical narrative. Classical narrative naturalises this disruption by way of a conventional language (continuity editing) oriented to the production of a coherent 'realist' space, in which the presence of written text is engulfed into the mimesis of the image – and into its narrative function.

Steve Neale has compellingly argued that in classic Hollywood melodrama structures of point of view and knowledge but above all, timing, collude to produce a fantasy of loss.⁸ Neale follows Franco Moretti's characterisation of the temporality of 'moving literature' by the 'rhetoric of the too late', and the resulting feelings of powerlessness it elicits, due in no small part to the empathy with a victim who is 'subjected to a chain of *causes* beyond his control – not as the artificer of his own desires, but as the victim of "reality" in its most radical form'.⁹ There is a deliberate ambiguity to this phrase: 'reality in its most radical form' suggests victimisation has little to do with 'reality' as the outcome of cause and effect, but rather with a more elusive set of forces at play. Neale goes in this direction when he claims that the 'rhetoric of the too late' has the potentiality to be read simultaneously *with* and *against* the grain of causal narrative through the potentiality of unfulfilled wish – the thought that things might have been different, that the 'fantasy could have been fulfilled, the object of desire indeed attained'.¹⁰ Melodrama thus proposes a fantasy of loss that is essentially com-

forting in its potentiality. Neale notes: 'the tears, in their function as demand, inscribe a position of narcissistic power in implying an Other who will respond'.¹¹ This state of potentiality (defined, in linguistic terms, by the subjunctive mode) resonates with Lisa's final words: 'if only you could have recognised what was always yours... could have found what was never lost... if only'.

The letter in melodrama is thus an ambiguous figure ripe for psychoanalytical interpretations, more pointedly among scholars set to disentangle the politics of desire in the woman's film. Thus, for Tania Modleski, the film's structure paradoxically foregrounds feminine desire whilst erasing female agency,¹² whilst Gaylyn Studlar highlights masochistic pleasure as the key to female sacrifice, which makes Lisa's letter, effectively, a suicide note.¹³ However, these readings of the sender, to whom our attention is compelled by the narrative, detract from the focus on the letter as the (repressed) manifestation of the 'other scene of writing' itself: in other words, what the letter's figurative representation both shows and hides. Reading through a Lacanian grid, Slavoj Žižek argues that the real message is the figural *stain* left by the letter itself, and asks: 'is not the letter itself ultimately such a stain – not a signifier but rather an object resisting symbolization, a surplus, a material leftover circulating among the subjects and staining its momentary possessor?'¹⁴ By reading the figure as a symbolic node of fantasy, the argument shifts from the potential examination of writing as agency, to the network of intersubjective relations set in motion by the object itself. If the letter is always already defined by its designated addressee, the letter *always* arrives at its destination, allocating the postman (the spectator) a fixed place in the symbolic structures of communication. However, by the mere fact of circulating the letter also opens up a space of uncertainty that challenges narrative teleology – it becomes, in the figural sense, *visible*.

The 'letter that arrives too late' or, the letter as a conduit of relations marked by deferral and absence can be conceptualised as a Lacanian figure of direct import to the psychosexual dynamics of melodrama. In Jacques Lacan's schema, the 'letter' (in its multiple meanings) is the very material trace of the subject's fragmentation: the mark of lack constitutive of a subject always already alienated in the Symbolic order. Quite literally, the letter in the image reveals the partial object: the fetish – the object *petit a* [a] – that defers the encounter with the Other/*Autre* [A], without ever remitting to a signified (the letter as detail in the text is often unreadable) but to the fluctuating chain of signifiers.¹⁵ The constellation of signifiers introduced by the letter (the voice, the face, the writing hand, the paper, the quill) and its multiple instances of condensation and displacement in the filmic text (through the voiceover, the close-up, the lap dissolve, or the superimposition) suggest that the letter constitutes in fact an unstable, composite sign.¹⁶ Rather than a metaphoric 'deep' object, the letter – the presence of writing within the film text – presents an economy of condensation

and displacement that creates relations and distributes positions in performance.

The letter has been the token of a ‘critical correspondence’¹⁷ generated by Edgar Allan Poe’s short story ‘The Purloined Letter’ (1845). In this story, the Queen writes a letter whose contents are never disclosed (but which involves a compromising secret which she needs to hide from the King). The letter changes hands several times, first giving power to the Minister – who steals it from the Queen – and then to the Detective, who is able *to see it* where the Police fails (the letter is ‘hidden’ in plain view), and to restore it to its rightful place. For Lacan, this ‘purloined letter’ is an allegory of the signifier and of the production of the subject as an effect of language. The letter – a circulating object that alters the power positions of the archetypal characters in the story with regard to knowledge – is simultaneously object and frame of discourse, producing a series of symbolic relationships that define the subject with regard to its position within the intersubjective network. As Johnson points out, the letter is ‘precisely that which subverts the polarity subjective/objective, that which makes subjectivity into something whose position in a structure is situated by the passage through it of an object.’¹⁸ The letter thus works as both motif and frame of discourse, index *and* void of subjectivity.

This pattern can be significantly explored with regard to the figurality of the letter in the mannerist costume film, in connection with the structural absence that underlies the (other) scene of writing. In *THE AGE OF INNOCENCE* the network of social relationships is represented through a profusion of *writings* (objects, codes, rituals) that supplement both actual relationships as well as the spectator’s direct relation with ‘the Past’ – replacing it with the intricate signs of pastness. As we have seen, in this film the image itself accumulates intertextual references of pictorial, literary and cinematic origin. The opacity of writing in close-up connotes its equivocal meanings in a hieroglyphic world in which ‘the real thing was never said or done or even thought, but only represented by a set of arbitrary signs’. Writing invades the space of personal relationships. Newland’s circling around two opposite women (the ‘homely’, virginal brunette May, and the ‘foreign’ sophisticated blonde Ellen) is visualised through letter-images: *THE AGE OF INNOCENCE* includes several scenes in which letters and telegrams are performed by the senders (Ellen and May alternatively) from the viewpoint of the recipient (Newland). Ellen in the snow or May against a backdrop of roses voice the written word in terms of Newland’s subjective perception of it. These instances of direct address to the camera – the emphasis on the *telling* over the *showing* – produce a certain theatrical distance, transforming the female senders into flat images conveyed by their writing: virtual postcards projected into Newland’s (un)consciousness. The feminine characters progressively become two sides of the same coin: mere reflections with equal weight

that represent two incompatible options: on the one side, Ellen, the love object; on the other, May, the prohibition. A different form of communication emerges in the interstitial spaces produced by the flux of correspondence: a libidinal economy in which Ellen and May are rewritten, respectively, into the impossible loci of the sublime object (condensed into the image of the 'letter-key' which forecloses Newland's dreams of freedom when returned to him), and of (symbolic) obstacle (the telegram announcing the imminent wedding that literally arrives at the eleventh hour, preventing Newland from consummating his relationship with Ellen). The film circles around an encounter that keeps being constantly deferred.

The textures of the image reinforce this labyrinthine form of communication where the impossibility of a sexual relationship is writ large. The written word in close-up becomes unreadable, an opaque image that provides yet another layer to the textures of the frame. The stopping of the moving film image reveals the letter-image as that which inscribes Ellen under erasure:¹⁹ by way of a complex dissolve that juxtaposes Ellen's image, her writing and Newland's writing hand in the same frame, Ellen does not write, but *is written*.



~~Woman~~: femininity under erasure. The letter in THE AGE OF INNOCENCE

'Ellen' qua desiring subject is effectively barred from the relationship. In the truest sense of the Lacanian maxim Woman does not exist, but in her role as the supreme partial object (the object *a*) she embodies both the threat and the compensation for male lack. Feminine subjectivity being absent in the film, Ellen's *image* is framed as one more object feeding the language of fetishism and melancholy.

In this respect, the material intrusion of the letter in THE AGE OF INNOCENCE illustrates the occult logic of courtly love: 'an altogether refined way of making up for the absence of sexual relation by pretending that it is we who put an

obstacle to it'.²⁰ Elaborating on this point, Žižek notes that Woman is raised to the rank of the ideal Thing – a vacant position around which the subject's desire is structured, a space distorted by the desiring gaze:

[T]he Object is attainable only by way of an incessant postponement, as its absent point of reference... 'sublimation' occurs when an object, part of everyday reality, finds itself at the place of the impossible Thing. Herein resides the function of those artificial obstacles that suddenly hinder our access to some ordinary object: they elevate the object into a stand-in for the Thing. This is how the impossible changes into the prohibited: by way of the short circuit between the Thing and some positive object rendered inaccessible through artificial obstacles.²¹

The logic of courtly love permeates narrative movement in *THE AGE OF INNOCENCE*. The lovers' relationship is permanently structured through a third object (a stand-in for the Symbolic, in psychoanalytic terms). The letter is that object, which resists being absorbed by the transitive, dual movement of correspondence. In this respect, May functions as an indirect executor of the letter. The child bride (like the child messenger) presents herself as a self-effacing blank slate, fulfilling a duplicitous function as bearer of letters between Ellen and Newland, who organise their affair largely around and through May. May is the physical recipient of a farewell letter intended *for Newland*; Ellen, in turn, receives messages from May – the telegram announcing the wedding – that are ultimately addressed to Newland as well. The detail (an insert shot) of May's 'innocent' hand as she gives Ellen's farewell letter to Newland, and the white trail of her bridal satin dress point at the contradictory construction of the female body in Victorian societies – May's 'knowing/not knowing' ambivalence. Her body is the metaphor of the violence of the letter whose meaning is arbitrary, but which nonetheless reaches its destination. May's unreadability – her 'whiteness' – stands for a literal signifier of the blankness of the message her body delivers. The letter is instrumental to the logic of melodrama: by reading the double text posed by May in different, temporally non-coincidental ways, Newland and Ellen perpetually circle around each other, thus missing each other.

In this scheme, the letter does not fulfil a communicative but a structural function. It remains, to all accounts, the blind spot of the structuralist grid. Melodrama's 'letter that arrives too late' is also the object *a* that inscribes the surplus of desire:

[T]he letter which circulates among the subjects of Poe's story, determining their position in the intersubjective network, is no longer the materialized agency of the *signifier* but rather an *object* in the strict sense of materialized enjoyment – the stain, the uncanny excess that the subjects snatch away from each other, forgetful of how its very

possession will mark them with a passive, 'feminine' stance that bears witness to the confrontation with the object-cause of desire.²²

This excess is articulated visually, through the fetishised detail of the letter. The letter therefore allows for the encounter between two seemingly irreconcilable readings of Freudian psychoanalysis: Lacan's 'linguistic' reworking, and Lyotard's figural principle. In *THE AGE OF INNOCENCE*, the letter passing between three characters is the 'stain' that draws the phantasmatic map of affects underlying the figurative representation. If femininity's structural absence underpins the temporal flux of melodrama, the letter's visibility in the image also reads fragmentation in the genre's relationship to space.

Letters and Spatial Displacement

The reproduction of a verbal medium in the visual texturing of film, either as a material presence or as performance of the written, produces something akin to what Garrett Stewart calls 'reverse ekphrasis'. Where traditional ekphrasis is concerned with the literary rendering of plastic art, its reverse, 'the painted experience of reading, or at least the look of it' posits a 'full *textual* inversion by which pictured reading becomes the true mirror double of the read picture'.²³ Whilst Stewart is concerned with the genre status of the 'scene of reading' in painting (or, 'the look of reading'), reverse ekphrasis also serves my look *at* the letter across films in order to explore its figural trace against the grain of its realist, narrative-driven figuration. The letter appears as a sort of threshold: between present and past, the intimate and the social, but also between displacement of thought and the tangible presence of the body in space.

The letter dovetails period realism with classical narrative in films where it continues to reassert the temporality of melodrama. For example, in *CYRANO DE BERGERAC* and *DANGEROUS LIAISONS* (Stephen Frears, 1988) the letter performs as object-motif: it is intratextual and thematic, and it brings closure to the narrative. However, other films expose, rather than repress, the letter's figural-ity outside this model. Reverse ekphrasis, or the material presence of writing in film, lies at the core of an alternative tradition of experimentation with the 'literariness' of film. Two period dramas from the 1970s directed by François Truffaut, *TWO ENGLISH GIRLS* and *L'HISTOIRE D'ADÈLE H./THE STORY OF ADÈLE H.* (1975), reflect cinema's fascination with the representation of self through the mechanisms of writing. It has been noted that, while searching for a purely cinematic expression, Truffaut's films paradoxically express a nostalgia for the book.²⁴ *TWO ENGLISH GIRLS* is criss-crossed by handwritten letters, diaries and

manuscripts that draw a love triangle mediated by the written word. The film adopts the memory of the literary as its enunciating position. *TWO ENGLISH GIRLS* was originally born as a 550-page screenplay by Jean Gruault, subsequently trimmed by Gruault and Truffaut into a fiercely faithful adaptation of Henri-Pierre Roché's autobiographical novel *Les Deux Anglaises et le Continent* (1956). As Roché's experience becomes a mirror for Truffaut's, a dialogue takes shape, starting, as we saw in chapter one, with the opening credits. They roll over a series of close-ups of a copy of Roché's book, whose pages appear densely annotated by Truffaut, making explicit the task of the adapter (see fig. p. 60). The film uses intermittently a heavy voiceover narration, through which fragments of the literary text are read aloud by the director himself. This double inscription of the author as interpreter grafts the literary into the *mise-en-scène*: the film develops as a visual extension of the narrator's voice – a voice that performs as writing. *TWO ENGLISH GIRLS* thus boldly declares its will to be faithful to the literary text, while opening up a space of signs where film and book can interact.²⁵ The result is closer to the effect of the intertitles of silent cinema, and the textures of the image suggest this association by way of a variety of archaic film devices such as irises. By recourse to a literary voiceover that eschews the middle ground of the theatrical dramatisation, writing emerges in excess of the representational space of the image. *TWO ENGLISH GIRLS* thus distances itself from the classical *découpage* of the Hollywood adaptation, as well as from the *cinéma de qualité* notoriously attacked by Truffaut in the 1950s (a historical precedent to entrenched critical prejudice towards the middlebrow adaptation).²⁶

Truffaut's literary period films are rooted in melodrama but unfold from an elaborate and self-reflexive *mise-en-scène* of writing. In *TWO ENGLISH GIRLS*, letters written and read (performed) by the actors underscore the artificiality of the narrative (set in the Belle Époque) and of its characters as belated archetypes of literary romanticism. Writing inscribes onto the image the spatio-temporal displacement implicit in the very notion of the letter-object. The reading aloud of the written text, alongside the actor's direct address to the camera is no less conventional than the voiceover that allows access to a character's thoughts and writing, yet it challenges the convention that would seal off the fictional space of the classical narrative. The film – which revolves around the on-and-off attachment of the young Frenchman Claude to the British sisters Anne and Muriel Brown – takes place entirely in a fantasy space dominated by interdiction and desire. As Anne Gillain has noted, in *TWO ENGLISH GIRLS* the protective screen of a realist plot does not exist. The web of interdictions (spun by the mother figures who hover over the fatherless protagonists) does not stem from any given social reality, but rather works within the logic of unconscious images and fantasies,²⁷ finding perfect expression in the persistent mirroring – and deferral – of feeling into its writing. The shifting and almost incestuous love affairs of

Claude with his two 'English sisters' unfold through journeys between Paris and Wales. They are mediated by Claude's literary self-consciousness (which impels him to transform their story into a novel, and publish Muriel's intimate journals), by Muriel's compulsive journal writing, by the sisters' letters – often performed aloud – and last but not least, by the self-awareness imposed by the characters' constant exercise in translation from French into English and vice versa. Fantasised by Truffaut as a love story between Marcel Proust and Charlotte Brontë,²⁸ the literary dimension takes over the markers of (nation-specific) realism. The present of the film keeps sliding into the past, as if told in the 'past imperfect' tense, in which the spectator *sees* the love story unfold but s/he is also the recipient of its *telling*.²⁹

The letter as token of literary romanticism reappears in *THE STORY OF ADELÈ H.*, a film that adapts the diaries of Victor Hugo's youngest daughter to construct a powerful female character driven to madness by desperate, unrequited love. The film focuses on Adèle's hopeless pursuit of a young British officer stationed in the overseas post of Halifax, Nova Scotia. Her feverish writing – in the form of letters to her parents and intimate journals – dominates the film, spinning a web of fantasies around the all-consuming rituals of romantic love, and their dangerous proximity to madness and death.³⁰ The letter constructs reality through a claustrophobic evocation of the literary universe of nineteenth-century Romanticism – whose trace persists in the erased family name of 'Adèle H(ugo)'. 'Victor Hugo' is figured in the film as its major intertext, but also as the Name of the Father – the absence that constrains and determines the symbolic space of feminine writing in the film – a name that Adèle repudiates in her writing (in her diaries she stamps 'I am born of unknown father').

As Adèle seeks to redefine her identity through her writing, her writing (like the compulsive letter-writing in *TWO ENGLISH GIRLS*) takes over the place of outside reality. It is also the space where the archetypes of femininity are fixed. In the *mise-en-scène* of one of Adèle's letters to her parents (a letter in which she lies about a non-existent marriage), the mobile surface of the sea is superimposed on a close-up of her face as she performs her letter. Adèle's subjective world is projected through her spatial mobility; her flight to Halifax, and then to Barbados, is also a flight from reality, symbolically associated with the fatherland. The inscription of the female gaze 'drowning' in the sea (Adèle is haunted by nightmares of her sister's death by drowning) spectacularises feminine hysteria, in a way reminiscent of the dream images of Isabel's sailing trip in the film-within-the-film in *THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY*. Adèle writes and is written: the madwoman's desire haunts the margins of literary history and of masculine authority, but is also a mask for the (male) film author's escape into the literary as a cinematic language of feeling.

TWO ENGLISH GIRLS and THE STORY OF ADÈLE H. fit neither the generic excess of the costume romance nor the picturesque look of the high-profile adaptations in 1980s French and British cinema. Both films rely on variations on the letter figure that condense and displace the reconstruction of the past into intricate sign-worlds, in which the ‘showing’ mode of realism gives in to the fragmentary literariness of the ‘telling’. These films were critically ill-received and ignored by domestic audiences at the moment of their release; they seemed thoroughly out of touch with the turbulent climate in post-1968 France.³¹ Instead, their ‘epistle-centricity’ projects the legacy of French literary diarists (from Hugo to Roché) through journeys beyond the continent (the space of the nation), and into imagined international encounters that stress the flight from social reality.

I would like to extend these considerations to two films made more than two decades later. ONEGIN and TO THOSE WHO LOVE are two independent productions in the margins of the mainstream period film of the 1990s which inhabit an imagined European, rather than national, space. Like Truffaut’s idiosyncratic 1970s period dramas, these films fit into my (necessarily fragmentary) account of the letter’s trajectory because they suggest, borrowing from Jacques Derrida, the figure’s ‘force of breaking with its context, that is, the set of presences which organize the moment of its inscription’.³² Both films are entirely predicated on the spatial self-enclosure of romantic attachments at the expense of expansive contextual reconstruction and, by extension, of period aesthetics as illustration. In their evocations of literary worlds, writing and the letter become crucial to the expressive distillation of feeling through spatial and temporal displacement. This figure becomes ever more visible in its new incarnations in international period films that revolve around Romantic mythologies.

The Love Letter and the Queer Encounter: ONEGIN

The image of the woman writing a letter in TWO ENGLISH GIRLS and THE STORY OF ADÈLE H. has become part of literary modernity. The letter-writing woman is synonymous with the myth of personal literary expression, through both the private practices of correspondence and diary-writing as well as the public forms of the novel and the essay. Caroline Steedman notes that there has been a desire (academic and otherwise) for the figure of the ‘woman writing a letter’, which manifests in both the fields of literary and cultural theory, as well as in the popular consumption of literary fictions in the modern era:

As a figure, she has come to offer a new originary narrative: she accounts for the emergence of modern subjects and modern social structures; of gender relations, and perhaps even of the concept of gender itself; of literary, cultural and feminist theory.

The Woman Writing a Letter, displayed in a Scene of Writing – this is the proposition – has become a myth of origin in her own right.³³

The success of modern epistolary narratives (from the *Portuguese Letters*, 1669, to Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*, 1747-1748) proves that it was woman's voice that was 'wanted, heard and consumed' – in spite of it often being no more than a mask for the male author. The modern novel was to permit the historical emergence into the public sphere of a narrative with a particular impact in modern popular culture.³⁴

As a fictional romantic heroine, or a stand-in for the female author, the period film has found in the woman writer its ideal poster girl. The letter is a powerful signifier of a discourse of individuality, intimacy and desire, which forms part of the legacy of the modern European novel.³⁵ Film seeks to capture the expressiveness of the process itself through the *mise-en-scène* of the period objects and the use of the close-up (of the hand and face) as signifier of psychological depth. The moment of writing has become a cliché in the writer's biopic as well as in romantic fictions. In particular, the successful cycle of films based on or inspired by the work of Jane Austen has spawned multiple versions of this moment, which blur the boundaries between both sub-genres: pictorial quotations, as in the Vermeer-inspired lighting that graces the sight of Elinor at her writing desk by the window in *SENSE AND SENSIBILITY*; theatrical display, such as Fanny Price's frontal performance of her letters and historical writings as she grows up in *MANSFIELD PARK*; or scenes that foreground the feelings (frustration, hesitation, exhilaration) elicited by writing as work, as in the opening sequence of the biopic *BECOMING JANE*. These moments typically privilege affective involvement over authenticity in the reconstruction; together, they cement a generic pattern subject to repetition and variation.

Writing presupposes reading, but is reading writing's matching mirror image? Reading makes for a static image, at odds with narrative flow. The visual rendering of reading is contradictory: it invites the viewer in, but it confronts him/her with an image that suggests opacity and inward energy, an image that withholds: a face lost in meditation, a body at rest from the effort of production. The scene of reading excludes its context, but also its content. Stewart notes that 'women are the most familiar avatars of reading's look', and notes the eroticisation of the female reader as a common trope in this particular painting genre. However, to the question of why reading should find its predominant iconic vessel in woman's body, he surmises: 'because *her* pleasure is always somehow out of phase with the onlooker's, male or not?'³⁶ In the letter's scene of reading/writing, as in melodrama itself, timing opens up a space of ambiguity of direct import to the spatial visualisation – and spectacularisation – of gender and the sexual encounter.

ONEGIN, a small-scale British film that freely adapts the Russian verse novel *Eugene Onegin* (Aleksandr Pushkin, 1831), takes on the melodramatic figure of the ‘letter that arrives too late’ in the tradition of LETTER FROM AN UNKNOWN WOMAN. Yet the letter originates a fantasy scenario that does not readily fit the aesthetic patterns of heritage realism or the feminist re-readings of the woman’s film. The film re-creates the realm of a European literary tradition – Russian Romanticism – that comes already shaped by exoticised renderings in Hollywood cinema, such as the epic DOCTOR ZHIVAGO (David Lean, 1965). Shunning the grander tapestry of historical events, ONEGIN is an intimate piece that attempts to capture mood through its static, painterly mise-en-scène and its setting in a ‘foreign’ landscape uprooted from its sociocultural context.

ONEGIN is the story of another ‘letter from an unknown woman’ and its devastating consequences for the masculine protagonist. Evgeny Onegin leaves St Petersburg to claim his deceased uncle’s country state as inheritance. In the country he befriends a poet, Lensky, engaged to be married to Olga, a girl from a local family of landowners. Onegin instantly feels attracted to Olga’s sister, Tatyana, and she falls in love with him. However, when Tatyana writes him a letter declaring her feelings, Onegin rejects her, and attempts to return the letter to her in the course of a social gathering – a letter she refuses to take back. To discourage Tatyana, Onegin takes Olga to dance in view of everyone at the party, incurring Lensky’s rage. Lensky impetuously challenges Onegin to a duel, and Onegin shoots him dead. He leaves the country, but Tatyana’s love letter comes to haunt him six years later, when he meets her again in a society ball, only to find her transformed into the beautiful and enigmatic wife of a military nobleman. Onegin then starts to court Tatyana obsessively, but this time it is Tatyana who rejects him – he comes too late.

The film adapts the classic Russian verse novel into a collection of what I would like to call, borrowing from Barthes, ‘Romantic mythologies’.³⁷ The film subsumes its literary referent as a set of images that produce an idea of the Romantic (anti-)hero by connotation, performing variations on certain particular themes such as ‘the dandy’, ‘the duel’, ‘love unrequited’ or ‘*la belle dame sans merci*’. It is in these images that we find the key to Ralph Fiennes’s performance, as well as to the overall aesthetics of the film. His Onegin is an amalgam of Pushkin’s hero and other literary characters like Ivan Turgenev’s Tchulkaturin, the first-person narrator in *The Diary of a Superfluous Man* (1899), another story of frustrated love and wasted lives told as a letter from a man at his deathbed. The film eschews, however, the recourse to the literary word and defines its hero visually, through his languor, his sartorial preciousness, his narcissism and, above all, through his proverbial ennui. Fiennes’s extremely mannered appearance and gestures bring to the fore the character’s artificial and feminised persona (‘like Aphrodite thence emerging/Did giddy deity desire/To masquer-

ade in male attire').³⁸ The screen character of Onegin establishes a visual link with ideas about the dandy circulating at the height of the nineteenth century, which take its cue from Pushkin's text as well as from other sources such as Charles Baudelaire's portrait of the dandy as a fixture of urban modernity:

Dandyism is a sunset; like the declining daystar, it is glorious without heat and full of melancholy... The distinguishing characteristic of the dandy's beauty consists above all in an air of coldness which comes from an unshakeable determination not to be moved.³⁹

In the film, melancholic masculinity is a given, a pose equally concerned with ethics as with aesthetics and inflected by casting choices (the emotional coldness in Fiennes's performance connects with his previous 'cruel lover' parts in *THE ENGLISH PATIENT* and *WUTHERING HEIGHTS* [Peter Kosminsky, 1992]). The character's overdetermined stance can be easily, and predictably, read as queer. Marked by a lack of desires and aspirations, Onegin's melancholy comes across, in the Freudian sense, as 'mourning without loss' or failed mourning – a state of narcissism which, as Judith Butler has noted, results from the formative exclusion of homosexual attachments in the child's developing psychosexuality. The repressed homosexual object of desire becomes an absence that is disavowed and thus never grieved – a sacrifice that is, according to Butler, at the basis of a culture of heterosexual melancholy.⁴⁰ I am not suggesting that the film produces an explicitly queer reading of its source. As in *THE AGE OF INNOCENCE*, queer content is actively repressed by the performance of fidelity understood as an unironic, conservative attachment to the (heterosexual) past. However, I want to retain the possibility of reading a queer structure of feeling which, I would contend, underlies the film's temporally complex mise-en-scene of the letter as the ambiguous site of missed heterosexual encounters.

The film's visual rendering of its Romantic intertext largely relies on the exquisite attention to the gaze and to the static and the slowed-down image to convey an elaborate eroticism. As we saw in the previous chapter, the irruption of the eye in the picture can register the split between vision and knowledge. This is, for Bal, at the basis of what she calls a 'melancholic aesthetic', which is

modeled upon the initial experience of melancholia that results from primary narcissism and the lack that the subject knows, but fails to *see*. Repressing this foundation in primary narcissism, this aesthetic may be itself an aesthetics of blindness. Acknowledging the foundation of melancholia in the primary experience of blindness then becomes the royal road to insight.⁴¹

Onegin is somebody who looks, yet is unable to *see*. In contrast, Tatyana's look expresses longing and desire, but also insight. Tatyana's gaze is active and prescient; as her sister Olga notes, she 'seems to want to read so much into every-

thing'. Olga and Tatyana constitute a further variation on the SENSE AND SENSIBILITY theme – the two sisters with opposed characters – which recurs in literary adaptations like HOWARDS END, but also in THE GOVERNESS and TO THOSE WHO LOVE. Whereas Olga, the 'realist' sister fails to comprehend the true significance of Lensky's dramatic farewell before his duel, Tatyana's anxious peering through thresholds and windows posits a gaze distorted by fantasy that *knows*.

In this respect, the film produces a stunning tableau moment that invites such fantasy reading, in a scene in which Tatyana spies on Lensky and Onegin while they are idling on a jetty. As the camera slowly pans along the supine body of Onegin, the moving shot inserts a literal quotation of the Pre-Raphaelite painting *Chatterton* (1856) by Henry Wallis.⁴² The tight close-up on Onegin's body that visually suppresses the actual distance between the jetty and Tatyana's boat inscribes woman's desiring gaze through a grafted, flat image that alters the realist perspective. Whilst faithful to the source poem (in which Onegin is described as suffering from 'the Russian blues', which brings him to the brink of suicide),⁴³ this allusion reinforces the mannerist textuality of the adaptation. Narrative time is momentarily suspended, and Onegin is knowingly – that is, textually – presented in the guise of the Romantic poet as a 'sad young man'. This passive masculine figure has been re-encoded as a gay image able to subvert heterosexual narratives and endowed, in Dyer's words, with a 'romantic-pornographic' edge⁴⁴ that is only enhanced by Tatyana's 'peeping tom' position, languid gestures and androgynous adolescent gaze.

The tableau moment hints at the secret of the film – a young man's death – but also establishes the sad young man as the unwitting, blinded object of woman's desire. The reification of death as an object of voyeuristic contemplation anticipates the duel that will take place on the same waterfront under stormy skies. Shot in extended slow-motion, this set piece constitutes another stylised Romantic vignette (reminiscent of THE DUELLISTS) which eroticises the rituals of masculinity. Once more, the outcome puts Tatyana in the position of (imaginary) secret witness to a homoerotic tableau centered on a young man's 'beautiful' corpse: Lensky's body lies inert on the jetty, while Onegin cradles his friend's bleeding head in his hands. As the *mise-en-scène* manipulates perspective (Tatyana is too far away to actually see), this twice-repeated structure – first on a subtextual level, then in the actual narrative – of feminine desire for the sad young man as 'tableau mourant' brings to the fore the too-late-ness of desire that structures the failed correspondence.

The duel's tragic outcome is the obstacle that drives Onegin and Tatyana apart, linking Onegin to the pattern of 'failed male leads' who project a 'suffering masculine subject' promoted by the romantic period film. Referring to the protagonists in SENSE AND SENSIBILITY, THE REMAINS OF THE DAY, THE AGE OF INNOCENCE or, indeed, ONEGIN, Pidduck describes a 'masculinist narrative tra-

jectory of repression, suffering and desire'⁴⁵ that is certainly at work in ONEGIN and especially in TO THOSE WHO LOVE. But ONEGIN encourages a double reading of the 'letter that arrives too late' that both indulges in the (masochistic) pleasures of the narrative of love unrequited, while opening an ambiguous space between the acts of writing and reading, masculine and feminine positions. The figure of the letter moves centre stage as source of both fascination and queer discontent with the fantasy scenarios of heterosexual romance.

In ONEGIN, the love letter is the figure that cements the intertext of literary Romanticism, and the theme (or, in Barthes's terms, the 'available structure', discussed in the previous chapter) that 'migrates' through different media – from literature to theatre and film. In the relationship between Onegin and Tatyana (mediated by the books that pass between them and the idealised portraits that they fabricate of each other) we find again the phantasmatic figure of courtly love, passing through an object that signifies the abolition of the love Object (the Other) through the fetish of the partial object (the object *a*). The key to ONEGIN's abandonment of realism lies in the love-letter figure that splits the film down the middle in two neat halves: a first part in which Onegin is 'read' as the archetypal melancholic subject – and as object of desire – by Tatyana, and a second part in which Tatyana is reinvented as the Lady-Object, indifferent and inaccessible, who rekindles Onegin's *own* desire. The two would-be lovers' image of each other always, irreversibly, exceeds the other.

The love-letter figure happens twice, almost as a musical leitmotif that plays in two crucial, parallel moments: a scene of writing, and a scene of reading. However, these two apparently symmetrical sequences are kept apart by six years and two different forms of the gaze. The 'scene of writing' in ONEGIN condenses the various fantasy positions allowed by the letter. It unfolds as a long, silent self-standing sequence that alternates by way of parallel editing a fragment in which Tatyana writes her letter to Onegin, the delivery of the letter by a peasant boy, and the image of Onegin silently reading it in his own drawing room. The dream quality of the setting comes to the fore as Tatyana sets out to write her letter in the dead of (a sleepless) night. The actual process of producing the letter is an arduous one: after the writing materials have been gathered, Tatyana starts writing down on her knees and with her arms leaning on the ground, in an uncomfortable pose that evidences the difficulty of the task. Writing does not come easily: the young woman stops, crosses words, corrects them, getting her fingers and nails black with ink in the process. The scene is miles away from the traditional propriety typical of period drama. Edited as a mosaic of insert shots and rapid takes that capture her flowing hair, sweaty brow and mobile, large hands, the scene inscribes self-pleasuring and its repression. Tatyana is restless, she cannot sleep, yet when questioned by her nanny, the young woman replies curtly, 'I'm not sick'. In her poetic manifesto *The Laugh of the*

Medusa, Hélène Cixous writes: ‘who, feeling a funny desire stirring inside her (to sing, to write, to dare to speak, in short, to bring out something new) hasn’t thought she was sick? Well, her shameful sickness is that she resists death, that she makes trouble’.⁴⁶ Tatyana resists death by making trouble, by short-circuiting Onegin’s awakening desire with her own. Tatyana’s writing is, borrowing from Cixous, a painful process of ‘coming to writing’ (and a narcissistic *coming* in writing). But, above all, it is writing as actual work; it is secret, it is messy, it painfully scratches the polite skin of the paper. It is, in short, a clandestine appropriation of the weapons of desire.



Nocturnal activity: the woman writer in ONEGIN

What does Tatyana write? The fruit of her nocturnal activity is censored from view. Her writing is presented as fragmentary, *visible* but not readable: a set of disconnected words thrown into relief by the close-ups of the thick trace of ink on the rough paper: ‘why?’, ‘help’, ‘secret’, ‘love’. The text as a whole, however, remains hidden. What we witness is feminine writing as figural, masturbatory expression: a flow of ink that mingles with Tatyana’s sweat and stains the paper, her white robe, and her large hands. There is no voiceover in the sequence, nor a close-up of the whole text being brought to us in performance – not at this point. The scene of writing is the scene of crime; Tatyana drops the quill as one would drop a weapon after unwittingly committing murder. Later in the film Onegin will attempt to return her letter to Tatyana so ‘she should not be compromised’, but Tatyana insists in his keeping the letter: it does not belong to her, but to him, the gift being, as Modleski notes, a measure of the donor’s rather than of the recipient’s power.⁴⁷

Onegin receives the letter, but the several close-ups of him reading it are not wrapped up in a voiceover disclosing the words, nor an image of Tatyana performing her letter. In silence, Onegin throws the letter to the fire, and then retrieves it from the fireplace before it burns to ashes. The scene closes there: the letter has *not* reached its destination, and it will not do so until much later, compelling the film to return to the scene of writing in its second half. In the interval, the respective positions of sender and addressee swap dramatically. In the ball scene that marks Onegin's return after six years of absence from St Petersburg, a metamorphosed Tatyana reappears. Clad in a red gown, the glamorous young lady soon catches Onegin's eye. Their (re)encounter is captured in a series of tight shots and reverse shots:

ONEGIN: Mademoiselle Larin! We've met before... I saw you mademoiselle but I wasn't sure it was... you.

TATYANA: And? Is it?

ONEGIN: Yes...

TATYANA: You seem surprised.

ONEGIN: No! Forgive me. Merely...

PRINCE: Will you forgive me, Evgeny? Tatyana is my wife.

It is at this moment – the essential moment of misrecognition – that the subjective positions shift. Tatyana has not in the least changed, but she is now desirable because safely unattainable; her image takes possession of Onegin's eye as that little 'more than herself' (the object *a*) that prevents the encounter with the Other. It is then that Onegin goes back to her letter. For the first time, we hear Tatyana performing her letter in voiceover, over a visual montage in which Onegin gazes at the Lady-Object with adoration, in the distance. The voice is completely disengaged from the body, and the images that accompany her reading (close-ups of the line of her neck, shoulders and shawl) show Tatyana already a fetish, the *corps morcellé* that fuels the chain of desire. The voice becomes a mere remainder of presence: an appendix of writing that discloses the mere illusion of interiority. Where Tatyana once was, she is not anymore; the aural integrity of her voice declaring her love for Onegin is supplemented by the temporal displacement of writing. Tatyana does not write but is written; like in *THE AGE OF INNOCENCE*, woman's sexual agency resurfaces as women themselves are crossed out from writing, reduced to a series of images that feed romantic desire and postpone the encounter with death. Tatyana will always

remain elsewhere for Onegin, and Onegin will be faithful to his love until he dies.

The letter is thus the object that acts as a structuring frame in the film. It acts as a *veduta* that mediates in the relationship between vision and knowledge, throwing into relief the ethics and aesthetics of melancholic subjectivity as queer encounter. ONEGIN is the story of a fabricated loss. The letter – the instrument of linear heterosexual correspondence – becomes the retrospective point of origin in a structure of feeling which, stressed by the very slowness of the film, and the frequent slowing down of the temporality of its images, dwells on ‘belatedness, dreaming, anticipation... all ways of stretching, bending, but not breaking linear time’ that characterise queer temporality.⁴⁸ The last meeting between Tatyana and Onegin takes place in a nearly empty, ice-white, mausoleum-like palace hall where Tatyana lives, literally, ‘entombed’. Tatyana’s white clothing and Onegin’s full black attire stress the otherworldly feeling of the encounter, in which Onegin can finally declare his love for Tatyana. Asked by Tatyana about the reasons for his change of heart, Onegin responds: ‘I don’t know. At seeing you again, I have seen myself.’ The final encounter spells out the melancholic aesthetics of blindness which is, as Bal puts it, ‘the royal road to insight’.

Reverse ekphrasis – the figuration of writing in the visual medium – concedes an unprecedented weight to the letter as a concrete manifestation of the network of intersubjective positions, providing a textual context for the understanding of fantasy within the limits of the genre’s mannerist fidelity to the past. Via the temporal delay that separates the scene of writing and the scene of reading, seeing and knowing, the letter brings to the fore the ambiguity of culturally codified structures of melodramatic heterosexual romance as a queer structure of feeling. As Pansy Duncan highlights with regard to the reversibility of heterosexual and queer readings of *LETTER FROM AN UNKNOWN WOMAN*, ‘loss actually seals heterosexual coupling – even as it evacuates it of content, permitting its realization only in the hypothetical realm delineated by melodrama’s plaintive “if only”’⁴⁹ (after Lisa’s final words in her posthumous letter). Death sublimates the story of unrequited love and tallies posthumously the fates of Lisa and Stefan, who redeems himself by his last, suicidal gesture. In contrast, Tatyana’s refusal to give in to Onegin’s desire at the end of the film leaves the spectator with an uncanny image of Onegin not dead but *dying*, endlessly circling the palace of his beloved, waiting for a letter that will never come. Tatyana’s final words ‘because you are too late’ come accompanied by soaring musical soundtrack and the tears of melodrama. They self-consciously re-position narrative desire as irrevocably out of step with the normative temporality of heterosexual coupling. Tatyana remains trapped by the image fabricated by the melancholic gaze, both its victim and its perverse accomplice.

Imaginary Landscapes of Loss: To THOSE WHO LOVE

ONEGIN's exquisite closing sequence draws its affective power not only from the anti-naturalist performances, but also from the way sets and costumes look. Its visual allure obscures its relationship with the historical past or present; it is a game of surfaces, an instance of what C.S. Tashiro would call 'Designer History':

Designer History creates a chilly vision of the past, as it combines the apolitical focus of costume melodrama with the impersonal affect of traditional History Film. The past becomes a movement of empty forms and exquisite objects, with politics chosen as a subject largely for its inability to involve the spectator emotionally... That very emptiness becomes the fascination of these films. When they succeed, they no longer need their historical references. They have become their own justification, a series of perfect poses, staged against the void.⁵⁰

Isabel Coixet's *To THOSE WHO LOVE* could be considered an even more accurate fit with Tashiro's description of Designer History. A low-budget production that refuses to flag up the usual signposts of heritage aesthetics, the film stands out as a real oddity in the Spanish cinema of the 1990s, which reflects to some extent Coixet's outsider status as a travelling writer-director. Originally from Barcelona, her breakthrough films *THINGS I NEVER TOLD YOU* (1995) and *MY LIFE WITHOUT ME* (2003) are both original English-language melodramas that take place in contemporary North America, and share a common idiom with the mode of production of independent American filmmaking.⁵¹ Made between these two films, *To THOSE WHO LOVE* registers a similar preoccupation with characters plagued by isolation, misplaced desire and the inability to articulate their feelings. However, the story takes place against the backdrop of an imaginary eighteenth-century borderland 'somewhere in Europe', inhabited by displaced characters and mapped over with linguistic difference.

Despite its negative critical connotations, the notion of 'Designer History' can help us situate the British film *ONEGIN* and the Spanish *To THOSE WHO LOVE* as part of an undervalued European genre cinema. These films rely on an international iconography that deliberately flouts the conventional lines of separation between national contexts. *To THOSE WHO LOVE* notably eschews both the tradition of quality literary adaptations prioritised by state policy in the 1980s, and the focus on the Spanish Civil War and the post-war period that constitutes the backbone of what could be considered the heritage genre in Spain.⁵² The story takes place 'at the time when a peasant woman dies by the shock provoked by the sight of a primitive locomotive; at the same time that a boy called Arthur Rimbaud is bitten by an angry goose; almost at the same time that a shoemaker,

a hero in the struggle against the French, is sentenced to death for stealing a loaf of bread'.⁵³ This whimsical myriad of historical anecdotes situates the film sometime between the eighteenth and the nineteenth century, aligning the diegetic world with a set of signs that have not yet evolved into a teleological narrative of history. Set at the dawn of modernity, but suppressing the idea of a *consciousness* of modernity, the story unfolds in the wings of history. Its *mise-en-scène* produces a series of landscapes inhabited by characters living in isolation, which evokes a transnational intertext of European literary Romanticism devoid of a specific historical or geopolitical framework. Referencing a range of texts from Stendhal (the film allegedly takes its inspiration from his short story 'Ernestina or, the Birth of Love', 1822) to Dante Alighieri's fourteenth-century poem the *Divine Comedy*, *TO THOSE WHO LOVE* follows the model of an auteurist period drama of controlled spaces and self-conscious 'literariness' along the lines of *THE MARQUISE OF O*, and especially *TOUS LES MATINS DU MONDE/ALL THE MORNINGS OF THE WORLD* (Alain Corneau, 1991), from which it borrows not only its austere conception of fixed frames and bare spaces, but also the central theme of (masculine) bereavement and melancholy.

TO THOSE WHO LOVE evokes an imaginary past defined by a vocabulary of affect marginalised in contemporary film culture. The film unfolds as a *ronde* of unrequited love and melancholic attachments, spelled out by the narrative voiceover in the pre-titles sequence: 'I spent my life loving a woman who loved another man, who did not love her but another woman, from whom he never knew if she returned his feelings'. This circular movement of misplaced desire encompasses the four main characters in the film: the unnamed young protagonist and narrator 'the Doctor', his beloved Matilde, and Léon, the French messenger Matilde madly loves and marries, but who is involved with Valeria, a mysterious Italian fencing master. Other characters stand in the wings, however, creating diversions from the Doctor's narrative: on the one hand, the Doctor's demented brother Jonás, and on the other, Matilde's younger sister Armanca.

The film takes place over one night, in which a schoolteacher, formerly a physician, is summoned to the sickbed of an ailing woman. During the course of his vigil, the Doctor tells her husband Martín (Armanca's son) the story of his lifelong devotion for Matilde. The story brings together the parallel childhood of the three protagonists: the Doctor, Matilde (with whom the Doctor falls in love as a child) and Valeria, the daughter of an Italian fencing master employed to teach in an isolated fencing ward in the family estate. Also early in the story, the Doctor refers to his older brother's 'madness'. Jonás haunts the margins of the narrative, his own story visually filling one of the gaps in the Doctor's account. After witnessing a death in the woods (a young woman appears to be killed, but the circumstances of her death remain unexplained), Jonás mutilates himself

with a gun, and decides to consecrate his life to memorising Dante's *Divine Comedy* – erasing his life's memories as he imperfectly learns the verses by heart. Years later, Jonás becomes once again the silent witness to the young Doctor's passion for Matilde. The Doctor courts the naïve young woman with flowers and love messages that he leaves for her on a rock by a lake – unaware that Matilde's younger sister, the adolescent Armancia (apparently infatuated with the Doctor herself) intercepts the letters, leaving only the bouquets with empty envelopes for Matilde to wonder about her secret admirer. Soon Matilde falls head over heels for another man whom she sees from her spot by the rock – the Frenchman Léon, who brings news of the sudden death of Matilde and Armancia's parents in the colonies. Léon and Matilde get married, and the Doctor contents himself with remaining Matilde's friend and confidant. Léon soon gets bored with the isolation and idleness of life at the country estate, and starts taking fencing classes with Valeria, now herself the fencing teacher at the ward. Léon and Valeria start a love affair, and Matilde becomes ill with loneliness and grief. Disobeying the Doctor's prohibition to go to the ward, she manages to spy on the lovers with the assistance of Armancia. Matilde dies in the Doctor's arms, acknowledging his love in the final moments of her life, and he finds the empty envelopes and dried flowers carefully kept in a locked trunk by her bed. The Doctor then silently takes revenge on the adulterous lovers, by poisoning the foils they use for daily practice. The outcome is Léon's death and Valeria's departure from the region as governess and escort to Armancia, who, thirsty for travel and adventure, wants to see 'all the cities in the world'. Armancia bids farewell to the Doctor with the words: 'Write to me. Your letters were beautiful.'

History is sealed off from this closed world, except in the form of uncanny repetition. The film hints at the round of unhappy attachments happening all over again within the next generation (the Doctor realises that Martín's wife's sickness is due to her husband's infidelities). To *THOSE WHO LOVE* touches directly on the themes of mourning and melancholia (loss, and the imaginary attachment to loss) through its focus on the Doctor's story, articulated through a fragmented voiceover and flashbacks. The structuring role of storytelling and memory sustains the melancholic universe of the film. To *THOSE WHO LOVE* does not directly engage with the 'past', but with an essentially literary sign system, condensed into a 'Romantic' visual aesthetics: borrowing, again, from Barthes, the film unfolds as 'fragments of a lover's discourse', rather than sustaining the logic of psychological realism. Such fragments hark back to the idea of the figure as an almost musical phrase that acquires its meaning by repetition:

Figures that take shape insofar as we can recognize, in passing discourse, something that has been read, heard, felt. The figure is outlined (like a sign) and memorable (like

an image or a tale). A figure is established if at least someone can say: *'That's so true! I recognize that scene of language'*.⁵⁴

Among them, the love letter comes to the fore as the central fantasy fragment/figure, rather than a further sign cementing the reality effect – the detail that supports the whole – attached to the aesthetics of heritage. The love letter, as both strange (ritualistic, belonging to a different world, and to a different economy of desire) and recognisable (container of feeling, metonymy for the lover's voice) also uncovers the essential uncanny-ness of the Barthesian figure: the 'factor of involuntary repetition'; the (un)familiarity – and memorability – of the fantasy scenarios constructed by the period film: *a recognisable scene of language*.

TO THOSE WHO LOVE alludes to and inflects a whole imagery of costume romance virtually absent from modern Spanish cinema, reinforcing the idea of a 'liminal and carefully encoded generic world'⁵⁵ while rejecting period spectacle. The film suppresses 'authentic' heritage spaces. The bourgeois country house is only seen as a series of pictorial views of bedrooms inhabited by ailing women. The presence of servants is elided; peasant life is hinted at through fixed tableaux artificially lit and darkened. The ballroom is merely guessed in the play of shadows of dancers on a window; and the city is a non-existent off-screen space that allows the characters to exit the scene of domestic melodrama. By contrast, other spaces come vividly to the fore: the forest is an almost theatrical décor in the manner of Shakespearean comedy – a magical place for romantic encounters and deep secrets. Likewise, the fencing ward is the 'other place' of fantasy, and stands at the centre of the romantic world inhabited by the mysterious foreigners Léon and Valeria, contiguous to but completely severed from the everyday spaces belonging to the Doctor and Matilde. The construction of a poetics of character and space through the expressive play with light and darkness, fixed camera angles and static framing elides the reality effect provided by period detail. These spaces work as separate windows of meaning; they do not add up to a fluid, consistent social world, but remain self-enclosed fragments. Costumes remain equally stylised, and they cannot be pinned down to any specific period. This design scheme works to re-create the past primarily through figures of connotation, rather than through realistic denotation, pushing to the fore storytelling as an exercise in memory.

A mirror being carried across sun-drenched meadows; a dusky fencing pavilion; a rock by the lake where love letters are deposited; a horseman suddenly appearing in the horizon – these are mannerist object-images, both familiar and apart, which do not reference a specific historical conjuncture but form a common 'language of pastness' as a displaced projection of fantasies of repression and desire. We could say, along with Agamben, that such object-images are

objects that the melancholic sensibility has emptied of their habitual meaning and transformed into images of its own mourning.... [they] have no other significance than the space that they weave during the epiphany of the unattainable. Since the lesson of melancholy is that only what is ungraspable can truly be grasped, the melancholic alone is at his leisure among these ambiguous emblematic spoils. As the relics of a past on which is written the Edenic cipher of infancy, these objects have captured forever a gleam of that which can be possessed only with the provision that it be lost forever.⁵⁶

The 'letter that arrives too late' stands as one such (partial) object, possessed only to signify loss. The letter in *TO THOSE WHO LOVE* is the token of the moral occult of melodrama, undoing the deceit and reuniting the would-be lovers only at the moment of death. Like Roxanne in *CYRANO DE BERGERAC*, Matilde is trapped in a fantasy scenario generated by love letters – letters which, ironically, she never gets to read. These are 'purloined letters' whose force lies not in their actual contents, but in the intersubjective network of symbolic relationships they generate. The empty envelopes that Matilde picks up from the rock prepare the ground for her falling in love with a different man – an unrequited love which eventually leads to her death – as the letter *literally* puts her in a place, symbolically, emotionally and physically (geographically) that will permit her encounter with Léon.

The motif of the bouquets and the letters anonymously left on a rock recalls Stendhal's 'Ernestina or, The Birth of Love', in which a young and impressionable woman becomes infatuated with an unknown man who leaves flowers for her on a particular spot by a lake. The story unfolds first from her viewpoint, and then from his, re-creating the two sides of a blossoming love story frustrated by bad timing, in which the would-be lovers misread each other's intentions.⁵⁷ The film contains other textual clues that hark back to the Stendhalian universe ('Matilde' was the name of a woman to whom Stendhal addressed intense love letters in vain; 'Armancia' or, *Armance*, is the title of Stendhal's first novel).⁵⁸ However, this play with allusions to literary Romanticism is also something of a red herring. Whereas the characters who actively love without hope (Matilde, the Doctor, Jonás) undoubtedly provide the emotional kernel of the film – as its title indicates – the apparently sealed fantasy scene generated by the love letter creates an unexpected diversion, as it circulates beyond the limits of the melancholic narrative constructed by the Doctor.

This is the role of the child's hand. The letter never fails to lead the eye to the hand which, in cinema, constitutes its material extension. Filmed in close-up, the letter exists (that is, becomes visible) in the act of being written, opened, held, grasped or hidden by a hand. The letter's hand constitutes a hidden third term in the symbolic intersubjectivity of correspondence (the encounter be-

tween Self and Other), which mirrors the asymmetric relationship of the literary with the filmic. As we saw in *THE AGE OF INNOCENCE*, May's 'innocent' hand symbolically works as vehicle in the correspondence between the would-be lovers. However, her opaque presence denotes the trace of the letter not as frame of communication but, rather, as an object through which communication takes place, positing a virtual third place between sender and addressee. In this respect, Armancia is not just a different story; she *belongs* to a different story. A liminal character – both inside and outside the Doctor's storytelling (since her interventions cannot possibly be accounted by the Doctor's narrative) – she intently watches the suffering of those who love. Armancia is, on the one hand, the required foil in the story of the star-crossed lovers, her intervention being part of the mechanisms of melodrama (she is, as visualised in an insert, the malicious hand that steals the letter). On the other, the little girl reads the love letter differently. Armancia's gestures comically mime the adults' and at the same time disavow the symbolic power of the romantic fantasy (although they do not undermine it). For the little girl, the melancholic twilight world of eternal fidelity to an unresponsive love object (a world peopled by the suffering Doctor, by Matilde and her obsession with the idea of absolute love, by Jonás's commitment to the sublime and unknown Beatrice of the *Divine Comedy*, or by the young nun's marriage to a God 'who does not write letters') is strongly suspicious:

Like desire, the love letter waits for an answer; it implicitly enjoins the other to reply, for without a reply the other's image changes, becomes *other*. This is what the young Freud explains authoritatively to his fiancée: 'Yet I don't want my letter to keep remaining unanswered, and I shall stop writing you altogether if you don't write back. Perpetual monologues apropos of a loved being, which are neither corrected nor nourished by that being, lead to erroneous notions concerning mutual relations, and make us stranger to each other when we meet again, so that we find things different from what, without realizing it, we imagined'.⁵⁹

Freud's protestation (as quoted in Barthes's chapter on the love letter) echoes the different and more demanding 'politics of love', smuggled into the romance narrative by Armancia. In this, Armancia resembles other 'little girls' who shadow the female heroine: 'feminine doubles' who bring to the fore the shades of ambiguity in the fantasy world of the romance narrative.

The 'little girl' is akin to the classic themes of, on the one hand, the two sisters with opposite temperaments (as discussed in *ONEGIN*) and, on the other, the mother-daughter bond, also implicit in the power-fraught relation between governess and the female pupil. The little girl's role is a diversion, a source of light relief, but also introduces a spectatorial position that produces commentary. *THE PIANO* arguably represents the model that subsequent films were to follow,

introducing the little girl as Ada's uncanny feminine double. However, the daughter/double's submission to the mother/self is deceptive. Flora both mimes her mother's gestures and revolts against her authority. As Modleski notes, the film is remarkable because 'it not only delivers up the [mother's] romantic fantasy but registers a powerful and angry critique of it from the daughter's point of view'.⁶⁰ Observing (and interfering with) the sentimental manoeuvres of the adults, the little girl occupies a position of ambivalence with regard to the romance narrative, which *coexists* with the desire for romance.



Observing the rituals or romance: the little girl in TO THOSE WHO LOVE

The feminine double does not necessarily articulate an oppositional discourse, but its figurality resists fixed meanings. The little girl is the uncanny 'stain in the picture', performing as a visual reminder of the complexity (and fluidity) of the fantasy scenario. In *THE GOVERNESS*, Clementina, the gothic girl, irrupts in Rosina's dreams as an eerie elf-child, suggesting (by association with her androgynous adolescent brother) a perverse sexuality. In contrast with Rosina's teachings in poise and immobility (in one scene she instructs the rebellious girl in ladylike behaviour, making her balance a book on top of her head as she walks), Clementina mucks about. Whereas Rosina stands still for the benefit of Cavendish's camera, the little girl (her trail captured in the frame) leaves her imprint as a literal blur in the masochistic picture of romance.

In *TO THOSE WHO LOVE*, the little girl introduces a position of spectatorial ambivalence (eloquently expressed in *THE PIANO* through the be-winged Flora's

mutation from cherubic interpreter of the mother's desire into impish agent of patriarchy). Armanca is a character closer to Campion's universe than to Stendhal's, and a conspicuous addition to the reworking of *Ernestine*. Her presence as both (sceptical) spectator and (willing) participant in the drama of frustrated passions underscores the ironies of the all-encompassing narrative of melancholic desire. On the one hand, by maliciously diverting the course of the letter she seemingly plays the part of the external obstacle that keeps the lovers apart in melodrama. Her gesture turns the love letter into the 'letter that arrives too late', and a sentimental story into a perverse narrative of unrequited love. On the other hand, Armanca distances herself from the Doctor's melancholic narrative. In one scene she reads aloud one of the Doctor's love letters to Matilde, bites it up, and chews it. A convent novice asks her 'what does it taste like?' This brief, subtly comical exchange between the young girl and the nun disavows the symbolic power of the rituals that organise the intricate universe of period romance.

Other characters also cast the predicament of the Doctor and Matilde in a different light. In contrast with Matilde – who talks non-stop about love all the way to her grave – Valeria, the 'other woman', is a clichéd figure of enigmatic femininity, who stays silent and remains deeply sceptical about the power of words to express actual feeling. Above all, there is Jonás, who lurks in the gaps of the Doctor's story. Jonás comes across as his brother's deformed double; the mirror projection of the 'sad young man', as Dyer puts it, frozen at the moment of yearning.⁶¹ Barthes notes:

Historically, the discourse of absence is carried on by the Woman... It is Woman who gives shape to absence, elaborates its fiction, for she has time to do so... It follows that in any man who utters the other's absence *something feminine* is declared: this man who waits and who suffers from his waiting is miraculously feminized.⁶²

Whereas the Doctor is metaphorically feminised by his life-long act of mourning, Jonás has literally castrated himself and erased his memories to consecrate himself to a similar life-long worship of an unknown 'beloved'. The Doctor elaborates his fiction in the belief that he can convey his Self through letters to the Other (who simply does not acknowledge his desire), whilst Jonás's voice awkwardly reproduces fragments of a poem addressed to an impossible object-choice. Through the Doctor, the film affirms the expressiveness and uniqueness of the Self's voice; however, Jonás's futile drilling in a broader and grander cultural narrative – that of courtly love – undermines the pretended uniqueness (and originality) of the lover's discourse. All has been lived, and written, before.

The figure of the little girl completes this kaleidoscopic mosaic of fragments, providing an alternative ending to the absolutism of the lover's discourse, and a vanishing point out of the symbolic webs generated by the love letter.

Where does life begin? Time in the crystal is differentiated into two movements, but one of them takes charge of the future and freedom, provided that it leaves the crystal. Then the real will be created; at the same time as it escapes the eternal referral back of the actual and the virtual, the present and the past.⁶³

Armanca, the character inside and outside the Doctor's fantasy, leaves the crystal of time posed by the world of *TO THOSE WHO LOVE*. She is the 'wise sister' who breaks away from the circularity of the melancholic narrative – the one who, at the end, escapes the magic forest in the company of the fencing master to travel the world, marry four times and be remembered by her son as a 'happy woman'. By reading the letter through the little girl's hand a different spectatorial position arises: one that both participates in the fantasy and disavows it. This does not necessarily signify the entrance into historical time as interpreted by Deleuze, but the point in which the figure of the period film becomes reversible, between realism and fantasy.

In *ONEGIN* and *TO THOSE WHO LOVE*, the letter works as a token of a circular economy of desire only tenuously linked to the sociocultural contexts that confers it its status of 'reality sign'. In this respect, *TO THOSE WHO LOVE* is an open letter about the ethics and aesthetics of desire. The film commits itself to the past as a scene of unaccomplished narratives endlessly deferred through the mechanisms of memory and storytelling. As heritage films, both films escape readings linked to their national contexts; as examples of women's cinema, they are not readily amenable to feminist readings. The letter-figure and its truncated trajectories of communication subscribes to a melodramatic economy of repression and desire, which gives place to queer structures of feeling and transnational movement. The letter thus brings together a mosaic of temporalities and subjectivities; it does not speak about factual history but about potential histories. In doing so, this figure returns specifically at a moment – the 1990s – that sees an increasing convergence of national film production into a fluid transnational space of communication. At the same time, it challenges our perception of the genre as stable and presentist. Through the letter the past comes in pieces; but can the letter be used to reconstruct history differently? This is the question that underlies the following, and last, section on *ATONEMENT*.

Truncated Narratives, Textual Possibilities: *ATONEMENT* and the Interrupted Histories of the European Period Film

This chapter has taken shape as a collage of love letters that form a chain of intersubjective relations within and beyond the illusion of cohesive spaces given

by culture and nation. The letter's recurrence in modern literary films and contemporary melodramas presents a departure from the suppression of writing in classical cinema. The letter in close-up fleshes out the haptic relations between writing, knowledge and vision, but also creates an objective correlative of the distance between sender and addressee, seeing and reading.

So where does the figure of the letter stand between its Romantic literary roots (re-articulated by film) and the modernist figuration of writing? Discussing both traditions in British cinema, John Orr questions the disappearance of a modernist line of filmmaking for the benefit of the return to the conventional classicism associated to the quality film:

For history's hard-boiled evolutionists, cinema creates a problem and its own contradictions. In 1929 the romantic and the modern coexisted before the romantic triumphed: and the romantic won out because it fitted more easily within the new *classical* conventions of sound narrative, of how to structure in cinematic terms the well-made film. Divorced from modernism, romanticism thrived by getting into bed with classicism, a marriage of convenience if ever there was one. Thus a history that had appeared progressive then goes circular and ends up as regressive – and all the while life, film and technology move on!⁶⁴

The films so far examined in this book could arguably be recast as the product of this compromise. Between a modernist cinema of consciousness and a regressive classicism that keeps the excesses of a romantic (authorial) subjectivity at bay, the mannerist aesthetic opts for a conservative accommodation of contradictory impulses. However, I would like to take Orr's suggestive macro-narrative through a last film with a focus on the interrupted trajectories of the letter, in order to ask what this figure might reveal about the period film's mediation in wider historical narratives.

For this I would like to return to British cinema one more time. *ATONEMENT*, directed by Joe Wright and released in 2007, is in many ways the perfect summation of the possibilities opened up by the letter in the textures of British heritage (melo)drama, and a dramatisation of the mechanisms of vision, writing and knowledge inherited, via Ian McEwan's celebrated 2001 novel, from literary modernism. Like Wright's previous *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE*, *ATONEMENT* was co-produced by UK and French companies (Working Title and Studio Canal) and secured wide international visibility through a distribution deal with Universal Pictures. The film continues the high-profile cycle of British films that projects a period-specific iconography of 'Englishness' through themes, settings and stars for international consumption. Two different intertexts in British heritage cinema and television – the country house as site of class critique, and the 1940s cinema of (class) consensus – are conjoined by sexual melodrama. In line with other postmodern revisions of the past that segue through different historical

moments – such as *THE HOURS* or *THE READER* (Stephen Daldry, 2008) – Wright's film is interested in both the self-enclosed worlds of period melodrama and their outer frames: the figuration of the past as the other of the present, yet irremediably connected to it.

The novel on which the film is based presents a meditation on subjectivity and narration as acts constantly revised in retrospection, their temporality plagued by ethical consequences. Geraghty has rightly noted that the film translates McEwan's complex metaliterary games into a consistent foregrounding of the medium: the literary in its first part, film history in the second (*ATONEMENT* cites the British World War II film extensively) and television in the third. Significantly, in Geraghty's analysis, television operates as the 'least' mediated filter, and therefore closest to the truth, signified by the sustained close-up of the protagonist that ends the film. In the final sequence, Briony Tallis, a veteran author interviewed on a television show on occasion of the publication of her last novel, *Atonement*, faces up to her past and declares fiction to be her only way to make it up to her sister Cecilia and her beloved Robbie. The couple's future together was curtailed by the child Briony's accusation of Robbie for a crime he did not commit. In an unforgiving static close-up, her image scrutinised by multiple television monitors, the elderly Briony announces her own impending death. The confessional mode acts as a corrective of her prior false testimony, both moments captured in tight close-up and direct address to the camera over a dark background.

This final 'letter' to the audience, a final act of literary performance, includes a revelation which alters our perception of the story so far. In her final confession Briony reveals the film's middle section (which shows her encounter with Robbie and Cecilia, reunited during the war) to be the product of her imagination, this time as an act of wishful reparation. A belated flashback reveals that Robbie never returned from the front in France, where a bout of septicaemia claimed his life, and that Cecilia was killed by drowning in a bombed underground station during the London Blitz. However, the film closes with idyllic images of the couple at a cottage by the sea on the coast of Dover, their mutual love and aspiration of a life together thus realised.

Addressing the ambivalent critical responses to the film's 'happy ending', Geraghty notes that the final sequence, and especially the final shot of the cottage over a backdrop of resplendent white cliffs and open sea, evokes 'the clichés associated with wartime love stories' through reference to the 1940s British cinema of consensus – the final images symbolising the Britain that was being fought for.⁶⁵ The static, reassuring final view of the English landscape bears a similarity to the final shot that soars over the house in *HOWARDS END*: both endings perform an act of (class) reparation, but at the same time they introduce a question mark over the stable images of the past. As Geraghty goes

on to note, this pristine ending may compromise the film's desire to position itself as a 'modern film capable of handling the postmodern challenge of its source' with a nostalgic retreat into a dominant former model of quality realism, summoned through the sepia tones of nostalgia.⁶⁶ However, the nostalgia for a lost home goes hand in hand with the revelation of home (and nation) as a site of fiction (Briony's), reflecting unrealised potentiality rather than fulfilment. Realism (or rather, the reality effect: the fiction of realism) is thus used to disclose the film's final virtual act of home-creation. In doing so, the film puts under a question mark the very possibility of a home in the past.

By ending this chapter with *ATONEMENT*, and by starting at the film's ending, I would like to bring together various threads in this book. The letter in *ATONEMENT* can help us reconstruct a (hi)story of suspension, stasis and repetition, which both structures the film and, potentially, its relationship with melodrama and realism. The scene of writing in *ATONEMENT* appears early in the film; like in *ONEGIN*, it underscores temporal suspension by spatial fragmentation. It unfolds as a montage of the romantic couple: Robbie struggles to express his feelings in a letter that he keeps retyping, whereas Cecilia, in her separate room, dresses up for the formal dinner later that evening. The intercutting of two actions that belong to separate moments in the novel highlights the connectedness between the would-be lovers despite their physical and social distance from each other. Visual cues, such as the partial masking of the close-ups, the smoke and glares that diffuse the image, and the small gestures carried over from Robbie's shots to Cecilia's (the distracted off-screen glances, the muttering of words, the lighting of a cigarette) create a fantasy of perfect correspondence between sender and addressee, made all the more tantalising by the tight framing and the parallel montage. The setting of this sequence to an excerpt from the opera *La Bohème* layered over the sounds of the typewriter suggest the melodramatic overflowing of feeling over the surfaces of the realist drama, peaking on the inscription of a set of words captured in extreme close up: 'I want to kiss your cunt, your sweet wet cunt'. In the suspended time allowed to the mannerist figuration of the letter, the 'other letter' emerges as the mark of desire uncensored that spills over the tasteful surface of the period melodrama with unexpected forcefulness. This other letter is, in many ways, a reflexive quotation of a generic trajectory, not only narrative but also stylistic: it spells out the content of every other letter in the period film (for example, Tatyana's 'hidden' letter in *ONEGIN*) and in so doing it brings to the fore the formerly sub-textual tension between conventional realism and melodrama.

Robbie's immediate substitution of the offending fragment for a more acceptable formulation of his love for Cecilia, and the subsequent accidental sending of the 'wrong' letter, are presented in a sequence split in two parts, which allows for a figuration of the object itself as the original cause that unchains melo-dra-

ma's fatal course of events. However, the two letters also present the film with two distinct possibilities: a double vision. *ATONEMENT* both reaffirms the expectations of romance which underpin a bankable national film genre, and uses high melodrama towards an alternative iconography of English heritage, one that is strained by conflict rather than cemented in stability. The two letters are at the core of a narrative that functions intertextually as well as intratextually. The film evokes the pressures exerted over the house of fiction, both from the outside – the European histories of conflict – as well as from the inside, through the threat posited by the conflicting paths of class and sexual desire. McEwan's novel is built on a dense web of literary references, including Henry James's *What Maisie Knew* (1897), D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928) (the film's tight insert around the word 'cunt' visually quotes the scandal associated with the novel) and especially L.P. Hartley's *The Go-Between*, from 1953,⁶⁷ another retrospective period story about lovers from different classes seen from the viewpoint of the child messenger who comes between them. *The Go-Between* provides the most direct antecedent for *Atonement*, to the extent that Earl Ingersoll notes that once *Atonement* appears 'it becomes impossible to read *The Go-Between* as the same text'.⁶⁸ Every new variation on a theme – in this case, a child's perception of the adults' erotic manoeuvres – alters our understanding of it. The same can be said of the film: *ATONEMENT* 'absorbs' its most direct antecedent, Joseph Losey's *THE GO-BETWEEN* (1971), placing the girl who (once) serves as a go-between at the narrative origin of the lovers' story.

ATONEMENT's adventurous use of a sophisticated narrative structure and sound design invokes alternative auteur histories in British cinema of the 1970s.⁶⁹ The film looks back to the work of various displaced filmmakers, including Stanley Kubrick (*BARRY LYNDON*, 1975), Roman Polanski (*TESS*, 1979), and especially Joseph Losey, whose *THE GO-BETWEEN* was the third and final collaboration with playwright and scriptwriter Harold Pinter after *THE SERVANT* (1963) and *ACCIDENT* (1967), two modernist dissections of Englishness and class. These films appropriate the mask of the classic adaptation to tell stories about the outsider's condition through a combination of melodrama and a formalist approach to the genre. Via its self-conscious dialogue with Losey's *THE GO-BETWEEN*, *ATONEMENT* evokes a previous, ephemeral moment in the period film's history as a modern British genre. This moment coincides with a time of economic uncertainty and industrial disarray. After the drying-up of American funds that had sustained a lucrative set-up for transnational (run-away) productions in Britain, the 1970s have been defined as a transitional interval in British film history. Higson calls it, not without qualifications, 'indeterminate, even stagnant'; a period which in retrospect can be identified as a moment of complex transformations that saw the decline of a 'particular cinematic formation: the classical cinema of the middle years of the century' and a 'growing

disenchantment with the traditional culture of consensus'.⁷⁰ This transitional moment is also a moment of potentiality for the genre, in which the continuity provided by the industrial structures endorsing the quality adaptation seems to lose its grip, momentarily opening a space for experimental variations.

In Losey's *THE GO-BETWEEN*, the child messenger articulates what Elsaesser refers to as the dualism of the film, torn 'between the need to belong and the awareness of being excluded, in short, the dilemma that the voyeur shares with the exile'.⁷¹ This dualism is mapped onto the narrative itself, where a complex play between 'subjective vision... confronting the objective existence of worlds outside this vision... never breaks the continuity of a universe at once visibly created, instantly present and reflected upon'.⁷² This creates a dynamics of imposed restraint and sudden display of melodramatic feeling, underscored by the 'suffocating sense of foreboding' in Michel Legrand's soaring and abrupt musical score, which acts as counterpoint to the placid pastoral images of the Maudsley country state.⁷³

It is worth quoting this appraisal of Losey's film at length, not least because it attributes the film a liminal position. Not only does *THE GO-BETWEEN* stand at the crossroads between traditions, but arguably is a work of pastiche that gestures towards what the image excludes from the spectacle of the world represented. This is, for Elsaesser, the strength of *THE GO-BETWEEN*. Identified with a moment of impasse in British cinema, he concludes that the film stands as a 'meditation about the freedom and restriction of a cinematic form at a moment of historical closure'.⁷⁴

ATONEMENT does not simply remake the motif of the letter as seen in *THE GO-BETWEEN*: it revolves around the very problem of interruption, of unachieved narratives. Bracketed between Robbie's letter from the front carrying the haunting words 'our story can resume' and Cecilia's tender plea to her lost lover – 'come back to me' – *ATONEMENT* invokes, then delays, the fantasy of teleological progression promised by period melodrama. In this respect, the central scene of letter-reading is a tour de force in mannerist figuration, stringing together the visual and aural threads so far developed in the film via a direct citation of the *mise-en-scène* of *THE GO-BETWEEN*. The sequence presents Briony outdoors, restlessly thrashing bushes with a twig in the hot summer afternoon, reprising Leo's reaction after reading Marianne's love letter to neighbouring farmer Ted Burgess in Losey's film. Briony is summoned by Robbie to deliver his letter to Cecilia, a moment elegantly underscored by a single shot framing the gesture of the letter passing hands, the envelope's whiteness shining under the scorching sun.

As Briony starts to run towards the Tallis house, two sonic threads – the rhythmic, machine-gun-like thumping of the typewriter, and the strands of the opera excerpt that accompanied Robbie's writing of the 'wrong' letter – send

visual and aural ripples over the editing of the scene, transforming it into an already retrospective image lodged in Robbie's memory. The scene culminates with Briony's storming into the hall of the house, and her momentous discovery of the words she was never meant to read. The inordinate impact of this moment is underscored by an overtly dramatic cut from the letter in extreme close-up, to an extreme long shot that isolates the petrified child in the vast hall of the Tallis manor – a spectacular iteration of the zooming in and out of Leo's hand holding the letter in *THE GO-BETWEEN*.



Figuring the letter in ATONEMENT

I am not trying to suggest a 'perfect' overlap between the child's hand motif in *THE GO-BETWEEN* and *ATONEMENT*. The latter reframes past tradition (both a prematurely foreclosed modernist moment, and a rich vein of romanticism) as a textual effect. The trauma experienced by Leo in *THE GO-BETWEEN* places the figure of child's hand in the realm of repression. As his position as both insider and outsider with regard to the web of class and sexual intrigue is condensed and displaced onto the letter, so is his erotic gaze, which both idealises the unreachable upper-class femininity represented by Marianne and Ted's working-class masculine body.⁷⁵ This outsider-ness is more ambiguous in the figure of the child's hand in *ATONEMENT*: although the letter involves her into the traumatic fantasy of the family romance, Briony's viewpoint is registered through her heteronormative infatuation with Robbie and her own safe position as member of the Tallis clan, which will be determinant to Robbie's expulsion. The abrupt cut from close-up to long shot that seals the scene of reading reverts once more to the house of fiction as the scene of crime. The letter follows a trajectory

that is already familiar: in *HOWARDS END*, the close-up on a shaking hand writing its last words on a piece of paper – Ruth Wilcox's leaving her property to Margaret – constitutes the original transgressive gesture that will set in motion the chain of melodramatic events, culminating in a crime (Leonard's killing) and an act of poetic justice (the reconstruction of *Howards End* as a home for Margaret, Helen, and the latter's illegitimate child).

Whilst in *THE GO-BETWEEN* the possibility of poetic reparation lies beyond the outcome of the narrative (the film ends with Marianne's sending the adult Leo 'on another errand of love', to tell her grandson the truth about his origins), in *ATONEMENT* the letter comes full circle, finally reaching its destination (the final image of the lovers reunited) via Briony's symbolic atonement for the sins of her melodramatic imagination. However, as noted earlier, this ending is but a figurative effect drawn from the spectacle of period realism at the service of fantasy. The mannerist figuration of the letter may thus highlight what Christine Gledhill terms as the 'dynamic disjunction' between melodrama and realism in British cinema. Rather than considering melodrama as opposed to the realist tradition, Gledhill argues, following Charles Barr, that classic British cinema 'displays a split between public spaces dominated by the class-differentiating codes of British realism and private spaces in which repressed subjectivities produce melodramatic pressures from within the fiction'.⁷⁶ *ATONEMENT* addresses this double vision through the letter's potential to realise the intersubjective scenario of fantasy that is at the basis of melodrama. If the 'scene of writing' constitutes a truthful moment of communication between the two lovers – the letter Robbie sends by mistake turns out to be, after all, the 'right' letter that makes possible for the undercurrent of sexual attraction between him and Cecilia to be consummated – the scene of reading dramatises a long-standing theme in British melodrama: emotional repression. Briony's reading of the letter brutally cuts short the fluidity of movement she displays in the first part of the film. In the second and third acts of the film, her unchanging appearance transmits her stunted development, with the controlled performances of the two actors (Romola Garai and Vanessa Redgrave) who play Briony as a young adult and as an elderly woman showing a similar lack of warmth and expressivity. Throughout her adult life Briony will remain mired in the memory of the traumatic events initiated by the letter.

If the child in *THE GO-BETWEEN* remains an aging, asexual being trapped in the virtual present-in-the-past of the letter, *ATONEMENT*, however, visualises temporality in the textures of the film. Robbie's voiceover and mental backward projection bring to the fore the original 'scene of reading' as a crystal of time, in which all three characters are contained. However, in two set-pieces that stand out, the temporality of the crystal allows for other potential encounters. Robbie's entrapment in the French port of Bray-Dunes, where he will die, sees him

standing in front of a big cinema screen where a classic of French poetic realism, *LE QUAI DES BRUMES*/PORT OF SHADOWS (Marcel Carné, 1938) is being projected. Robbie covers his face, and his figure appears belittled by the juxtaposition onto the gigantic close-up of Jean Gabin and Michèle Morgan in one of the most famous love scenes in French cinematic history. This eerie moment allows for a self-reflexive projection of his own love story, which carries on even as his own life is brought to a halt.

Simultaneously, the adolescent Briony, who works as an army nurse during the war, is granted the chance to atone by playing (and thus finally understanding) a subtle love scene with an amnesiac French soldier called Luc Cornet (a close phonetic variation on Carné). The scene takes place against a vivid red curtain that serves as a protective screen to the dying soldier's bed, separating him from the rest of the wounded men at the hospital ward. In this dreamlike sequence, the ambient silence and, especially, the stunning red background, which disrupts the sombre colour scheme in the hospital scenes, brings to the fore the idea of temporal suspension and cinematic fantasy once more. Unlike the direct references to British realist cinema of the 1940s cited by Geraghty,⁷⁷ this moment summons the memory of an alternative tradition of romanticism and melodrama (the films of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger come to mind) against the grain of the narrative. At this moment, the audience is invited to look *at* the screen rather than *through* the screen (as encouraged by the British realist film).⁷⁸ The fact that the scene is spoken in French reconstructs British romantic melodrama through an imagined transnational encounter, invoking the letter as a figure of fantasy that projects an alternative history of internationalism in the genre – a figure that travels.

By looking at the intersubjective mode of the letter and its attendant figurative manifestations (the different forms of the scene of writing, and the scene of reading) this chapter has tried to show the ways the temporality of melodrama is imprinted onto the textures of the film, disrupting the surface realism. The figurations of writing in the contemporary period film bring to the fore interrupted or marginalised modernist traditions, reframed through stories of unaccomplished desire and (historical) interruption. The figuration of the letter in *ATONEMENT*, in particular, reprises apparently stagnated forms of quality realism through a mannerist sensibility exacerbated by repetition and interruption. The film suggests that this classical figure, now turned into a mannerist fragment, does not remain static even if characters and narratives do. It circulates, it creates its own genealogies, itineraries and visual variations. The letter thus dramatises its own historical trajectory within the restrictions imposed by a closed form.

Conclusion – Second Sight: Reviewing the Past, Figuring the Present

The original idea for this book took root in my mind quite a few years ago. It did not, in fact, come in the shape of an idea (which would form much later); rather, it was an emotional response. I watched *THE AGE OF INNOCENCE* for the first time in the week of its general release in cinemas. Sitting very close to the huge screen at my local multiplex, I remember being overwhelmed by the sheer density of the film's colours and textures, but especially by the emotional story of renunciation unfolding in the airless world that the film brought to life in such astonishing detail. It was the moment in which that renunciation effectively happened that caught my *eye*, before its significance dawned on my consciousness. May stands up to announce her pregnancy to her husband Newland, and her move breaks down in a sequence of three takes, shot at slightly different scales and speeds. As her body expands, fills up the frame, occupying space *and* time, Newland's world virtually shrinks. He knows he will never be able to leave even before she utters the words. He has been swallowed whole by the gulf opened by her impenetrable, yet formidable gesture.

This book is in many ways an attempt to make sense of that moment, and of the emotional impact it had on me *visually*, rather than in terms of its narrative implications, let alone its disturbing gender connotations. Retrospectively, it was the experience of a film moment reviewed many times since that generated many of the questions that I have attempted to answer, or at least to explore, in this book. On second sight, I saw this as a rare, but perfectly formed, present-in-the-past moment – actuality being figured as memory at the very moment when it happens; memory intensifying and invading our presentness.¹ The disjunctive editing makes visible the cracks of time and the limits of a world that still looks resplendently whole. This is what makes *THE AGE OF INNOCENCE* a breathtaking, and a breathtakingly mannerist, film.

This book has attempted to open new inroads into thinking about realism and fantasy in relation to the period film's figurative possibilities. Reading the period film as a mannerist cultural object, fidelity, melancholy and belatedness become productive formations, revealing the figure's potential (its present-in-the-past-ness) at the very moment of narrative and ideological closure. Deleuze notes that 'the "too-late" is not an accident that takes place in time but a dimension of time itself... opposed to the static dimension of the past'.² The films and

figures investigated in this book construe an aesthetic which, whilst generically characterised by the spatial conventions of period realism, entertains a complex relationship with temporality. Melodrama's too-late-ness opens up narrative realism to figural fantasies where, by visualising the past and investing it with affect, the film image also reflects (on) its own past. Whereas nostalgia 'can hide the discontinuities between the present and the past... turning the past into a safe, familiar place',³ the figure reveals such breaks and discontinuities in affective ways. The figure makes visible the fragmented histories of the period film, but the focus on the figure also permits us to read those stories – and genre histories – differently.

Temporality and femininity are closely linked in the figural reversals of the period film. It is not only May's body that poses an interruption: so do Ellen Olenska's and Lily Bart's disappearances into still images, Charlotte Stant's entombment in the newsreels that greet her upon arrival at American City, even Onegin's feminised, dying body. *Howards End* comes forth as an effect of Ruth Wilcox's ghostly gaze, whilst Briony Tallis's retelling of the past summons the fantasy of a compelling happy ending for a wartime tragedy – a fantasy that can render the teller's own fractured consciousness whole again but which consigns the love story to the virtual temporality of the letter. Yet the feminine is also strongly attached to the return of the historical through the recursive structure of the figure. The tableau as portrait in *THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY*, *ARTEMISIA* and *THE GOVERNESS* revises the progressive narratives of feminism through the conservative frame of romance, making room for the anachronistic gestures of re-writing made possible by feminism's delayed or 'second' moment of reading. Significantly, these period fictions dramatise a return to feminist histories at a moment defined by the flight from (modernist) feminist politics.

In this regard, I have highlighted the importance of the aesthetics of popular film to post-structuralist film theory (and vice versa), not as a mere symptom of cultural or ideological imperatives, but as a way of revising notions such as pastiche, fidelity, illustration and nostalgia. By opening up these debates through figural analysis, close reading becomes a *reflexive* viewing practice within the aesthetic experience of immersion privileged by the genre. It allows us to reframe crucial questions of spectatorship and writing in light of the critical foundations established by film theory since the 1970s, without relapsing into the overarching narratives of 'grand theory'. By privileging a textual poetics, the figure emerges as a rhetorical and deconstructive tool linked to a particular moment in the genre. Cultural formations of gender and affect are at the centre of the mannerist aesthetic as an international mode of circulation.

More remains to be said about the period film as an international cultural form – especially in relation to complex modes of deterritorialised cinephilia. The focus on the figure through analysis of its formal qualities (camerawork,

framing, editing) and narrative motifs (the house, the tableau, the letter) opens up a myriad of intertextual connections and unexpected forms of dialogue between cinematic traditions. The epistemological break posed by the transformation of the very material basis of cinema itself has enhanced the possibilities of textual analysis. The digital memory of the text⁴ – the frame as bearer of apparently limitless mnemonic layers of information, now accessible in domestic environments thanks to digital formats – has given new impetus to the driving utopia of the historical film as a genre, within the utopian drive of cinema itself: cinema can *re-live* the past. It is not the naïve disavowal of the simulacrum that characterises the mannerist phase of contemporary filmmaking, but the emergence of new styles of writing that assist in the transformation of our historical and literary memory. This epochal shift opens new possibilities for the mannerist aesthetic, but it also appeals to what Mulvey calls, after Bellour, the ‘pensive spectator’:

As the spectator controls the unfolding of the cinematic image, so the drive of the narrative is weakened and other, previously invisible or unimportant details come to the fore... As narrative coherence fragments, the moment in which an object, figure, or event is actually inscribed on the original material suddenly finds visibility in the slowed or stilled image. Not only does spectatorship find new forms, it can also allow space for reflection on time, on the presence of history preserved on film (whether as fiction or nonfiction), producing a ‘pensive’ spectator.⁵

Although this citation refers to our changing relationship with the medium of cinema itself, it can be extended to rethink the spectator not as a simple consumer of nostalgia, but as a pensive spectator who searches through the layers of presentness, retrospect and cultural history permeating the period film. The genre has, in fact, already attempted to figure such spectator in meta-period fantasies staged by art and popular films. Two examples: in Sokurov’s *RUSSIAN ARK*, we are immersed in a state of temporal and spatial disorientation, which replicates the split consciousness of our double guide through the Hermitage Museum: on the one hand, a disembodied Russian camera-eye from the twenty-first century; on the other, a nineteenth-century foreign (‘European’) aristocrat who tentatively makes his way through the labyrinth of Russian history. They are both at loss in the ball of ghosts that people the museum, and yet, crucially, a dialogue – and a story – emerge between these two different forms of displacement. In the retro-tourist comedy *MIDNIGHT IN PARIS* (Woody Allen, 2011) a man living in 2011 and a woman living in 1920s Paris are afflicted by the humorously cited ‘Golden-Age syndrome’ or, the desire to go back to a past imagined as more fulfilling than the present. Their desire manifests in their time-travelling escapades into past worlds within the world of present-day Paris. Nostalgia is ambivalently portrayed, insufficient in itself but essential for

the main character, a writer spending a holiday in the French capital, to see his own experience mirrored elsewhere, and thus be able to face the present.

Both films talk not about the past, but about our perception of the past (narrative, political, affective) by figuring time itself. They are poised between history as museum, and as dynamic projection of our fantasies of pastness as a basis on which to construct the future. The period film's mannerist attachment to the past is thus carefully balanced between reassuring recognition and uncanny strangeness, intertextual self-consciousness and narrative immersion, proof of the possibilities of this conservative yet adventurous genre.

Notes

Introduction – Period Film and the Mannerist Moment

1. Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), xvii.
2. Pam Cook, *Fashioning the Nation. Costume and Identity in British Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1996), 67.
3. See Leger Grindon, *Shadows in the Past: Studies in the Historical Fiction Film* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 2; and Amy Sargeant, 'Making and Selling Heritage Culture. Style and authenticity in historical fictions on film and television', in Justine Ashby and Andrew Higson (eds.), *British Cinema. Past and Present* (London: Routledge, 2000), 301-315.
4. Pidduck, *Contemporary Costume Film. Space, Place and the Past* (London: British Film Institute, 2004), 4.
5. Cook, *Fashioning the Nation*, 67.
6. Deborah Cartmell, *Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice. The Relationship between Text and Film* (London: Methuen Drama, 2010), 19.
7. Barring a cut masked by white sheets hung out to dry that momentarily invade the foreground of the shot. Joe Wright, DVD Audio commentary. *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE*. Universal, 2005.
8. See John Caughie's discussion of the 'small pleasures' of period detail in relation to the negative criticism of the quality adaptation for television in *Television Drama: Realism, Modernism and British Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 211-215.
9. This is suggested by Wright in his audio commentary on the DVD, which signals the film's self-reflexive standing with regard to the classic adaptation (*PRIDE AND PREJUDICE*. DVD. Universal, 2005).
10. Pidduck, *Contemporary Costume Film*, 15-16.
11. In psychoanalytic terminology, 'fantasy' is also commonly spelled 'phantasy' (see Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis* [1967], trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith [London: Hogarth Press, 1973], 314-319). I have kept the preferred spelling of the sources cited in this book. I use 'fantasy' throughout to convey both everyday and psychoanalytic uses of the word.
12. Langford, *Film Genre. Hollywood and Beyond* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 7 (emphasis in the original).
13. Pidduck, *Contemporary Costume Film*, 176.
14. Geraghty, *Now a Major Motion Picture. Film Adaptations of Literature and Drama* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 39.
15. Pidduck, *Contemporary Costume Film*, 10.

16. See Higson, *English Heritage, English Cinema. Costume Drama since 1980* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) and *Film England. Culturally English Filmmaking since the 1990s* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011).
17. See Eckart Voigts-Virchow, "'Corset Wars': An Introduction to Syncretic Heritage Film Culture since the Mid-1990s", in Eckart Voigts-Virchow (ed.) *Janespotting and Beyond. British Heritage Retrovisions since the Mid-1990s* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 2004), 9-31.
18. Higson, *Film England*, 173.
19. *Ibid.*, 170.
20. For an introduction to these debates, see Higson, *English Heritage, English Cinema*, 46-85; Claire Monk, 'The British Heritage-Film Debate Revisited', in Claire Monk and Amy Sargeant (eds.), *British Historical Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2002), 176-198; Vidal, *The Heritage Film. Nation, Genre and Representation* (London: Wallflower Press/Columbia University Press, 2012).
21. For an early assessment of this trend, see Tana Wollen, 'Over our shoulders: nostalgic screen fictions for the 1980s', in John Corner and Sylvia Harvey (eds.), *Enterprise and Heritage. Crosscurrents of National Culture* (London: Routledge, 1991), 178-193; and Cairns Craig, 'Rooms without a View', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 1, no. 6 (1991), 10-13.
22. Higson, 'Re-presenting the National Past: Nostalgia and Pastiche in the Heritage Film', in Lester Friedman (ed.) *Fires Were Started: British Cinema and Thatcherism*, 2nd edition (London: Wallflower, 2006 [1993]), 91-109, 100-101.
23. See John Corner and Sylvia Harvey, 'Mediating tradition and modernity: the heritage/enterprise couplet', in Corner and Harvey (eds.), *Enterprise and Heritage*, 45-75: 49, 56.
24. Paul Dave, 'The Bourgeois Paradigm and Heritage Cinema', *New Left Review*, 224 (1997), 111-126: 117.
25. Sadoff, *Victorian Vogue. British Novels on Screen* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2010), 7.
26. *Ibid.*, 17.
27. De la Bretèque, 'Le film en costumes: un bon objet?', *CinémAction*, 65 (1992), 111-122: 113.
28. See Rosalind Galt's exploration of landscape in relation to history in Italian period melodramas in *The New European Cinema. Redrawing the Map* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 26-87. Thomas Elsaesser offers a wide-ranging evaluation of this phenomenon in *European Cinema. Face to Face with Hollywood* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005), 57-81.
29. The phrase comes from Angela Krewani, 'Heritage as International Film Format', in *Janespotting and Beyond*, 161-166.
30. This is the approach adopted by Pidduck, who focuses on 'how cultural forms travel'. *Contemporary Costume Film*, 12.
31. Voigts-Virchow, "'Corset Wars'", 22-23.
32. De Baecque, 'Le cinéma d'Europe à la recherche d'une forme', *Cahiers du cinéma*, 455-456 (1992), 78-84: 79 (my translation).
33. See Ginette Vincendeau on the critical reception of the period film in France in 'Un genre qui fait problème: le Heritage film. La critique face à un genre populaire des

- deux côtés de la Manche', in Raphaëlle Moine (ed.) *Le cinéma français face aux genres* (Paris: Association Française de Recherche sur l'Histoire du Cinéma, 2005), 131-140.
34. For an account of the incompatibility of the 'quality', 'authorship' and 'art' categories running through British critical discourses, see John Ellis, 'Art, Culture and Quality. Terms for a Cinema in the Forties and Seventies', *Screen*, vol. 19, no. 3 (1978), 9-49.
 35. Cook, *Fashioning the Nation*, 73.
 36. See principally, among others: Omar Calabrese, *Neo-Baroque. A Sign of the Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); Angela Ndalianis, *Neo-Baroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004) and Timothy Murray, *Digital Baroque. New Media Art and Cinematic Folds* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).
 37. Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio. Contemporary Art, Preposterous History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 16.
 38. See Christine Gledhill's reformulation of melodrama in her seminal 'The Melodramatic Field: An Investigation', in Christine Gledhill (ed.), *Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film* (London: British Film Institute, 1987), 5-39.
 39. See Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), as well as the essays contained in the collection *Home Is Where the Heart Is*.
 40. See Miriam Bratu Hansen, 'The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism' in *Reinventing Film Studies*, quoted by Joe McElhaney, *The Death of Classical Cinema. Hitchcock, Lang, Minnelli* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2006), 9.
 41. McElhaney, *The Death of Classical Cinema*, 4-7.
 42. Dunant, 'Olympian Dreamscapes: The Photographic Canvas. The Wide-screen Paintings of Leighton, Poynter and Alma-Tadema', in Jacky Bratton, Jim Cook and Christine Gledhill (eds.), *Melodrama, Stage, Picture, Screen* (London: British Film Institute, 1994), 82-93: 88.
 43. *Ibid.*, 89. Dunant develops this argument from Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 41.
 44. See Bazin, 'Ontology of the Photographic Image' (1958), in the volume of collected writings *What is Cinema?* Trans. Timothy Barnard (Montreal: Caboose, 2009), 3-12: 6.
 45. Brooks, *History Painting and Narrative: Delacroix's Moments* (Oxford: European Humanities Research Centre of the University of Oxford, 1998), 32.
 46. This is Pam Cook's project in *Fashioning the Past*.
 47. See Monk, 'Sexuality and the heritage', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 5, no. 10 (1995), 32-34.
 48. Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 47.
 49. *Ibid.*, x.

Chapter I – A Poetics of Figuration

1. Caughie, *Television Drama*, 216.

2. Vincendeau, 'Introduction', in *Film/Literature/Heritage*, xi-xxxi: xviii.
3. Jousse, 'L'habit ne fait pas l'académisme', *Cahiers du cinéma*, 548 (2000), 42-43: 43 (my translation).
4. Vincendeau, 'Un genre qui fait problème: le Heritage film. La critique face à un genre populaire des deux côtés de la Manche', 138-140.
5. Hauser, *Mannerism. The Crisis of the Renaissance and the Origin of Modern Art*. Volume I: Text (London: Routledge, 1965), 4.
6. *Ibid.*, 21.
7. John Shearman, *Mannerism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), 34-35.
8. Greenberg, 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch' (1939), in Francis Frascina (ed.), *Pollock and After. The Critical Debate* (London: Harper & Row, 1985), 21-33: 22.
9. Greenberg, 'Towards a Newer Laocoon' (1940), in *Pollock and After*, 35-45: 38.
10. *Ibid.*, 39.
11. See Alain Bergala's series of articles in *Cahiers du cinéma*: 'Le vrai, le faux, le factice', 351 (1983), 5-9; 'Le cinéma de l'après', 360-361 (1984), 58-62; and 'D'une certaine manière', 370 (1985), 11-15.
12. Bergala, 'D'une certaine manière', 14 (my translation).
13. As Chris Darke has noted, in the 1980s *Cahiers* seems to fall back on its former critical dynamics, according to which 'the return of the "bad object" (the "cinéma de qualité") impels a... diversion via art history in order to resurrect the 'good object', the auteurist ideal, with which to counter it.' The retrieval of the mannerist in this context reverts to a large extent to the cultural battles around the definition of a French national cinema. See Darke, 'Rupture, continuity and diversification: *Cahiers du cinéma* in the 1980s', *Screen*, vol. 34, no. 4 (1993), 362-379: 376.
14. Olivier Assayas, Alain Bergala and Pascal Bonitzer, 'Le cinéma, l'art et la manière. Entretien avec Patrick Mauriès', *Cahiers du cinéma*, 370 (1985), 23-27: 23.
15. *Ibid.*, 26 (my translation).
16. Greenberg, 'Towards a Newer Laocoon', 43.
17. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition. A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiv.
18. See Calabrese, *Neo-Baroque. A Sign of the Times*, 12-14; Hal Foster, 'Postmodernism: A Preface', in Foster (ed.), *Postmodern Culture* (London: Pluto Press, 1985), ix-xvi.
19. Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 20.
20. Michael Walsh points out that 'following Althusser, Jameson sees History as the absent cause, while film's virtual basis is rooted only in what is present'. See his 'Jameson and "Global Aesthetics"', in David Bordwell and Noël Carroll (eds.), *Post-Theory. Reconstructing Film Studies* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press 1996), 481-500: 485.
21. Jameson, *Postmodernism*, xv.
22. *Ibid.*, 18.
23. Venturi, 'Architecture as Sign rather than Space. *New Mannerism rather than Old Expressionism*', in Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, *Architecture as Signs and Systems. For a Mannerist Time* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 7-101: 77.
24. *Ibid.*, 74-75.

25. See Garrett Stewart, 'Film's Victorian Retrofit', *Victorian Studies*, vol. 38, no. 2 (1995), 153-198: 183-184. It is also significant that Jameson extends his critique of the nostalgia film to the original STAR WARS (rebranded STAR WARS: EPISODE IV – A NEW HOPE, George Lucas 1977), a sci-fi blockbuster reminiscent of 1930s serials and 1950s B-movies and, therefore, of the familiar pleasures of genre as well as myth and the folk tale. In 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society', in *Postmodern Culture*, 111-125: 116.
26. Craig, 'Rooms without a View', 12 (emphasis in the original).
27. See Stewart, 'Film's Victorian Retrofit'; Pidduck, 'Elizabeth and Shakespeare in Love: Screening the Elizabethans', in *Film/ Literature/ Heritage*, 130-135.
28. Sadoff and John Kucich, 'Introduction. Histories of the Present', in Kucich and Sadoff (eds.), *Victorian Afterlife. Postmodern Culture Rewrites the Nineteenth Century* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), ix-xxx: x.
29. Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio*, 18-19.
30. Dyer, *Pastiche* (London: Routledge, 2007), 175.
31. *Ibid.*, 176.
32. *Ibid.*, 177.
33. *Ibid.*, 180.
34. Barthes, 'The Reality Effect' (1968), in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 141-148: 148.
35. Barthes, 'The Discourse of History' (1967), in *The Rustle of Language*, 127-140.
36. See Philip Rosen, *Change Mummified. Cinema, Historicity, Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 170-171.
37. Barthes, 'Rhetoric of the Image' (1964), in Stephen Heath (ed. and trans.), *Image-Music-Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 32-51: 44.
38. Higson, 'Re-presenting the National Past', 99.
39. This is Jean-Louis Comolli's thesis in 'Historical Fiction. A Body Too Much', as cited by Rosen, *Change Mummified*, 181. For an application of Comolli to contemporary costume drama with special reference to *Elizabeth*, see Pidduck, *Contemporary Costume Film*, 96, 170-173.
40. Such debates were deeply entrenched in the struggle around popular memory taking place in France at the time. For an introduction including original texts in English translation, see David Wilson (ed.), *Cahiers du cinéma. Vol. IV 1973-1978: History, Ideology, Cultural Struggle* (London: Routledge, 2000). Also, see Naomi Greene, *Landscapes of Loss. The National Past in Postwar French Cinema* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 3-30 and Galt, *The New European Cinema*, 11-14.
41. See especially Pascal Kané, 'L'effet d'étrangeté', *Cahiers du cinéma*, 254-255 (1974-1975), 77-83; Comolli, 'Le passé filmé' *Cahiers du cinéma*, 277 (1977), 5-14, and 'Historical Fiction. A Body Too Much' (1977), trans. Ben Brewster, *Screen*, vol. 19, no. 2 (1978), 41-53.
42. See 'Rhetoric of the Image', where Barthes identifies the photographic as the 'message without a code', 45.
43. Barthes, 'The Third Meaning. Research notes on Some Eisenstein stills' (1970), in *Image-Music-Text*, 52-68: 58.
44. Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 63.
45. As Philippe C. Dubois remarks, 'from artifice (*postiche*) to *pastiche* there is just one small leap that Barthes is only too happy to take... beyond this dialectic, the oscilla-

- tion remarked by Barthes, the third meaning of his text lies perhaps hidden – of which it would then become possible to do a reading *en abyme*'. 'Barthes et l'image', *The French Review*, vol. 72, no. 4 (1999), 676-686: 680 (my translation).
46. See Comolli, 'Historical Fiction. A Body Too Much'.
 47. For Derek Attridge, Barthes's semiotic project is hampered by the fact that 'the terms *obtuse meaning* and *punctum* themselves have the status of something like obtuse meanings or *puncta* within Barthes's writing... They thus only masquerade as technical terms, their specificity and Latinity a ruse, preventing generalization rather than facilitating it. They are not the names of concepts but function more like proper names'. See Attridge, 'Roland Barthes's Obtuse, Sharp Meaning and the Responsibilities of Commentary', in Jean-Michel Rabaté (ed.), *Writing the Image after Roland Barthes* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 77-89: 80.
 48. *Ibid.*, 83.
 49. Barthes, 'The Third Meaning', 64-65.
 50. Barthes borrows this term from Julia Kristeva, who defines *signifiante* in relation to the productive intertextuality of the poetic language as 'the surplus of work exceeding the signifying chain' (my translation); the vector which traverses perpendicularly the surface of the utterance (*parole*) and produces the work of differentiation outside representation; *Séméiotikè. Recherches pour une sémanalyse* (Paris: Seuil, 1969), 10-11, 313.
 51. D.N. Rodowick, *Reading the Figural, or, Philosophy after the New Media* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 241.
 52. Raymond Bellour, 'The Unattainable Text', *Screen*, vol. 16, no. 3 (1975), 19-28.
 53. Barthes, 'The Reality Effect', 145-146.
 54. For a detailed account of this evolution, see José María Pozuelo Yvancos, 'Roland Barthes y el cine', in José Luis Castro de Paz, Pilar Couto Cantero and José María Paz Gago (eds.), *Cien años de cine. Historia, teoría y análisis del texto fílmico* (La Coruña: Universidade da Coruña/Visor Libros, 1999), 237-253.
 55. Barthes's own definition; see 'Writing Reading' (1970), in *The Rustle of Language*, 29-32: 30.
 56. *Ibid.*, 29.
 57. Dudley Andrew, *Concepts in Film Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 161. For a mapping of figurality in film semiotics and psychoanalysis, see Christian Metz, *Psychoanalysis and Cinema. The Imaginary Signifier*, trans. Celia Britton, Annyl Williams, Ben Brewster and Alfred Guzzetti (London: Macmillan, 1982).
 58. Jakobson, 'Linguistics and Poetics', in Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy (eds.), *Language in Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 62-94: 69-70.
 59. Aumont, *L'Image* (Paris: Nathan, 1990), 196 (my translation).
 60. 'Figure, n', *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, at <http://www.oed.com>, accessed 1 May 2011, Oxford University Press, 2011.
 61. Term used in the French original. See Lyotard, *Discours, figure* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1971), 9. Hereafter I will be referring to the English translation, *Discourse, Figure* (see below).
 62. Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, trans. Anthony Hudek and Mary Lydon (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 3.

63. For an approach into deconstruction and film more concerned with direct application of Derrida's texts, see Peter Brunette and David Wills, *Screen/Play* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); Robert Smith, 'Deconstruction and Film', in Nicholas Royle (ed.), *Deconstructions. A User's Guide* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), 119-136.
64. Aumont, *L'Image*, 197 (my translation).
65. For an account of the structure and main lines of argument in *Discourse, Figure*, see Mary Lydon, 'Veduta on *Discours, figure*', *Yale French Studies*, 99 (2001), 10-26, especially 12-13.
66. Turim, 'Desire in Art and Politics: The Theories of Jean-François Lyotard', *Camera Obscura*, 12 (1984), 91-106: 94.
67. For an investigation of *Discourse, Figure* in relation to Barthes's critical work, and its influence upon 1970s film theory, see Rodowick, *Reading the Figural*.
68. Rodolphe Gasché, 'Deconstruction as Criticism', *Glyph*, 6 (1976), 177-216: 192.
69. Lydon, 'Veduta on *Discours, figure*', 20.
70. Notably Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier's theory of *cinécriture* challenges the notion of the film image as necessarily representational, pushing editing to the fore as the organisational principle in a mode of analysis that challenges the centripetal force of the classical narrative space. Her theory (primarily informed by Derridean deconstruction) finds its ideal object of analysis in modernist filmmaking: whether in Eisenstein's montage of attractions, Godard's experimental film writing or Marguerite Duras's disjunctive film textures, the continuous 'fissure in the suture' of the editing process becomes closely identified with the composite nature of film, and its drive towards textual dissemination. However, film *écriture* is not necessarily limited to historical modernisms, nor is editing the unique site of deconstruction. Stewart takes the smallest unit where photography and film converge – the photogram – as the basis for his own exploration of Derridean *différance* on film. The visibility of the photographic in the moving image puts the photogram at the centre of a triangulation between literature, photography and film, which expands through popular and art cinemas. See Ropars, *Le Texte Divisé* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1981) and Stewart, *Between Film and Screen. Modernism's Photo Synthesis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).
71. This utopian value is elaborated through the sublime. See Lyotard's argument about the sublime in relation to avant-garde painting in 'Presenting the Unpresentable: the Sublime', trans. Lisa Liebmann, *Artforum*, 20 (1982), 64-69, and 'The Sublime and the Avant-Garde', trans. Lisa Liebmann, *Artforum*, 22 (1984), 36-43.
72. As Lyotard points out, 'the presence of the figural distinguishes itself negatively, through disorder. However, no single type of disorder ranks higher than the others. One cannot claim that the deconstruction of a space of figurative representation is any less provocative than that of abstract "good forms"'. *Discourse, Figure*, 324.
73. Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, 361. Also see the commentary on this passage provided by Geoffrey Bennington in *Lyotard. Writing the event* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 100.
74. See *Discourse, Figure*, especially 356-389.
75. See David Carroll's commentary on this passage in *Paraesthetics: Foucault, Lyotard, Derrida* (London: Methuen: 1987), 41.
76. Rodowick, *The Difficulty of Difference*, 131.

77. Ibid., xi.
78. See, for instance, the classic studies by George Bluestone, *Novels into Film: The Metamorphosis of Fiction into Cinema* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1957) or Seymour Chatman, 'What Novels Can Do That Films Can't (and Vice Versa)', *Critical Inquiry*, 7 (1980), 121-140.
79. For instance, Robin Wood's study on Softley's *The Wings of the Dove* opens with a preface on 'the problem of literary adaptation' in which he summarises the issue in rather blunt terms: 'literature is literature, film is film'. See *The Wings of the Dove. Henry James in the 1990s* (London: British Film Institute, 1999), 7.
80. Robert Stam, 'Beyond fidelity: the dialogics of adaptation', in James Naremore (ed.), *Film Adaptation* (London: The Athlone Press, 2000), 54-76: 62.
81. See James Naremore on Terry Eagleton's discussion of Arnoldian and Kantian aesthetics in 'Introduction: Film and the Reign of Adaptation', in *Film Adaptation*, 1-16: 2-5.
82. See, for instance, Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan's *Adaptations. From text to screen, screen to text* (London: Routledge, 1999).
83. Naremore, 'Introduction', 7-8. A salient example of the former is Brian MacFarlane's *Novel to Film. An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), whereas the latter typically supports the debates surrounding modernist cinema's adaptation of literary sources – for instance, T. Jefferson Kline, *Screening the Text. Intertextuality in New Wave French Cinema* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), Andrew Horton and Joan Magretta (eds.), *Modern European Filmmakers and the Art of Adaptation* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1981).
84. Barthes, *S/Z*, quoted by Barbara Johnson, 'The Critical Difference: Balzac's "Sarrasine" and Barthes's "S/Z"', in Robert Young (ed.), *Untying the Text. A Post-Structuralist Reader* (London: Routledge, 1981), 162-174: 167 (emphasis in the original).
85. Barthes, 'Theory of the Text' (1973), trans. Ian McLeod, in *Untying the Text*, 31-47: 33.
86. See Greenberg, 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch', as discussed by Naremore in connection with the Hollywood studio adaptation, 'Introduction', 4-5.
87. Johnson, 'The Critical Difference', 172-173.
88. Ibid., 169-170.
89. Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 316.
90. Stam, 'Beyond fidelity', 65.
91. See Colin MacCabe, 'Realism and the Cinema: Notes on Some Brechtian Theses', *Screen*, vol. 15, no. 2 (1974), 7-27: 8.
92. Janet Bergstrom, 'Alternation, Segmentation, Hypnosis: Interview with Raymond Bellour', trans. Susan Suleiman, *Camera Obscura*, 3-4 (1979), 71-103: 89.
93. See, for instance, 'System of a Fragment (on *The Birds*)' (1969), trans. Ben Brewster, in *The Analysis of Film*, 28-67.
94. Rodowick, *The Difficulty of Difference*, 122.
95. Bellour, 'Alternation, Segmentation, Hypnosis', 97.
96. Bergstrom, 'Enunciation and Sexual Difference (Part I)', *Camera Obscura*, 3-4 (1979), 33-65: 53 (emphasis in the original).
97. Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, vol. 16, no. 3 (1975), 6-18.
98. Johnson, 'The Critical Difference', 172-173.

99. Corrigan, *Film and Literature: An Introduction and Reader* (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1999), 72.
100. *Ibid.*, 72-73.
101. Vicente J. Benet, 'El relato y lo visible. A propósito de *Bram Stoker's Dracula*', *Archivos de la Filmoteca*, 21 (1995), 113-129: 122.
102. On the fin-de-siècle aesthetics of Coppola's film, see Elsaesser, 'Specularity and Engulfment. Francis Ford Coppola and *Bram Stoker's Dracula*', in Steve Neale and Murray Smith (eds.), *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1998), 191-208: 199.
103. See also Sadoff's extended account of what she calls the 'morph aesthetics' of Coppola's film, in *Victorian Vogue*, 125-134.
104. Elsaesser, 'Specularity and Engulfment', 200-204.
105. *Ibid.*, 205.
106. Ronald R. Thomas, 'Specters of the Novel. *Dracula* and the Cinematic Afterlife of the Victorian Novel', in *Victorian Afterlife*, 288-310: 299.
107. Stewart, 'Film's Victorian Retrofit', 154. See also Stewart, *Between Film and Screen*, 237-244.
108. Stewart, *Between Film and Screen*, 244.
109. Stewart, 'Film's Victorian Retrofit', 154-157.
110. *Ibid.*, 155.
111. *Ibid.*, 184.
112. *Ibid.*, 158.
113. *Ibid.*, 171.
114. Stewart, *Framed Time. Towards a Postfilmic Cinema* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 3.
115. Corrigan, *Film and Literature*, 74.
116. See Kuntzel, 'The Film-Work' (1972), trans. Lawrence Crawford, Kimball Lockhart and Claudia Tysdal, *Enclitic*, vol. 2, no. 1 (1978), 38-71; 'The Film-Work, 2' (1975), trans. Nancy Huston, *Camera Obscura*, 5 (1980) 6-69; and 'Sight, Insight and Power: Allegory of a Cave' (1975), trans. Nancy Huston, *Camera Obscura*, 6 (1980), 91-112.
117. Kuntzel, 'The Film-Work, 2', 56.
118. *Ibid.*, 13.
119. Kuntzel, 'The Film-Work, 2', 24.
120. The pair line/letter captures the oscillation of the trace between seeing and reading. The line may close down into the formal identity of the letter; the letter may open up into the line, into the deep space of the image. See Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, 264.
121. Pidduck, *Contemporary Costume Film*, 35.
122. *Ibid.*, 4-5.
123. See Laurent Aknin, 'Générique/Incipit', *Vertigo. Lector in Cinéma*, 17 (1997), 69-70.
124. See Suzanne Llandrat-Guigues, 'Nature morte au livre', *Vertigo. Lector in Cinéma*, 17 (1997), 65-67.
125. On (masculine) authorship and the costume biopic, see Pidduck, *Contemporary Costume Film*, 91-97.
126. Pat Kirkham, 'Looking for the Simple Idea', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 4, no. 2 (1994), 16-20: 19.
127. Pidduck, *Contemporary Costume Film*, 55.

128. Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Haberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 96.
129. Bennington, *Liotard. Writing the event*, 71.

Chapter 2 – Present in the Past: The House

1. Pidduck, *Contemporary Costume Film*, 5.
2. Sadoff, *Victorian Vogue*, xiv.
3. *Ibid.*, xviii.
4. Tom Stoppard, *Arcadia* (London: Faber and Faber, 1993).
5. Pidduck, *Contemporary Costume Film*, 45.
6. *Ibid.*, 53-54.
7. *Ibid.*, 122.
8. Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, Vol. 1. *Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London: Verso, 1994), 259.
9. *Ibid.*, 262.
10. See John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Society* (London: Sage, 1990).
11. Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, 265-266.
12. Julia Prewitt Brown, *The Bourgeois Interior. How the Middle Class Imagines Itself in Literature and Film* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 3 (emphasis in the original).
13. *Ibid.*, 11.
14. See Lucie Armitt, *Theorising the Fantastic* (London: Arnold, 1996), 49.
15. Peter Buse and Andrew Stott, 'Introduction: a Future for Haunting', in Peter Buse and Andrew Stott (eds.), *Ghosts. Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, History* (London: Macmillan, 1999), 1-20: 14.
16. It has been argued that the Steadicam exposes the direct relationship between the transformation of capitalist technology and the 'depthlessness' of the postmodern text through the work on space in terms of 'mere externals, timeless surfaces without connotations'. See Jean-Pierre Geuens, 'Visuality and Power. The Work of the Steadicam', *Film Quarterly*, vol. 47, no. 2 (1993-1994), 8-17: 15.
17. Higson, 'Re-presenting the National Past', 93.
18. See Robert Emmet Long, *The Films of Merchant Ivory* (New York: Citadel Press, 1991), 12-32.
19. For an early account of Merchant Ivory's international career, see John Pym, *The Wandering Company: Twenty-One Years of Merchant Ivory* (New York: British Film Institute/The Museum of Modern Art, 1983).
20. On the themes of travelling and exile in the Merchant Ivory filmography, see Long, *The Films of Merchant Ivory*.
21. Higson, 'Re-presenting the National Past', 96 (emphasis in the original).
22. *Ibid.*, 92.
23. See Monk, 'Sexuality and the heritage' and 'The British Heritage-Film Debate Revisited', 181.
24. In relation to nation, nostalgia and representation, see Higson, *English Heritage, English Cinema*; John Hill, *British Cinema in the 1980s* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999),

- 73-98; in relation to cultural capital and international taste formations, see Martin A. Hipsky, 'Anglophil(m)ia. Why Does America Watch Merchant-Ivory Movies?', *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, vol. 22, no. 3 (1994), 98-107; in connection with gender, class and sexuality in the British context, see Cook, *Fashioning the Nation*, and Monk, 'The British Heritage-Film Debate Revisited', among others.
25. For an account of the 'official' and 'unofficial' traditions in British cinema, see Elsaesser, 'Images for Sale: The "New" British Cinema', in *Fires Were Started*, 45-57: 54.
 26. Jhabvala, 'Disinheritance', *Blackwood's Magazine*, 326 (1979), 4-14: 4.
 27. *Ibid.*, 7.
 28. Marie-Anne Guérin, 'Le collectionneur', *Cahiers du cinéma*, 455-456 (1992), 24-25: 25.
 29. Leitch, *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents. From Gone with the Wind to The Passion of the Christ* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 162.
 30. Bazin, 'Diary of a Country Priest and the Robert Bresson Style' (1951), in *What Is Cinema?*, 39-159: 159.
 31. Higson, 'Re-presenting the National Past', 96 (emphasis in the original).
 32. Ian Goode, 'A pattern of inheritances: Alan Bennett, heritage and British film and television', *Screen*, vol. 44, no. 3 (2003), 295-313.
 33. *Ibid.*, 312. Goode identifies this position in the work of English playwright and scriptwriter Alan Bennett. Bennett forms part of an intellectual tradition that is anti-Thatcherite yet conservative in its interest in continuity and preservation.
 34. For an extended analysis of its critical reception, see Higson, *English Heritage, English Cinema*, 146-193.
 35. Higson, 'The Instability of the National', in *British Cinema. Past and Present*, 35-47: 37.
 36. *Ibid.* (emphasis in the original).
 37. Higson, *English Heritage, English Cinema*, 171.
 38. *Ibid.*, 39-41.
 39. Guérin, 'Le collectionneur', 24 (my translation).
 40. Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 22.
 41. *Ibid.*
 42. *Ibid.*, 81.
 43. Phil Powrie adopts Higson's critique of heritage in his assessment of the film in *French Cinema in the 1980s. Nostalgia and the Crisis of Masculinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 42.
 44. Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 109.
 45. Hélène Cixous, 'Fiction and its Phantoms: A Reading of Freud's *Das Unheimliche* (The "uncanny")', *New Literary History*, vol. 7, no. 3 (1976), 525-548: 543.
 46. See José Manuel López, 'La casa, la memoria', *Cahiers du cinéma España*, 17 (2008), 42-43.
 47. For a feminist appraisal of the iconographic influence of Coventry Patmore's 1885 poem 'The Angel in the House' in Victorian and post-Victorian literature, see Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic. The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 3-44.
 48. *Ibid.*, 26.
 49. Guérin, 'Le collectionneur', 25 (my translation).

50. Buse and Stott, 'Introduction: a Future for Haunting', 9.
51. Brown, *The Bourgeois Interior*, 20.
52. Homi K. Bhabha, 'The World and the Home', in Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti and Ella Shohat (eds.), *Dangerous Liaisons. Gender, Nation and Postcolonial Perspectives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 445-455: 445.
53. See Higson, *English Heritage, English Cinema*, 148. See also Hill, *British Cinema in the 1980s*, 91. In a more explicitly sociological reading of class and gender relations, E. Kim Stone argues that the 'utopian construction' of *Howards End*, especially apparent in the final receding shot over the new occupiers of the house, 'actually functions as what Michel Foucault calls "heterotopia" – a sacred space that masks but does not resolve cultural anxieties. Stone, 'Recovering the Lone Mother: *Howards End* as Aesthetic Anodyne', *Camera Obscura* 55, vol. 19, no. 1 (2004), 43-75: 46.
54. This is Lee Clark Mitchell's view in 'Based on the Novel by Henry James: *The Golden Bowl* 2000', and Wendy Graham's in 'The Rift in the *Loot*: Cognitive Dissonance for the Reader of Merchant Ivory's *The Golden Bowl*', both in Susan M. Griffin (ed.), *Henry James Goes to the Movies* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2002), 281-332.
55. Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 172.
56. See Mitchell Owens, 'Merchant Ivory's *The Golden Bowl*. A new production stars some of England's greatest houses', *Architectural Digest*, April 2000. At: <http://www.merchantivory.com/goldenbowl/arch.html>, accessed 1 July 2011. THE GOLDEN BOWL retains a reference to *The Portrait of a Lady*, by having a supporting character make a passing comment on the fate of an American heiress seduced by an unscrupulous American man exiled in Italy.
57. See Mark A. Eaton, 'Miramax, Merchant-Ivory, and the New Nobrow Culture: Niche Marketing, *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Golden Bowl*', *Literature/Film Quarterly*, vol. 34, no. 4 (2006): 257-266.
58. Sadoff, *Victorian Vogue*, 175.
59. *Ibid.*, 176.
60. Leitch, *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents*, 165.
61. *Ibid.*, 168.
62. Ivory, 'James Ivory's passage to mini-India', *The Guardian*, 2 November 2010. At: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2010/nov/02/james-ivory-indian-miniatures?INTCMP=SRCH>, accessed 17 December 2010.
63. See Peter Buse, Ken Hirschkop, Scott McCracken and Bertrand Taithe, *Benjamin's Arcades. An unGuided tour* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 6.
64. Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*. Trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 204.
65. Mitchell, 'Based on the Novel By Henry James: *The Golden Bowl* 2000', 283.
66. The visual references to Sargent's and Tissot's society portraits became commonplace in the 1990s adaptations of texts by Henry James and Edith Wharton (*The Golden Bowl*, *The Age of Innocence* and *The House of Mirth*); a sort of ready-made visual shorthand for 'accurate reconstruction' in films dealing with fin-de-siècle high society. For production details, see Ivory in interview in 'Imagining *The Golden Bowl*' (no date). At: <http://www.thegolden-bowl.com/testframe.html?interviews.html> accessed 19 March 2010.
67. Mitchell, 'Based on the Novel by Henry James: *The Golden Bowl* 2000', 288.

68. *Ibid.*, 294.
69. See Susan Felleman, *Art in the Cinematic Imagination* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 35.
70. See Lyotard on *Hamlet* in connection with the figural work that traverses discourse in *Discourse, Figure*, 387-389.
71. Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 5.
72. Graham, 'The Rift in the Loot', 311.
73. Stewart, *Framed Time*, 41.
74. See Martin Haliwell, 'Modernism and Adaptation', in Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Literature on Screen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 90-106.
75. Stewart, *Framed Time*, 53 (emphasis in the original).
76. The painstaking research work into the look and customs of the period was pointed out by many reviewers and scholars alike; see Charles H. Helmetag, 'Recreating Edith Wharton's New York in Martin Scorsese's *The Age of Innocence*', *Literature/Film Quarterly*, vol. 26, no. 1 (1998), 162-165.
77. Cook, 'The Age of Innocence', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 4, no. 2 (1994), 45-46: 45.
78. Geoff Andrew asserts that Scorsese 'pushes the literary costume-drama way beyond the polite, blandly illustrative traditions of the Merchant Ivory school'. 'Past Master', *Time Out*, January 12-19 (1994), 18-22: 18.
79. Christie, 'Passion and Restraint', 10.
80. The published production notes include references to films that 'inspired' *THE AGE OF INNOCENCE*: from archival discoveries (such as the early film *AT THE FOOT OF THE FLATIRON*, 1903) to classics such as *THE MAGNIFICENT AMBERSONS* (Orson Welles, 1942), *THE HEIRESS* (William Wyler, 1949), or *SENSO* (Visconti, 1954). See Scorsese and Jay Cocks, *The Age of Innocence. The Shooting Script* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1996), 127-135.
81. After György Lukács, cited in C.S. Tashiro, *Pretty Pictures. Production Design and the History Film* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), 67.
82. Pidduck, *Contemporary Costume Film*, 46.
83. Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, cited in Brown, *The Bourgeois Interior*, 62.
84. *Ibid.*
85. Murphy, 'Artist of the Beautiful', *Film Comment*, vol. 29, no. 6 (1993), 11-15: 12.
86. See Gavin Smith, 'Martin Scorsese Interviewed' (1993), in Peter Brunette (ed.), *Martin Scorsese. Interviews* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999), 200-219: 206.
87. Elsaesser, 'Tales of Sound and Fury. Observations on the Family Melodrama', in *Home Is Where the Heart Is*, 43-69: 62.
88. See Paul Willemen on the 'diamonds' credit sequence of Douglas Sirk's *Imitation of Life* (1958) in *Looks and Frictions. Essays in Cultural Studies and Film Theory* (London: British Film Institute, 1994), 91.
89. See Pidduck's analysis of the opera sequence in *Contemporary Costume Film*, 46-48.
90. Carlos F. Heredero, *La Edad de la Inocencia/Eva al Desnudo* (Barcelona: Dirigido, 1999), 52 (my translation).
91. Tashiro, *Pretty Pictures*, 92.
92. Gavin Smith, 'Martin Scorsese Interviewed', 203. This kind of dissolve also occurs at the beginning of *The Remains of the Day*, where the pre-war servants at Darlington

- Hall dissolve away like ghosts around Stevens who, like Newland, ends up as a walking relic from a disappeared world.
93. For an analysis of the film in relation with its literary source through the mediating role of painting, see Brigitte Peucker, 'The Moment of Portraiture: Scorsese Reads Wharton' in her book *The Material Image. Art and the Real in Film*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 19-29. It should be noted, as Peucker points out, that 'the conjoining of image and narrative is figured in Wharton's fiction: a preoccupation with the visual is central to her writing' (20).
 94. Heredero, *La Edad de la Inocencia/Eva al Desnudo*, 44-45.
 95. This is implied elsewhere in the novel: 'Mrs Welland, who knew exactly why Archer had pressed her to announce her daughter's engagement at the Beaufort ball (and had indeed expected him to do no less), yet felt obliged to simulate reluctance, and the air of having had her hand forced, quite as, in the books on Primitive Man that people of advanced culture were beginning to read, the savage bride is dragged with shrieks from her parents' tent'. Edith Wharton and Candace Waid (ed.), *The Age of Innocence* (1920) (New York: Norton, 2003), 29.
 96. Stern, *The Scorsese Connection* (London: British Film Institute, 1995), 226 (my emphasis).
 97. In particular, the Steadicam shot is a trademark feature linking THE AGE OF INNOCENCE with other Scorsese films that place a considerable weight in the description of closed symbolic worlds, such as GOODFELLAS (1990), CASINO (1995), and even MEAN STREETS (1973), a pre-Steadicam film that already includes a long tracking shot following a character into a strip club.
 98. See Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Vintage, 1998), 67-119, and Slavoj Žižek's take on this topic in *Looking Awry. An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 125-128.
 99. See Freud, 'A Special Type of Choice of Object Made by Men (Contributions to the Psychology of Love I)' (1910), trans. James Strachey, in Peter Gay (ed.), *The Freud Reader* (London: Vintage, 1995), 387-394. For a Freudian reading of the feminine images in THE AGE OF INNOCENCE, see José Antonio Palao, 'La resplandeciente opacidad de la ignorancia. La edad de la inocencia de Martin Scorsese', *Banda Aparte*, 1 (1994), 41-51.
 100. The film's opening, whilst presenting Newland as fully compliant with the established social principles, draws him as a more neutral observer than he is in the novel. In Wharton's text, he initially perceives Ellen as a socially unacceptable intruder who may jeopardise May's position: 'He hated to think of May Welland's being exposed to the influence of a young woman so careless of the dictates of Taste' (Wharton, *The Age of Innocence*, 11).
 101. Transcribed from the film; the published script contains a slightly modified version of this scene (See Scorsese and Cocks, *The Age of Innocence. The Shooting Script*, 4).
 102. Wharton, *The Age of Innocence*, 12.
 103. Peucker, *The Material Image*, 24-25.
 104. Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 69.
 105. Peucker, *The Material Image*, 26.
 106. *Ibid.*, 28.
 107. Stewart, *Framed Time*, 2.

108. See Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', quoted by Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body. Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 64.
109. Agamben, *Stanzas. Word and Phantasm in Western Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 20.
110. For a reading of the film focusing on the melancholic male hero, see Mark Nicholls, 'Male Melancholia and Martin Scorsese's *The Age of Innocence*', *Film Quarterly*, vol. 58, no. 1 (2004), 25-35.
111. Stewart, *Framed Time*, 2.
112. See Gavin Smith, 'Martin Scorsese Interviewed', 200.
113. *Ibid.*
114. Wharton, *The Age of Innocence*, 205.
115. Elsaesser, 'Tales of Sound and Fury', 48.
116. Pidduck, *Contemporary Costume Film*, 49.
117. Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 82.
118. Pidduck, *Contemporary Costume Film*, 52. Pidduck notes the recurrence of a masculine stance of suffering and melodramatic muteness in other films (*THE REMAINS OF THE DAY*, *SENSE AND SENSIBILITY*, *THE PIANO* or *ANGELS AND INSECTS*) that transforms man's emotional journey into a site of identification.
119. Wharton, *The Age of Innocence*, 217.
120. Stern, *The Scorsese Connection*, 227.
121. Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 74.
122. Fleissner, 'The Biological Clock: Edith Wharton, Naturalism, and the Temporality of Womanhood', *American Literature*, vol. 73, no. 3 (2006), 519-548: 520-521.
123. Pidduck points out that 'Lily's complicity in her own fate sits uncomfortably within a contemporary feminist context... If the modern novel prefers an active "opposing self"...popular feminist costume films prefer a sprightly and independent heroine (such as Elizabeth Bennet or Rozema's updated Fanny) to a silently suffering one', *Contemporary Costume Film*, 70.
124. Wendy Everett argues that 'Davies not only rejects the book's anti-Semitic tone but perhaps actually compensates for it on a subtextual level through two of his musical sources: Morton Feldman's "Rothko Chapel", with its quotation of traditional Hebrew melodies, and Alexander Volkoviski Tamir's "Shtiler Shtiler", a wartime Estonian Resistance song'. See Everett, *Terence Davies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 140. Other critics, however, feel the film is severely at fault for erasing ethnicity; Martha P. Nochimson finds Davies's a 'puzzlingly regressive choice' that recalls 'the worst of classical Hollywood by repressing the word "Jew" from the dialogue and attempting to substitute dated codes'; *The House of Mirth. Review*, *Cineaste*, vol. 26, no. 2 (2001), 41-43: 42. Like in *THE AGE OF INNOCENCE*, this and other alterations contribute towards a more sympathetic portrait of the film's protagonist.
125. Nochimson starts her review by noting the conspicuous absence of Gerty Farish, a woman without means who lives in the margins of 'good society', and who represents to some extent the New Woman's struggles and the rise of an economically independent, mobile femininity (*Ibid.*, 41). Another important omission is Nettie Struther, a working-class woman who gives Lily momentary relief the evening before her death. Nettie presents an alternative role model endowed with the aura of motherhood. Elaine Showalter interprets Lily's death as sign of the inevitable extinc-

- tion of an 'ornamental' femininity (the 'lady') modelled by and for the patriarchal society, so that women like Gertie Farish and Nettie Struther – along with feminine solidarity – may rise. See Showalter, 'The Death of the Lady (Novelist): Wharton's *House of Mirth*', *Representations*, 9 (1985), 133-149.
126. The film is an independent production shot on location in Glasgow. For an analysis of the film as an adaptation in relation to setting and production design, see Christine Geraghty, *Now a Major Motion Picture*, 179-184.
 127. *VISKNINGAR OCH ROP*/CRIES AND WHISPERS (Ingmar Bergman, 1972) and *TOUS LES MATINS DU MONDE*/ALL THE MORNINGS OF THE WORLD (Alain Corneau, 1991), as well as Davies's previous experiments with period aesthetics in *DISTANT VOICES*, *STILL LIVES* (1988) and *THE LONG DAY CLOSES* (1992) are some of the film's most obvious referents. See Philip Horne, 'Beauty's slow fade', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 10, no. 10 (2000), 14-18: 16. For Jim Hoberman, 'Davies's sense of the material is closer to a Mizoguchi geisha drama than *Masterpiece Theatre*'. This comparison clearly intends to separate Davies's art-house sensibility from Merchant Ivory's aesthetics, often compared to the transatlantic quality product promoted by *Masterpiece Theatre* ('100 Years of Solitude', *The Village Voice*, 51 (2000). At: <http://www.villagevoice.com/issues/0051/hoberman.php>, accessed 14 November 2010.
 128. Horne, 'Beauty's slow fade', 16.
 129. Everett, *Terence Davies*, 162-63. Everett also remarks on the symmetry of the Marcello theme as it reappears, like the lace pattern, at the scene of Lily's death in a more subtle string variation.
 130. Jim Ellis, 'Temporality and Queer Consciousness in *The House of Mirth*', *Screen*, vol. 47, no. 2, (2006), 163-178: 174.
 131. Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy. Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1990), 145.
 132. See Mary Chapman, "'Living Pictures": Women and Tableaux Vivants in Nineteenth-Century American Fiction and Culture', *Wide Angle*, vol. 18, no. 3 (1996), 22-52: 24.
 133. Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body*, 269-270.
 134. Barthes, *S/Z. An Essay*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), 33.
 135. *Ibid.*
 136. Wharton and Elizabeth Ammons (ed.), *The House of Mirth* (1905) (New York: Norton, 1990), 106.
 137. Fuller, 'Summer's End', *Film Comment*, vol. 37, no. 1 (2001), 54-59: 56.
 138. Davies seems to share Barthes's passion for photographs, as one of his best-known traits of style is the use of long static takes that seem to freeze into stills, especially in his films *DISTANT VOICES*, *STILL LIVES* and *THE LONG DAY CLOSES*. See Powrie, 'On the threshold between past and present: alternative heritage', in *British Cinema. Past and Present*, 316-326; and John Caughie, 'Halfway to paradise', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 2, no. 5 (1992), 11-13.
 139. Ellis, 'Temporality and Queer Consciousness in *The House of Mirth*', 170.
 140. Barthes, *S/Z*, 55.
 141. Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 95-96.

Chapter 3 – Time and the Image: The Tableau

1. Antonio Costa, *Cinema e Pittura* (Torino: Loescher, 1991), 16-17 (my translation).
2. See Áurea Ortiz and María Jesús Piqueras, *La pintura en el cine. Cuestiones de representación visual* (Barcelona: Paidós, 1995), 182-183.
3. See Costa, *Cinema e Pittura*; Aumont, *L'Œil Interminable. Cinéma et Peinture* (Paris: Séguier, 1995); Pascal Bonitzer, *Décadrages. Cinéma et Peinture* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma/L'Étoile, 1985) and Brigitte Peucker, *Incorporating Images. Film and the Rival Arts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), among others.
4. Costa, *Cinema e Pittura*, 155-156.
5. Maurizio Calvesi, 'Dipingere alla moviola', quoted by Costa, *Cinema e Pittura*, 151 (my translation).
6. *Ibid.*, 157 (my translation; emphasis in the original).
7. See Michel Chion, 'La loupe et le tableau', *Cahiers du cinéma*, 350 (1983), 9-11.
8. Costa, *Cinema e Pittura*, 162.
9. Chion, "'Caption.'" L'image et le titre chez Stanley Kubrick', *Positif*, 464 (1999), 95-98: 96 (my translation).
10. *Ibid.*
11. Vincent Amiel, 'Barry Lyndon. Jusqu'au bleu le plus froid', *Positif*, 464 (1999), 102-104: 103.
12. Marc Fumaroli, 'Cinéma et Terreur', *Cahiers du cinéma*, 559 (2001), 42-46: 44-45.
13. Patrice Blouin, 'Sueurs froides', *Cahiers du cinéma*, 559 (2001), 47-49: 48 (my translation).
14. Mary Ann Doane, *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1991), 194.
15. Bonitzer, *Décadrages*, 30. This is only truer in the case of the period film. There are numerous examples of films by directors trained in the advertisement industries, whose stylised images of the past show the impact of this kind of filmmaking: *THE DUELLISTS*, *ONEGIN*, *THE GOVERNESS*, and *TO THOSE WHO LOVE* are some examples.
16. Barthes, 'Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein' (1973), in *Image-Music-Text*, 73 (emphasis in the original).
17. In eighteenth-century aesthetics the valuing of spatial or imagistic values, i.e. of the iconic over the written, was met by a reaction which attempted to reassert the boundaries between space and time by an appeal to the superior status of temporal and historical values. This undervaluation of the figure/space in contrast with the overvaluation of discourse/time was firmly set in place in the *Laocoon*. See W.J.T. Mitchell, *Iconology. Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 114.
18. Brooks, *History Painting and Narrative*, 15. The notion of hybrid media anticipated in the *Laocoon* influenced early film theory; for example, Rudolf Arnheim looks at the talking film as a composite art in 'A New Laocoön: Artistic Composites and the Talking Film', in *Film as Art* (London: Faber and Faber, 1958), 164-189.
19. Aumont, *L'Œil Interminable*, 13-36; see also Ortiz and Piqueras, *La pintura en el cine*, 30-33.
20. This argument is explored by Charles Tashiro in 'When History Films (Try to) Become Paintings', *Cinema Journal*, vol. 35, no. 3 (1996), 19-33; and Ellen Draper in "'Untrammelled by Historical Fact": *That Hamilton Woman* and Melodrama's Aver-

- sion to History', *Wide Angle*, vol. 14, no. 1 (1992), 56-63. As Draper notes about the tableau scene of the dying Nelson featured in *THAT HAMILTON WOMAN* (Alexander Korda, 1941), 'self-consciousness in the representation of historical incident [that is, picture effects] is the last thing a melodrama can afford'. Melodrama relies on an immediate affective impact: amidst the historical setting, it needs to remind the audience that 'they are suffering in present tense' (58).
21. As Kara McKechnie points out, the last scene in which young Elizabeth is reified into her own (historical) legend visually reconstructs the Ditchley portrait by Marcus Gheeraerts (1592). The film shot, via the reference to the official portrait, loses its mimetic weight to become a symbol of the 'alliance of art and power' – virginity as a political declaration. See McKechnie, 'Taking Liberties with the monarch. The royal bio-pic in the 1990s', in *British Historical Cinema*, 217-236: 230-232.
 22. See Freud, 'The Moses of Michelangelo' (1914), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. XVII, trans. Joan Rivière (London: Hogarth Press, 1950), 257-287, commented by Brooks, *History Painting and Narrative*, 23.
 23. Burgin, 'Diderot/Barthes/Vertigo', in James Donald Burgin and Cora Kaplan (eds.), *Formations of Fantasy* (London: Methuen, 1986), 85-108: 99-100.
 24. Barthes, 'Diderot, Brecht, Eisensetein', 73.
 25. Burgin, 'Diderot/Barthes/Vertigo', 103 (emphasis in the original).
 26. Dominique Païni, 'Un détour pour le regard/A Detour for the Gaze', Dominique Païni and Marc Vernet (eds.), *Iris. Le Portrait Peint au Cinéma/The Painted Portrait in Film*, 14-15 (1992), 3-6: 5.
 27. Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, 379.
 28. What Lyotard calls the 'Cézannian revolution', *Discourse, Figure*, 380.
 29. *Ibid.*
 30. *Ibid.*, 378.
 31. Bonitzer, *Décadrages*, 32 (my translation).
 32. Brooks, *Body Work. Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 146.
 33. Ortiz and Piqueras, *La pintura en el cine*, 171-172.
 34. Païni, 'Un détour pour le regard', 6.
 35. See the articles on the portrait in the classical Hollywood film included in the collection *Le Portrait Peint au Cinéma/The Painted Portrait in Film*.
 36. René Démoris, 'L'Héritage de la peinture: le portrait impossible', *Iris*, 14-15 (1992), 11-23: 22-23 (my translation).
 37. Peucker, *The Material Image*, 28.
 38. Païni, 'Au Commencement était le portrait', *Iris*, 14-15 (1992), 107-115: 111 (my translation).
 39. *Ibid.*, 112.
 40. Doane, *Femmes Fatales*, 195.
 41. *Ibid.*, 23.
 42. Joan Rivière, 'Womanliness as a Masquerade', in *Formations of Fantasy*, 35-44.
 43. Doane, *Femmes Fatales*, 38.
 44. *Ibid.*, 37.
 45. Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra, 'In focus: postfeminism and contemporary media studies', *Cinema Journal*, vol. 44, no. 2 (2005), 107-110: 107.

46. See Karen Boyle's overview of these debates in 'Feminism without men: feminist media studies in a post-feminist age', in James Curran and Michael Gurevitch (eds.), *Mass Media and Society*, 4th edition (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005), 29-45: 31-33.
47. De Lauretis, 'Guerrilla in the midst: women's cinema in the 80s', *Screen*, vol. 31, no. 1 (1990), 6-25: 12.
48. Ibid.
49. Butler, 'Feminist theory and women's films at the turn of the century', *Screen*, vol. 41, no. 1 (2000), 73-79: 77.
50. The association between *Wuthering Heights* and *THE PIANO* has been explored by a number of critics, who take their cue from *Campion* herself. In published interviews *Campion* has cited *Wuthering Heights* as one of her sources of inspiration. See for example Miro Bilbrough, 'The Piano: Interview with Jane Campion' (1993), in Virginia Wright Wexman (ed.), *Jane Campion: Interviews* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999), 113-123: 114-115.
51. Bruzzi, 'Jane Campion: Costume Drama and Reclaiming Women's Past', in Pam Cook and Philip Dodd (eds.), *Women and Film: A Sight and Sound Reader* (London: Scarlet Press, 1996), 232-242: 233.
52. Showalter, 'Toward a Feminist Poetics' (1979), in Hazard Adams (ed.), *Critical Theory since Plato* (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992), 1223-1233: 1226.
53. Bruzzi, 'Jane Campion: Costume Drama and Reclaiming Women's Past', 233.
54. Ibid., 233-235.
55. Pidduck, *Contemporary Costume Film*, 77.
56. Laplanche and Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, 314 (my emphasis).
57. De Lauretis, *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire*, quoted in Patricia White, *UnInvited: Classical Hollywood Cinema and Lesbian Representability* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 196.
58. White, *UnInvited*, 205.
59. "'A Child Is Being Beaten": A Contribution to the Study of the Origin of Sexual Perversions' (1919), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. XVII, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), 175-204.
60. See Rodowick's detailed account of the beating fantasy in *The Difficulty of Difference: Psychoanalysis, Sexual Difference and Film Theory* (London: Routledge, 1992), 70-84: 72.
61. See White's analysis of fantasy in connection with the ways in which the reconstruction of queer viewing processes ('retrospectatorship') produces a different context of the understanding of the classical Hollywood text, in *UnInvited*, 194-215.
62. Rodowick, *The Difficulty of Difference*, 94.
63. AN ANGEL AT MY TABLE won the Special Jury Prize at the 1990 Venice Film Festival, and *THE PIANO* earned *Campion* the first ever *Palme d'Or* bestowed on a woman director in the 1993 Cannes Film Festival, before becoming an international box-office success in 1994.
64. See Dana Polan, *Jane Campion* (London: British Film Institute, 2001), 128.
65. Pidduck, *Contemporary Costume Film*, 79.
66. James, 'Preface', in James and Nicola Bradbury (ed.), *The Portrait of a Lady* (1907), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 3-18: 12-13.

67. Ibid., 10.
68. Lynne Kirby's review of Bonitzer's *Décadrages*, 'Painting and Cinema: The Frames of Discourse', *Camera Obscura*, 18 (1988), 95-105: 99.
69. Gordon, 'Portraits Perversely Framed. Jane Campion and Henry James', *Film Quarterly*, 56 (2003), 14-24: 15.
70. Michel Ciment, 'A Voyage to Discover Herself' (1996), trans. Michele Curley, in Virginia Wright Wexman (ed.), *Jane Campion. Interviews* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999), 177-185: 178.
71. Ibid., 180.
72. James, *The Portrait of a Lady*, 185.
73. Kathleen Murphy, 'Jane Campion's Shining: portrait of a director', *Film Comment*, vol. 36, no. 6 (1996), 29-33: 30.
74. De Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't. Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 138.
75. Ibid., 157.
76. A strategy that appears with even more intensity in Campion's later films: in satiric form in *HOLY SMOKE* (1999), and in the urban thriller *IN THE CUT* (2004).
77. As Lizzie Francke points out, Campion's work 'has been so deliciously uncensored that she taps into the most perverse parts of the female psyche, unafraid to deal with women who are the undoing of themselves'. See Francke, 'On the Brink', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 6, no. 11 (1996), 6-9: 9.
78. Murphy, 'Jane Campion's Shining', 29-30.
79. William E. Shriver has noted the importance of women's relationships in the film: Isabel's 'falling' for the two women who will bind her to Osmond (Madame Merle and Pansy) helps explain her complex romantic entanglement. See his review of *THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY*, quoted by Polan, *Jane Campion*, 128.
80. 'My Journey' quotes the trips around the world of the cameramen working for the Lumière's *Actualités* (1895-97) in the Venice and Egypt sections, but it can also be read through silent films such as Edwin S. Porter's *The European Rest Cure* (1904), which parodies the concept of the 'grand tour' in a sequence of tableaux describing the perils of travelling abroad. See Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping. Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 97-100.
81. Vernet, *Figures de l'absence. De l'invisible au cinéma* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma/L'Étoile, 1988), 68.
82. Pidduck, *Contemporary Costume Film*, 72.
83. Griselda Pollock, *Differencing the Canon. Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories* (London: Routledge, 1999), 23.
84. Lynette Felber, 'Capturing the Shadows of Ghosts. Mixed Media and the Female Gaze in *The Women on the Roof* and *The Governess*', *Film Quarterly*, vol. 54, no. 4 (2001), 27-37.
85. See Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation. Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press), 2000.
86. De Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't*, 107.
87. See Garrard, 'Artemisia and Susanna', in Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (eds.), *Feminism and Art History. Questioning the Litany* (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), 147-171; and *Artemisia Gentileschi: The Female Hero in Italian Baroque Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

88. Garrard and Steinem, 'Now that you've seen the film, meet the real Artemisia Gentileschi' (no date). At: <http://www.efn.org/~acd/Artemisia.html>, accessed 16 April 2010.
89. Griselda Pollock first documented these critical reactions in 'A hungry eye' (1998), originally published in *Sight and Sound*. From here on I will be citing from the updated and extended version of this piece, 'Feminist dilemmas with the art/life problem', in Mieke Bal (ed.), *The Artemisia Files: Artemisia Gentileschi for Feminists and Other Thinking People* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 169–206.
90. Garrard, 'Artemisia's Trial by Cinema', *Art in America*, vol. 86, no. 10 (1998), 65–69: 65, 67.
91. Griselda Pollock, 'Artists Mythologies and Media Genius, Madness and Art History', *Screen*, vol. 21, no. 3 (1980), 57–96: 58.
92. *Ibid.*, 67.
93. *Ibid.*, 95.
94. *Ibid.*, 65.
95. Pollock, 'Feminist dilemmas with the art/life problem', 193.
96. Felleman, *Art in the Cinematic Imagination*, 140–141.
97. For a different view on the film POLLOCK that is more critical of the representation of Lee Krasner in the film, see *ibid.*, 151.
98. *Ibid.*, 206.
99. Pollock, *Differencing the Canon*, 98.
100. Susana Scarparo, *Elusive Subjects: Biography as Gendered Metafiction* (Leicester: Troubador, 2005), 39.
101. Burt, *Renaissance Remakes: Post-National Film and Video*. I thank the author for allowing access to his work in progress.
102. See Germaine Greer, 'The Magnificent Exception', in *The Obstacle Race. The Fortunes of Women Painters and Their Work* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1979), 189–207.
103. Burt, *Renaissance Remakes*.
104. *Ibid.*
105. Pollock, 'Feminist dilemmas with the art/life problem', 198.
106. Felleman, *Art in the Cinematic Imagination*, 145–146.
107. Pollock, 'Feminist dilemmas with the art/life problem', 200.
108. All dialogue from the film is transcribed (with minor adjustments) from the subtitles available in the US DVD edition of the film. ARTEMISIA. DVD. Miramax, 2001.
109. Pollock, 'Feminist dilemmas with the art/life problem', 199.
110. Bal, *Reading "Rembrandt"*, 146.
111. For an interpretation of the 'hand' motif and the creative process in the masculine biopic, see Pidduck, *Contemporary Costume Film*, 94–95.
112. Pollock, *Differencing the Canon*, 113.
113. Felleman, *Art in the Cinematic Imagination*, 143.
114. Roland Barthes, 'Deux femmes. Sur le tableau d'Artemisia Gentileschi: *Judith et Holopherne*' (1979), in Éric Marty (ed.), *Œuvres Complètes*. Tome III 1974–1980 (Paris: Seuil, 1995), 1052–1054: 1052 (my translation; emphasis in the original).
115. Cowie, *Representing the Woman: Cinema and Psychoanalysis*, 135.
116. Pollock, 'Feminist dilemmas with the art/life problem', 170.
117. At: <http://www.sonypicturesclassics.com/governess>, accessed 22 April 2005. The production notes on the film's official website state that Goldbacher was inspired

- by her desire 'to explore the two different influences of her own cultural heritage – her father is an Italian Jew and her mother came from the Isle of Skye'.
118. Kucich and Sadoff, 'Introduction', in *Victorian Afterlife*, xv.
 119. On the subject of the gaze as figure, see de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't*, quoted by Felber, 'Capturing the Shadows of Ghosts', 32.
 120. Felber, 'Capturing the Shadows of Ghosts', 34.
 121. Doane, *Femmes Fatales*, 166-167 (emphasis in the original).
 122. Felber, 'Capturing the Shadows of Ghosts', 32.
 123. Vernet, *Figures de l'absence*, 59-74.
 124. Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, 339, 349-350.
 125. See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990), 128-141.
 126. I thank Wilma Boisnard for pointing this out to me.
 127. Alison Butler, *Women's Cinema. The Contested Screen* (London: Wallflower Press, 2002), 13.

Chapter 4 – The Scene of Writing: The Letter

1. Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema. Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 103.
2. See Pidduck, *Contemporary Costume Film*, 54-55.
3. Laura U. Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), xii.
4. Steve Neale, 'Melodrama and Tears', *Screen*, 27 (1986), 6-23: 6.
5. Maureen Turim, *Flashbacks in Film. Memory and History*, quoted by Pidduck, *Contemporary Costume Film*, 57.
6. Žižek, 'In His Bold Gaze My Ruin Is Writ Large', in Slavoj Žižek (ed.), *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Lacan (But Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock)* (London: Verso, 1992), 211-272: 259.
7. See Bonitzer, 'Hitchcockian Suspense', in *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Lacan (But Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock)*, 15-30. Bonitzer points out that the gaze inscribes the fiction. With the introduction of editing and of the close-up, the impression of reality shifts to a second level – the level of connotation. This is at the core of the opposition between the Lumières's cinema (which, according to Bonitzer, 'does not see death') and Hitchcock's perverse and moralising universe (because connoted with second meanings). Taking this argument further, in *LETTER FROM AN UNKNOWN WOMAN* the insert of the letter does not only reveal 'death' on its heading but also anticipates Stefan's death by inscribing guilt in the desiring gaze.
8. This is the main argument in 'Melodrama and Tears'.
9. Franco Moretti, *Signs Taken for Wonders. On the Sociology of Literary Forms* (London: Verso, 1983), 162 (emphasis in the original).
10. Neale, 'Melodrama and Tears', 22.
11. *Ibid.*
12. Modleski, 'Time and Desire in the Woman's Film', in *Home Is Where the Heart Is*, 326-338.

13. Studlar, 'Masochistic Performance and Female Subjectivity in *Letter from an Unknown Woman*', *Cinema Journal*, no. 33, vol. 3 (1994), 35-57: 42.
14. Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom! Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out*, 2nd edition (London: Routledge, 2001), 8.
15. See Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection* (London: Routledge, 1980), 161-198; *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, especially 263-276.
16. Kuntzel, 'The Film-Work, 2', 13.
17. Involving Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida and Barbara Johnson. See Johnson, 'The Frame of Reference: Poe, Lacan, Derrida', *Yale French Studies*, 55-56 (1977), 457-505. For a compilation of the critical debates around the letter (including the original texts) see John P. Muller and William J. Richardson (eds.), *The Purlined Poe: Lacan, Derrida and Psychoanalytic Reading* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988).
18. Johnson, 'The Frame of Reference', 502.
19. Lacan, 'God and the *Jouissance* of The Woman. A Love Letter' (1972-1973), in Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose (eds.), *Feminine Sexuality. Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne*, trans. Jacqueline Rose, (New York: Norton, 1982), 137-161. Lacan's formulation of the subject's libidinal economy is fundamentally phallic, to the point it represents woman (*l'Autre*) under the erasure sign (~~The~~ Woman).
20. *Ibid.*, 141.
21. Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment. Six Essays on Woman and Causality* (London: Verso, 1994), 95. See also Freud, 'On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love' (1912), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. XI, trans. James Strachey, (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), 179-190. Renata Salecl connects this point to the 'ethic of romantic love' in the novels *The Age of Innocence* and Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* (1989). See Salecl, (*Per Versions of Love and Hate* (London: Verso, 1998), 6-33.
22. Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom!*, 22-23 (emphasis in the original).
23. Stewart, *The Look of Reading. Book, Painting, Text* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 82 (emphasis in the original).
24. T. Jefferson Kline has commented on the ubiquitousness of the book as object of attention in the cinema of the New Wave, parallel to the dogmatic repression of the literary adaptation (at least in the early work of New Wave filmmakers) in *Screening the Text*, 4. This is also Annette Insdorf's point; she remarks that Truffaut's characters (from Antoine Doinel to Claude Roc or Adèle H.) and *mise-en-scène* are 'self-consciously concerned with language. Truffaut's protagonists are constantly turning themselves into books, whether literally in *FAHRENHEIT 451*, more subtly in *L'HOMME QUI AIMAIT LES FEMMES* and *LES DEUX ANGLAISES ET LE CONTINENT*, in which the male characters write autobiographical novels, or implicitly in *L'ENFANT SAUVAGE* and *UNE BELLE FILLE COMME MOI*'. Insdorf, 'Maurice Jaubert and François Truffaut: Musical Continuities from *L'ATALANTE* to *L'HISTOIRE D'ADÈLE H.*', *Yale French Studies*, 60 (1980), 204-218: 204.
25. In his idiosyncratic defence of the auteur adaptation (such as Robert Bresson's *LE JOURNAL D'UN CURÉ DE CAMPAGNE/DIARY OF A COUNTRY PRIEST*, 1955), as opposed to the popular transpositions by Jean Aurenche and Pierre Bost, Truffaut drastically asserts that the latter are 'bad theatre, whereas it would have been more worthwhile to read a text out loud. This solution has always seemed better to me, when the

- interest of a book lies in its prose'. 'Interview with François Truffaut' (1962, no author given), in Peter Graham with Ginette Vincendeau (eds.), *The French New Wave. Critical Landmarks* (London: British Film Institute/Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 187-219: 197-198. Truffaut refers to the source novels via extensive use of voiceover in his own adaptations from Henri-Pierre Roché's novels, *JULES ET JIM* (1962) and *TWO ENGLISH GIRLS*.
26. See above as well as Truffaut's 'A Certain Tendency in French Cinema' (1954), in *The French New Wave. Critical Landmarks*, 39-63.
 27. See Gillain, *François Truffaut. Le Secret Perdu* (Paris: Hatier, 1991), 138.
 28. Robert Stam, *François Truffaut and Friends: Modernism, Sexuality, and Film Adaptation* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 180.
 29. Marc Chevré, 'L'amour à l'imparfait', quoted by Gillain, 129.
 30. See Annette Insdorf's analysis of the film in 'Maurice Jaubert and François Truffaut'.
 31. Serge Toubiana, 'L'homme qui aimait deux femmes', *Cahiers du cinéma*, 369 (1985), 5-7: 5.
 32. Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 317.
 33. Steedman, 'A woman writing a letter', in Rebecca Earle (ed.), *Epistolary Selves: letters and letter-writers, 1600-1945* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 111-133: 119.
 34. *Ibid.*, 121.
 35. See Pidduck's section on 'The Writing Desk and the Letter' in *Contemporary Costume Film*, 54-57.
 36. Stewart, *The Look of Reading*, 13 (emphasis in the original).
 37. See Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (London: Jonathan Cape, 1972).
 38. Pushkin, *Eugene Onegin*, trans. Babette Deutsch (London: Penguin, 1964), 30.
 39. Baudelaire, 'The Painter of Modern Life' (1863), in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon Press, 1995), 1-41: 29.
 40. Butler, 'Critically Queer', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1993), 17-32: 25.
 41. Bal, *Reading "Rembrandt"*, 348 (emphasis in the original).
 42. In *ONEGIN*, the painting by Wallis gets a 'straight' reading, as a pastiche that indirectly redirects the reader towards a diffuse Romantic intertext circulating in popular culture. Its use in this film can be contrasted with the reference to the same painting as a source of homoerotic desire in *LOVE AND DEATH ON LONG ISLAND* (Richard Kwietniowski, 1996), a film that comments on the consumption of heritage films as a middlebrow gay genre within a broader argument on the British-American cultural divide.
 43. Pushkin, *Eugene Onegin*, 36.
 44. Richard Dyer, *The Culture of Queers* (London: British Film Institute, 2002), 128.
 45. Pidduck, *Contemporary Costume Film*, 52.
 46. Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa' (1976), trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, in Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle (eds.), *Critical Theory since 1965* (Tallahassee: University Presses of Florida, 1986), 308-320: 309.
 47. Modleski, *Old Wives' Tales. Feminist Re-Visions of Film and Other Fictions* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999), 38.
 48. Elizabeth Freeman, 'Introduction', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, vol. 13, no. 2-3 (2007), 159-176: 163.

49. Duncan, 'Tears, melodrama and "heterosensibility"' in *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, *Screen*, vol. 52, no. 2 (2011), 173-192: 191.
50. Tashiro, *Pretty Pictures*, 96.
51. See Vidal, 'Love, Loneliness and Laundromats: Affect and Artifice in the Melodramas of Isabel Coixet', in Jay Beck and Vicente Rodríguez-Ortega (eds.) *Contemporary Spanish Cinema and Genre* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), 219-238.
52. See Núria Triana-Toribio, *Spanish National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2003), 117.
53. Quoted from the original script by Heredero, *Veinte nuevos directores del cine español* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1999), 115 (my translation).
54. Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse. Fragments*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 4 (emphasis in the original).
55. Pidduck, *Contemporary Costume Film*, 4.
56. Agamben, *Stanzas*, 26.
57. See Stendhal, *Ernestine ou la naissance de l'amour*, in Henri Martineau (ed.), *De l'Amour* (1822), (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1959), 352-378.
58. See Heredero's entry on Isabel Coixet in *Veinte nuevos directores del cine español* (115-119), as well as an interview with the director in Heredero's *Espejo de Miradas. Entrevistas con nuevos directores del cine español de los años noventa* (Alcalá de Henares: 27 Festival de Cine de Alcalá de Henares/Fundación Colegio del Rey, 1997), 292-323.
59. Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*, 158-159.
60. Modleski, *Old Wives' Tales*, 42.
61. Dyer, *The Culture of Queers*, 128.
62. Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*, 14 (emphasis in the original).
63. Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 88.
64. John Orr, *Romantics and Modernists in British Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 5-6 (emphasis in the original).
65. Geraghty, 'Foregrounding the Media: *Atonement* (2007) as an Adaptation', *Adaptation*, vol. 2 no. 2 (2009), 91-109: 104-105.
66. *Ibid.*, 106.
67. See Maria Margaritis, 'The Anxiety of Authenticity: Writing Historical Fiction at the End of the Twentieth Century', *History Workshop Journal*, no. 65 (2008), 138-160: 142.
68. Earl G. Ingersoll, 'Intertextuality in L.P. Hartley's *The Go-Between* and Ian McEwan's *Atonement*', *Forum of Modern Language Studies*, vol. xl, no. 3 (2004), 241-258: 241.
69. See Sue Harper, 'History and Representation: The Case of 1970s British Cinema', in James Chapman, Mark Glancy and Sue Harper (eds.), *The New Film History. Sources, Methods, Approaches* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 27-40: 31-34.
70. Higson, 'A diversity of film practices. Renewing British cinema in the 1970s', in Bart Moore-Gilbert (ed.), *The Arts in the 1970s. Cultural Closure?* (London: Routledge, 1994), 216-239: 236.
71. Elsaesser, *European Cinema*, 414.
72. *Ibid.*, 414-415.
73. Colin Gardner, *Joseph Losey* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 164.
74. Elsaesser, *European Cinema*, 419.
75. See Ali Smith, 'Rereading: *The Go-Between* by L.P.Hartley', *The Guardian*, 17 June 2011. At: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2011/jun/17/lp-hartley-go-between-ali-smith>, accessed 19 June 2011.

76. Gledhill, 'Between Melodrama and Realism: Anthony Asquith's *Underground* and King Vidor's *The Crowd*, in Jane Gaines (ed.), *Classical Hollywood Narrative. The Paradigm Wars* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), 129-167: 165.
77. Geraghty, 'Foregrounding the Media', 99-103.
78. *Ibid.*, 101.

Conclusion – Second Sight: Reviewing the Past, Figuring the Present

1. I later discovered that Scorsese himself has noted that the challenge of figuring this moment on the screen was a compelling reason in itself to take on the adaptation of Wharton's novel. See Gavin Smith, 'Martin Scorsese Interviewed', 200.
2. Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 96.
3. Friedberg, *Window Shopping*, 188.
4. As we have seen, this has been reinvigorated through reading practices such as Garrett Stewart's narratographic analysis.
5. Laura Mulvey, 'Looking at the Past from the Present: Rethinking Feminist Film Theory of the 1970s', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 30, no. 1 (2004), 1286-1292: 1289.

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