SCREENING GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN CONTEMPORARY QUÉBEC FILM ADAPTATION

DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT


More often than not, whether in Québec or elsewhere in the Western world, the study of film and literature has been limited to an examination of the relationship between an individual film and its source text. Stam suggests that film adaptation be looked at as a special kind of intertextual relationship between a “hypotext” (a source text) and a “hypertext” (its film adaptation). The concept of intertextuality situates literature and film as part of a complex matrix of discursive practices that underlies all texts produced by a culture, facilitating the analysis of film adaptation and the representation therein as specific to Québec. Through the course of this study, I situate each of the four films noted above with respect to the sociocultural and economic milieux of production and examine their popular and critical reception. In addition, I provide background on each of the filmmakers as well as on the authors of the pertinent source texts in order to situate the
adaptations within Québec’s literary and cinematic narrative traditions. Furthermore, as Simoneau, Pool and Baillargeon are known for their controversial and innovative representations of gender and sexuality, I examine this aspect of each of these adaptations in-depth.
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INTRODUCTION

A full-length study on the role of adaptation in the evolution of Québec cinema, a topic on which very little has been written to date, is essential to a fuller understanding of the contributions of Québec national cinema. The films discussed in this thesis directed by Paule Baillargeon (Le sexe des étoiles, 1993) and Léa Pool [La demoiselle sauvage (1991) and A corps perdu (1988)] have received little if any critical attention, and that of Yves Simoneau (Les fous de Bassan, 1986) has yet to receive the critical attention it deserves. This research focuses on the relationships of these four adaptations to their respective source texts, situates the films regarding the sociocultural and economic milieux of their production, and analyzes the representation of gender and sexuality in each film. This is an innovative approach to the study of Québec adaptation, as previous works have tended to focus on issues of fidelity to a source text and to concentrate on individual films taken out of cultural context. By focusing on little known or otherwise overlooked films, I contribute to existing scholarly research on Simoneau, Baillargeon and Pool, whose other works have benefited from more extensive scholarly investigation.

In chapter one, “Fidèle ou Infidèle”: Is That the Question? I provide an overview of the critical works that have been published to date on Québec cinema and the...
discussion of adaptation therein, including Pallister’s *The Cinema of Québec* (1995), Marshall’s *Quebec National Cinema* (2001), and Véronneau’s “Attraction fatale et originalité” (1997). Following this, I examine the discourse surrounding film and literature studies, providing an overview of such works as Bluestone’s *Novels into Film* (1957), Mayne’s *Private Novels, Public Films* (1988), and Stam’s “Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation” (2000). Then, in order to situate the development of film adaptation specific to Québec, I investigate the evolution of Québec cinema with particular attention to women’s participation in the film industry. Finally, drawing on Stam’s discussion of adaptation as an intertextual relationship between a “hypotext” (the source text) and a “hypertext” (the film adaptation), and citing the importance of examining the reflection and subversion of cultural ideology in narrative, I state my intention of investigating the intertextual rapport of the films to be examined and their source texts with respect to the representation of gender and sexuality.

In chapter two, “Simoneau’s *Les fous de Bassan*: A Portrait of Violence,” I discuss Yves Simoneau’s adaptation of Anne Hébert’s novel *Les fous de Bassan*, released in 1986. Having directed *Les célébrations* in 1979 based on the novel written by Michel Garneau, this was not Simoneau’s first attempt at adaptation. If ever there were a québécois director who could be said to have “americanized” his work, it is Simoneau. Simoneau is known for his ability to blend his personal style and vision with characteristic elements of Hollywood cinema to create successful films. Two of his other films released at about the same time, *Pouvoir intime* (1986, a contemporary crime story/thriller) and *Dans le ventre du dragon* (1989, having elements of both comedy and
thriller genres) fared quite well at the box office—not to imply that *Les fous de Bassan* did not. However, *Les fous de Bassan* definitely had the most controversial reception of all three. While Hébert’s novel has been the subject of extensive academic investigation, the film has had less scholarly attention. Still, there are several texts that address the importance of *Les fous de Bassan* as an adaptation. In *The Cinema of Québec*, Pallister discusses Simoneau’s adaptation and the critical reception of the film at some length, pointing out that while in the novel Hébert emphasizes Olivia and Nora’s perspectives, in the adaptation Simoneau focuses on Stevens Brown’s point of view. In “Anne Hébert à l’écran. Entre poésie et réalisme: le problème des personnages dans ‘Les fous de Bassan’” (1995), Sanaker examines existing film reviews and proposes that Simoneau has attempted to maintain the dreamlike representations of the characters and events of Hébert’s novel. Drawing upon the theoretical work of Vernet and Gardies, he suggests that through “un travail de dé-référentialisation” which prohibits a spectator’s easy identification with the individual characters and the images on-screen, Simoneau subverts cinematic realism to create an otherworldly ambiguity reminiscent of that of Hébert’s written narrative (63).

In “From Agent of Destruction to Object of Desire: The Cinematic Transformation of Stevens Brown in *les Fous de Bassan*” (1989/90), Slott traces the complex production history of the film (changes of director, difficulties in selecting a scenario) and reviews its critical reception. Taking a closer look at the adaptation itself, Slott focuses on the role of Stevens in both narratives with respect to those of Nora and Olivia, and asserts that in the film version Stevens is depicted as a more sympathetic
character. Slott states that Simoneau “changed Stevens from the destructive force that rips apart Griffin Creek to the pathetic victim of love denied,” and that he neglects “to confront the general oppression of women” which characterizes the novel (“Agent” 27). According to Slott, Simoneau’s adaptation is unfaithful to its source text. Apart from these two articles and Pallister’s comments in The Cinema of Québec, there are but several interviews with the director and a number of brief reviews published immediately following the film’s release. In the majority of these reviews, Simoneau is harshly criticized for not being true to the novel. My research focuses on Simoneau’s critique of gender socialization in the dominant culture as instrumental in the perpetuation of violence against women, and on his portrayal of the experience of gender oppression from a male point of view. I propose a reading of the film based on its own merits, its representation understood to be an extension of the content, style and form of the novel. To enable readers to grasp more fully the intertextual rapport between the adaptation and its source novel, I investigate the basic structure of each narrative (plot, characterization, form) and propose a rationale for Simoneau’s artistic choices in the film. In addition, I examine how Hébert’s use of myth and irony play into Simoneau’s adaptation, and discuss the representation of desire as expressed/repressed by the primary characters in the film.

In chapter three, “Pool unravels Pierre’s ménage à trois with a cinécriture éclatée,” I examine two films directed by Léa Pool, La demoiselle sauvage (1991) and A corps perdu (1988). Pool is an established director best known for her trilogy Strass Café (1980), La Femme de l’hôtel (1984), and Anne Trister (1986). Other than Nadeau’s
brief comments on *La demoiselle sauvage* in her article “La Représentation de la femme comme autre: l’ambiguïté du cinéma de Léa Pool pour une position féministe,” neither the film nor the short story from which it was adapted has received much critical attention. Pallister, devoting a one-page synopsis to the film in her section on the work of Léa Pool, notes that *La demoiselle sauvage* is “loosely inspired from the novella of S. Corinna Bille,” which is not in the least an understatement (*Cinema* 478). At first glance, there seems to be little if anything with respect to the film’s scenario that would identify it as an adaptation. What elements if any are common to both the short story and the film, other than the title? How might the transformation affect a reading of the adaptation? This is what I investigate at the beginning of chapter three, in which I discuss the possibility of Pool’s relaying conceptual, thematic and stylistic elements rather than fidelity to plot, characterization and/or form in the adaptation.

The majority of chapter three is devoted to *A corps perdu* (1988). As is the case with *La demoiselle sauvage*, Léa Pool has a hand in the development of the scenario for *A corps perdu* as well, this time working with Jean Beaulieu on the screenplay. Not surprisingly, there is little work to be found and much to be done on this film. While there are a number of brief critical reviews and a variety of passing comments on *A corps perdu* in articles devoted to Pool’s other works, there is no full-length article on either the novel or its adaptation. However, there are two articles dealing with the practice of using still images, specifically photographs, in contemporary Québec cinema that are particularly helpful when discussing *A corps perdu*: Larouche’s “La Représentation de Montréal dans les images immobilisées du cinéma québécois” (1992) and Pérusse’s “Le
statut de la photographie dans la pratique de cinéastes québécois” (1992). Neither of these articles focuses specifically on *A corps perdu*, and neither addresses the film’s importance as an adaptation. Still, they are helpful to the discussion of image and perception in the film.

In *A corps perdu*, the themes of image, perception and vision are particularly important. The main character of the film, Pierre Kurwenal, is a photojournalist; the photographs that he takes while on location in Nicaragua and after his return to Montréal are featured as still images in the film. When Kurwenal returns to his apartment in Montréal, he discovers that his two long-term lovers David and Sarah have left him. In the second half of the film, Kurwenal has a male lover named Quentin who is a deaf-mute and a window-washer by trade; they communicate with their eyes, by gestures, or by writing down what they want to say to each other. Love triangles, bisexuality, homosexuality, heterosexuality… In *A corps perdu*, Pool represents diverse expressions of human sexuality in an honest and non-judgmental light. In “Pool unravels Pierre’s *ménage à trois* with a *cinécriture éclatée*,” I examine the intertextuality of the pertinent source texts and their adaptations (*La demoiselle sauvage* and *A corps perdu*), and discuss the representation of gender and sexuality in each film. In addition, with respect to *A corps perdu*, I examine Pool’s use of a *cinécriture éclatée* (the innovative use of editing technique, sound, and film form) to create a viewing experience that challenges the style and feel of conventional Hollywood cinema.

In chapter four, “Screening Gender and Sexuality in Baillargeon’s *Le sexe des étoiles*.” I discuss Paule Baillargeon’s adaptation of Monique Proulx’s novel *Le sexe des
étoiles. Baillargeon’s most notorious film to date is probably *La cuisine rouge*, a film co-directed with Frédérique Collin in 1980. *La cuisine rouge* provides a critical commentary on traditional gender roles and the need to rethink the basis of men and women’s relationships with one another. In *Le sexe des étoiles*, Baillargeon depicts the inadequacy of traditional understandings of gender in today’s world, going one step further to tackle society’s misconceptions of, and discrimination against, transsexuals. Whereas Simoneau’s *Les fous de Bassan* had a highly controversial reception and critical review, this is not the case with *Le sexe des étoiles*. The issue of fidelity to a source text is not so much a concern with this film; Proulx herself wrote the scenario. Very little has been written about *Le sexe des étoiles*, the novel or the film. As for the film, aside from a few brief critical reviews and extensive interviews with the director, there have been only two scholarly articles published, both of which address the film as an adaptation and were presented at the *Littérature et cinéma du Québec* conference held in Bologna in 1995. In “‘Le sexe des étoiles’ de Monique Proulx: le roman et le film,” Falzoni reviews the principal elements of both the novel and the film to compare their respective resolutions of the Oedipal complex that she suggests characterizes the relationship between Camille and her father Marie-Pierre (85). In “Détournement d’images ou l’éloge de la vie réelle,” Monique Proulx discusses her personal experience as a writer undertaking the task of adapting her own work for the screen. In addition to these two articles that focus solely on the adaptation, Michele Anderson has written “Female Subjects in the Films of Paule Baillargeon” in which she suggests that Baillargeon represents a “female gaze” and characterizes the transsexual in *Le sexe des étoiles* as a multidimensional subject.
In “Screening Gender and Sexuality in Baillargeon’s Le sexe des étoiles,” I examine how the source text has been modified for the adaptation, discuss Baillargeon’s representation of female subjectivity, and examine the overall depiction of gender and sexuality in the film. Along these lines, I discuss the basic structure of each narrative (plot, setting, structure, characterization) and propose a rationale for the artistic choices made in the film. Following this, I examine how the representation of gender and sexuality in the film is instrumental in challenging the conflation of the categories of sex, gender and social identity (male–masculine-man, female-feminine-woman) in the dominant culture. Naturally, this analysis involves a close examination of several scenes in the film that challenge traditional representations of sex, gender, social identity and sexuality.

The diversity of the films to be examined demonstrate that in spite of Jean’s concerns about a developing tendency toward the establishment of a “qualité québécoise” (with allusion to Truffaut’s famous article), there seems little danger that these filmmakers will turn to simplistic transformations of literary classics (cinéma 94). Simoneau, Baillargeon and Pool have created innovative films depicting original interpretations of contemporary Québec, Swiss and French narratives. I propose taking another look at the work of these three directors, whose films have been both overlooked and under-estimated, to further substantiate the assertion that Québec cinema is alive, well, and worthy of greater scholarly investigation.
Québec’s contributions to contemporary film production have more often than not been overlooked. In the past, individual québécois films have been acknowledged as isolated achievements rather than as products of a thriving, well-developed film industry with a history of its own. The production context of a film is not discussed, and the talented artists who participate in the film’s creation go unnoticed. Many of Québec’s filmmakers have directed adaptations inspired by well-known works of québécois literature: Anne Hébert’s Kamouraska (C. Jutra, 1973); Gabrielle Roy’s Bonheur d’occasion (C. Fournier, 1983); André Langevin’s La poussière sur la ville (A. Lamothe, 1968) and Yves Beauchemin’s Le matou (J. Beaudin, 1985), to name only a few. Three of Québec’s contemporary filmmakers, Yves Simoneau, Paule Baillargeon and Léa Pool, have directed adaptations. Simoneau directed La célébration in 1979 and Les fous de Bassan in 1986, Baillargeon Le sexe des étoiles in 1993. Léa Pool has made three adaptations to date: La demoiselle sauvage (1991), A corps perdu (1988) and Lost and Delirious (2001). My thesis focuses on how each of these directors has developed his/her film adaptation(s) in a manner consistent with the personal vision characteristic of his/her
respective work. Furthermore, as Simoneau, Baillargeon and Pool are recognized for their innovative representations of gender and sexuality, I discuss this aspect of each of these adaptations at length.

Scholarly research specific to Québec cinema can be difficult to find, whether in English or in French. Furthermore, publications focusing specifically on Québec film adaptation are even more difficult to locate, in spite of the fact that film studies and postcolonial studies are two of the most prominent fields of interest and research for contemporary scholars. Pallister’s *The Cinema of Québec* (1995) is an exception to the rule. Pallister devotes one full chapter to a discussion of Québec film adaptation, providing a series of critiques of individual adaptations and their source texts and including limited discussion of their respective critical receptions. In his recently published *Quebec National Cinema* (2001), Marshall does not entertain any lengthy discussion of adaptation, and the fact that a film has been adapted from a novel or other written narrative is mentioned only in passing. Likewise, Weinmann, Lever and Jean, all of whom are québécois and have published important full-length texts on Québec cinema in French, do not devote any serious time or attention to the study of film adaptation. In “Attraction fatale et originalité,” Véronneau points out that with respect to the availability of scholarly materials,

> Il n’y a pas eu souvent au Québec, contrairement à l’Europe, de longues polémiques sur l’adaptation et la pureté cinématographique, si je prends le contrepied de Bazin qui parle de ‘cinéma impur’. On a surtout fonctionné au cas par cas. (33)

Critical studies of Québec film adaptation have primarily been undertaken on individual films in relation to their source texts; there is no single full-length work, in English or in
French, which specifically addresses the importance of film adaptation within the context of the Québec film industry.

The majority of scholarly work on the relationship between film and literature has tended to focus on adaptation and on the strict fidelity—or lack thereof—of an adaptation to its source text. Whether a filmmaker has or has not transposed all of the elements of a source text (e.g. characters, plot, setting, structure, etc.) has often been taken as evidence of the success of his/her work, the film judged accordingly as good or bad. The written narrative is considered to be a superior form of artistic expression, providing standards of content, style and form to which its film adaptation must conform if it is to be viewed as successful. Bluestone’s *Novels Into Film* (1957) helped to refocus adaptation studies on the value of individual films as autonomous works rather than on questions of fidelity. According to Bluestone, literature and film are autonomous forms of artistic expression, one communicating with written words, the other with visual images. Along these lines, Bluestone suggests that

What happens, therefore, when the filmist undertakes the adaptation of a novel, given the inevitable mutation, is that he does not convert the novel at all. What he adapts is a kind of paraphrase of the novel—the novel viewed as raw material. He looks not to the organic novel, whose language is inseparable from its theme, but to characters and incidents which have somehow detached themselves from language and, like the heroes of folk legends, have achieved a mythic status of their own. (62)

This approach, while challenging the hierarchy of valuation (“novel—good, film—bad”) associated with discussions of strict fidelity, inevitably has its limitations. Bluestone’s selective focus on the formal differences of the two signifying systems situates novels and films as disparate, closed texts. Mayne asserts that
Bluestone’s approach is informed at all levels by an insistence on autonomy, and thus all relations between film and the novel are collapsed into the single question, can the film “stand on its own”?… What begins as a way of defining cinema as an art form in its own right leads to the pursuit of aesthetic autonomy and individual authorship. Films and novels are connected in a way that has nothing to do with history. (101)

The question of authorship takes precedence in Bluestone’s discussion of film adaptation. As Mayne points out, this obscures the existence of the sociocultural context associated with the production of any narrative form, including film and literature.

Approaches to the study of adaptation run the gamut from strict fidelity to particularities of form (film versus literary language), from questions of artistic autonomy to the importance of narrative as complicit in and/or resistant to the sociohistorical context of its production. Andrew suggests that contemporary approaches to the study of film adaptation can be placed in one of three basic categorizes, each of which compares the level of an adaptation’s fidelity to its source text: “borrowing,” “intersection,” and “fidelity of transformation” (98). “Borrowing” is the category in which the majority of film adaptations would belong; “here the artist employs, more or less extensively, the material, idea, or form of an earlier, generally successful text” (98). “Intersection” is the opposite of “borrowing,” in that it implies a stricter adherence to the content, style and form of the written narrative: “the uniqueness of the original text is preserved to such an extent that it is intentionally left unassimilated in adaptation… intersecting insists that the analyst attend to the specificity of the original within the specificity of the cinema” (99-100). Andrew discusses Bresson’s depiction of the writing in the diary in his film Diary of a Country Priest as an example of “intersection.” The third category, “fidelity of transformation,” concerns whether a filmmaker has included the transferable aspects (e.g.
number of characters, setting and plot elements) of the written narrative in the adaptation, and whether s/he has successfully found a filmic equivalent, for example, of the hypothetical “essence” of the novel (style, tone, imagery).

McFarlane states that “fidelity criticism depends on a notion of the text as having and rendering up to the (intelligent) reader a single, correct ‘meaning’ which the filmmaker has either adhered to or in some sense violated or tampered with…any given film version is able only to aim at reproducing the filmmaker’s reading of the original” (8-9). Thus what is in fact merely one of an infinite number of possible interpretations of a source text will influence a spectator’s appraisal of its adaptation. Along these lines, Andrew suggests the need to go beyond questions of fidelity and proposes the development of a “sociology” of adaptation:

It is time for adaptation studies to take a sociological turn…Although adaptation may be calculated as a relatively constant volume in the history of cinema, its particular function in any moment is far from constant. The choices of the mode of adaptation and of prototypes suggest a great deal about the cinema’s sense of its role and aspirations from decade to decade. Moreover, the stylistic strategies developed to achieve the proportional equivalencies necessary to construct matching stories not only are symptomatic of a period’s style but may crucially alter that style. (104)

Neither novel nor film exists in a vacuum, apart from the sociohistorical context of its production. It is important to consider the ways in which the ideology of a dominant culture is implicated in the narrative process.

Rather than selectively focus on one novel and one film, in Private Novels, Public Films (1988), Mayne examines the relationship between the middle-class novel and classical Hollywood cinema and the implications of their ideological function as narrative with respect to the dominant culture. Mayne asserts that for the purpose of her research
“the complexities with which I am concerned are not simply those of an individual text, but rather the complexities engendered by a juncture of texts, viewers and history” (105). Inspired by Ropars’s observation that there is a “narrative common denominator between novel and film, an affiliation that surpasses the relationship between a single novel and a single film,” Mayne studies the social implications of narrative by focusing on the thematic preoccupation with, and the spectator’s/reader’s relationship to, the public and private in film and literature (6). Historically, middle-class women have been relegated to the private sphere (i.e. family, friends, the homestead), while men have been associated with the public sphere (i.e. the world of work, business). Mayne contends that the concepts of private and public

are key terms for the consideration of a series of oppositions—male and female, fiction and everyday life, aristocracy and middle-class, middle-class and working class. Narrative is the fundamental process whereby the very foundations of these oppositions are examined, reflected upon, and given imaginative form. (32)

By examining the relationship of the reader (e.g. middle-class woman) to the novel, and of the spectator (e.g. working-class, and in this case immigrant male) to the screen, Mayne concludes that “the search for connections between the two realms [public and private], whether in the solitude of reading… or in the public space of a movie theatre, is a fantasy of integration” (162). Along these lines, narrative provides a way for those marginalized by the dominant culture to mediate the ideological constraints associated with the public and private spheres, and by extension to transcend such binary oppositions as male and female, masculine and feminine—on the level of the imaginary.

Mayne’s interest in looking at “the complexities engendered by a juncture of texts, viewers and history,” at the social implications of narrative rather than at individual
novels and films as unrelated, closed texts, provides a segue for the discussion of film adaptation relative to the notion of intertextuality (105). Intertextuality, as defined in the Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism, may be understood as “a text’s dependence on prior words, concepts, connotations, codes, conventions, unconscious practices and texts. Every text is an intertext that borrows, knowingly or not, from the immense archive of previous cultures” (21). Within the context of intertextuality, adaptation is a process whereby a written narrative, used as a creative resource, is transformed to serve a film’s ideology. Inspired by Genette, Stam suggests applying the concept of hypertextuality, Genette’s fifth type of transtextuality (a more inclusive term than intertextuality for the relationships between texts), to the study of film adaptation. Hypertextuality refers to the “relation between one text, which Genette calls ‘hypertext,’ to an anterior or ‘hypotext,’ which the former transforms, modifies, elaborates, or extends” (“Beyond” 66). Stam suggests looking at adaptation as the intertextual relationship between a “‘hypotext’” (the written narrative, or source text) and a “‘hypertext’” (its film adaptation). Along these lines, we may ask: in what ways does a film adaptation reflect a transformation, modification, elaboration and/or extension of its source text? Stam’s work will serve as the foundation for my discussion of the complex interrelations between film and literature in the following chapters. Moreover, as the concept of intertextuality situates literature and film as part of a complex matrix of discursive practices that underlies all texts produced by a culture, this facilitates the study of film adaptation and the representation therein as specific to Québec culture. Consequently, we may ask: what are the social implications of the representation of gender and sexuality in Québec film adaptation,
specifically in those films directed by Simoneau, Pool and Baillargeon, relative to the dominant ideology?

To grasp the importance of film adaptation to Québec cinema, it is useful to have a general understanding of the development of the francophone film industry in Québec and its history relative to Canadian film production as a whole. For over 200 years, relations between the French- and English-speaking segments of Canadian society have been difficult. The cultural and political tensions that exist between the two communities are long-standing, and the effects of these tensions have influenced the evolution of francophone film production. In the 1960s, Québec experienced a surge of neo-nationalism known as the Révolution Tranquille (Quiet Revolution), a popular movement calling for social, economic, and political reform. Setting themselves apart from the anglophone majority, French Canadians in Québec became Québécois in an affirmation of their distinct cultural identity. Until that time, the economic oppression experienced by French Canadians as a result of their minority status, and the conservatism of the powerful Catholic Church and provincial government, had managed effectively to maintain the traditionalist status quo. The representation of the French Canadians prior to the Révolution Tranquille reinforced this state of affairs, depicting a continuing commitment to a rural way of life and the centrality of family, community and the Catholic Church. With the Révolution Tranquille, the Québécois reevaluated the traditional values espoused by their culture, and developed a new concept of national identity. Cinema was to play a crucial role in the Québécois’ self-determination. Outdated images of French Canadians were replaced by those of québécois directors who made
films depicting the realities of their rapidly changing society. “The period from 1960 through the 1980s saw the evolution and expansion of the Quebec cinema from a provincial expression of ethnic frustration into an articulate, cinematically cogent industry producing films of world-class stature” (Reines “Emergence” 24).

While the Office National du Film (ONF) / National Film Board (NFB) was established in 1939 to support the Canadian film industry, French-language production at the ONF did not take place until over fifteen years later. In 1955, the ONF expanded its operations into television and produced two French-language series: *Passe-Partout* (1955-1957) and *Panoramic* (1957-1958) (Reines “Future” 74). With the success of these two television series, the ONF assumed its role in furthering the development of francophone film production in Canada. Thanks to the financial support of such government-funded filmmaking opportunities as those provided by the ONF, young (male) directors in Québec began to make their first films in the late 1950s. Yet throughout the 50’s and early 60s, women’s options at the ONF were for the most part limited to “behind the scenes” support positions rather than to those behind the camera. During this period, the realities of women’s roles in the public sphere were but an extension of their traditional roles in the home. In the 60s, with the onset of the *Révolution Tranquille*, formerly privatized institutions were taken out of the hands of the Church, and the government was held responsible to the people. The Québécois questioned the dictates of the Church with respect to social customs, religious obligations, and life in the home. During this period of political and social unrest, the camera became a tool in the hands of those traditionally marginalized by the dominant
culture. From early on, women filmmakers took advantage of documentary form to reveal
the intricacies of their own and others’ experiences of the condition féminine. Thanks to
Québec’s increasing ouverture to other cultures and customs, the impact of the women’s
movement hit home.

According to Jean, women’s cinema in Québec did not exist per se before the
early 70s:

au Québec, le cinéma des femmes a sa propre histoire. Il apparaît véritablement
au début des années 70 et s’affirme dès lors comme une entité, avec ses thèmes
(liés à la condition féminine) ses genres (le documentaire, la fiction sociale) et son
esthétique (l’utilisation de la voix off, l’intériorisation, etc.)… On trouve bien peu
de traces de films réalisés par les femmes avant la fin des années 60. (cinéma 78)

On March 29, 1971, two women instrumental in the founding of women’s cinema in
Québec, Anne-Claire Poirier [Mourir à tue-tête (1979), Tu as crié “let me go”(1997)] and
Jeanne Morazin, wrote and delivered the statement “En tant que femmes nous-mêmes” to
ONF executives (79). In this document they expressed the desire of women to coordinate
and direct a program of women’s films. The program objectives were defined as follows:

“permettre aux femmes de briser leur isolement et d’acquérir un sens de la
solidarité, d’apprendre à assumer une identité propre et à se redéfinir; de
developper une conscience sociale et d’entrevoir des solutions concrètes visent le
mieux-être des individus et de la collectivité.” (“En tant que femmes” cited in
Suchet “l’oeil” 83)

The keystone in the establishment of federal support of women’s film production in
Canada, this text led to the funding of the program and resulted in the development of a
series of six films–all documentaries–devoted to topics specific to the condition
féminine. These six films

examined the daily lives of married women, child care arrangements, nervous
breakdowns, housework and marriage. The series was televised in Québec and
helped a number of isolated women realize that many others shared the same problems, that they were not alone. (Quebec Women 366)

“En tant que femmes” served to raise women’s consciousness of their collective experience of oppression, to provide a forum to question the basis of individual identity on traditional roles, and to encourage women to take action on their own behalf both as individuals and as a collective. Shortly after the production of “En tant que femmes” in 1971, Mireille Dansereau set a double precedent with La vie rêvée (1972), the first full-length fiction film to be directed by a woman, and the first film directed by a woman to be produced in the private industry.

In 1974, the ONF established “Studio D,” a program intended to encourage, support and fund the work of Canadian women wanting to make English-language films. It wasn’t until 1986—twelve years later—that Regards de femmes, the French-language equivalent of “Studio D,” was created by the ONF to support the efforts of Québécoises in the film industry. While programs such as “Studio D” and Regards de femmes have contributed to the training and experience necessary for Québécoises to have successful careers in the film industry, in spite of these efforts, québécoises technicians and directors continue to represent a minority of those working in contemporary film production. “Sur les 800 longs métrages réalisés au Québec de 1960 à [1992] on compte à peine 50 films de femmes, dont une quarantaine pour les seules années récentes (1980-1992), documentaires et fictions comprises” (Carrière cited in Monet-Chartrand 249). Today, “Studio D” and Regards de femmes no longer exist; they were discontinued by the ONF in 1996 due to the restructuring necessitated by significant federal budget cuts. Government officials justified their decision by saying that women filmmakers should
be integrated with and funded equally to their male contemporaries under the general ONF program.

In “L’œil au féminin,” Suchet suggests that women directors began distinguishing themselves as film artists in the 1980s:

les films actuellement réalisés par des femmes s’attachent à décrire une réalité plus variée, multiforme et polyvalente, tout en essayant de développer un point de vue féministe sur l’ensemble des questions et non plus seulement sur des problèmes de femmes. (86)

Today, thirty years after “En tant que femmes,” women filmmakers in Québec are every bit as much auteurs as their male contemporaries. In fact, many women directors, including Léa Pool and Paule Baillargeon, would prefer that society had evolved to the extent that there would be no need to categorize their work as cinéma de femmes. (It has never been necessary to refer to the work of male directors as cinéma d’hommes.) Pool and Baillargeon, whose work will be discussed in chapters three and four, demonstrate how women filmmakers today use a personal style and vision to bring a more global, yet undeniably feminist, vision of human experience to the screen. Yet the fact remains that success for women in the film industry such as that experienced by Baillargeon and Pool is more the exception than the rule. Women are as ever in the minority of those directing films, whether with the ONF or with private production companies. Moreover, the documentary, a genre frequently chosen by women in the past and today for aesthetic and economic reasons, is in crisis in Québec, relegated to the “small screen” due to lack of public interest and consequently, lack of funding.

Further restricting the opportunities of little known or beginning filmmakers in Québec is the fact that small, alternative “art” theatres are an endangered species.
As a result, the distribution and exhibition opportunities for small-budget films are extremely limited. Québécois directors just starting out in the industry struggle now more than ever to make their first films, as their talents are as yet unproven and the industry does not want to risk funding the work of unknowns. These days, “moins de cinéastes arrivent à tourner un premier film...et, généralement, ceux-ci sont plus âgés” (Jean cinéma 96). Currently, in order to direct and produce films in Québec, filmmakers and their supporting staff must adhere to strict standards set by the producers who finance their projects. Proposals must pass through a series of approvals relative to their projected profitability (e.g. the public’s past reception of similar scenarios, the cost-effectiveness of the proposed budget, the prior experience of the director and cast) before being approved for production whether through government funding or in the private industry.

Historically a cinéma d’auteur, the Québec film industry is dominated by films forced to meet pre-established production criteria that minimize their directors’ freedom to experiment with genres, formats, lengths and techniques. In Québec, “le cinéma d’auteur...se trouve de plus en plus marginalisé” (Véronneau “Les années 80” 5).

Moreover, in spite of the efforts of the ONF’s French Production Unit (located in Montréal) and other government-funding resources both at the provincial and federal levels, the francophone film industry in Québec is as ever menaced by English-language productions, above all by Hollywood films. The predominance (80%) of films shown in Canada today are U.S. productions, accounting for “92-93% of the total English language film revenues and 80% of the French box office in Canada” (Reines “Future” 79). The fact that French box-office receipts for English-language films in Québec have not
exceeded this percentage is largely due to the Québec Cinema Act of 1983 (which went into effect in late 1988 in an attempt to protect the indigenous film industry). In order to compete with U.S. productions, films for which the budget typically exceeds ten million U.S. dollars, production companies elsewhere are forced to invest more money than ever before in their films. Consequently, producers demand more and more that the films they back conform to qualities inherent in Hollywood films so that they might at the very least recoup their costs. With respect to current economic conditions and an eye to the future of film production in Québec, Jean observes that

le nombre de films produits par l’industrie diminue, conséquence directe d’une inflation démesurée… Incapables d’ajuster les budgets des organismes de financement à l’inflation des coûts de production, les gouvernements se [contentent] alors de limiter les dégats en maintenant leur aide financière au niveau actuel… l’industrie cinématographique [est] condamnée… à l’asphyxie. (cinéma 108-09)

While private industry, government funding and international co-production can temporarily prevent the demise of smaller national and independent film production, “il est évident que l’avenir du cinéma québécois… n’est pas rose. . . . Le cinéma dans son ensemble est menacé” (109).

In an attempt to increase the probability that a film will be successful, i.e. recover and exceed the initial investment, the industry has turned more and more to the backing of adaptations based on popular contemporary novels and literary classics. In Québec, whereas in the past the number of adaptations produced annually was relatively low, their presence in overall film production has steadily increased. In Histoire générale du cinéma au Québec, Lever notes that until 1980, “les scénarios sont très majoritairement… des œuvres originales, écrites directement pour le grand écran” (352). However, since 1980,
the number of film adaptations produced in Québec has steadily increased. “Dans les années 80 surtout…les grands titres de la littérature québécoise fournissent les sujets des productions les plus importantes” and “des romans étrangers servent aussi de matière première” (352-53). With respect to the presence of adaptations in the contemporary film industry as a whole, Corrigan notes that “30 percent of the movies today derive from novels and that 80 percent of the books classified as best sellers have been adapted to the screen” (2). Financing the adaptation of literary works would seem to minimize risk, as their narratives have proven their popularity in written form and thus are seen to have strong potential for success. However, such reasoning does not always hold true, as is the case evidenced by the general reception of Claude Jutra’s adaptation of Anne Hébert’s Kamouraska in 1973 and Jean Beaudin’s adaptation of Pauline Cadieux’s Cordélia in 1979.

Kamouraska was expected to be a major success in both French and Québec markets due to Jutra’s past success, Hébert’s renown, and its atypically generous budget (it was a French-Québec co-production.) However, despite the relative lack of economic limitations and the popularity of its collaborators, Kamouraska failed to live up to the producers’ expectations.

Le cinéaste de fiction le plus prestigieux de l’heure, Claude Jutra…l’adaptation de l’oeuvre d’une des plus grandes romancières québécoises actuelles, Anne Hébert, dont la renommé sur le marché français laisse par ailleurs espérer un succès dans ce pays. Un film d’époque, une co-production franco-canadienne, un budget de près d’un million, du jamais vu, la crème du cinéma québécois (de la star Geneviève Bujold au grand directeur photo Michel Brault), un célèbre best-seller dont les ventes ont franchi le cap des 1 000 000 exemplaires, voici les ingrédients d’un film programmé pour réussir. Plus hautes les espérances, plus amère sera la défaite. (Véronneau “Attraction” 18-19)
A classic of literature, written by one of Québec’s most recognized authors…adapted by one of Québec’s most celebrated directors…what went wrong? Was it a matter of the film’s infidelity to the adapted text? Lack of funding? Inadequate acting on the part of the cast? A poorly written scenario? The essence of the novel’s message not relayed on-screen?

*Kamouraska*, released in 1973 with a running time of 123 minutes, seemed, as noted by Véronneau, “programmé pour réussir” and was expected to do so. Anne Hébert herself collaborated with Jutra on the scenario and personally approved the copy used in production. As it turns out, the problem was not that the film was not true to the novel. On the contrary, the difficulty appears to be that the film version was perhaps too faithful to the original work. Critics complained that the film lacked originality and followed the events in the novel too closely. The crux of the critical assessment concerns more the relationship between media-specific style and form. For example, a novel may be put aside to allow the reader to reflect and distance him/herself from the intrigue; however, a film is most often screened in one sitting. Western film viewers have been trained to expect a style in which editing is used to advance the story line at a good pace and thus maintain their interest; in *Kamouraska* it did not. In fact, the unedited version of the film had a running time of 210 minutes. The producers demanded that the film be edited so that its duration would be more consistent with average running times.

Some of Jutra’s contemporaries felt that “Jutra a erré en tentant de trouver un équivalent cinématographique à l’écriture d’Anne Hébert” (Véronneau “Attraction” 20), and the majority of the film critics concurred. As a case in point, Lévesque suggests that
“Jutra a filmé de la même manière qu’Anne Hébert, avec la même finesse et la même subtilité, mais aussi avec le même recul et la même préciosité. A cet égard, le Kamouraska de Jutra est décevant. On l’aurait préféré moins fidèle et plus captivant.” (in Véronneau 20)

Presented that year at the Cannes Film Festival, Kamouraska received little response from the critics. Furthermore, despite the fact that it was a French-Québec co-production, Kamouraska was not even released in France. This “perfect choice for an adaptation” was clearly much less of a success than hoped for at the box office. With Anne Hébert herself collaborating on the scenario, the adaptation of the novel could hardly be said to be anything less than faithful to the novel’s intended message. In reality, the problem resulted from too many details being included in the scenario, details that were unnecessary and even burdensome to film narration. In his review, Perreault points out that “le film souffre un peu d’être trop fidèle à l’original” and that consequently “l’intérêt dramatique est très faible par moment” (in Véronneau 19). Summing up an interview with Claude Jutra concerning the film, Pallister explains that though on the whole Jutra found Anne Hébert to be a compatible collaborator, he does confess that her demands that certain details regarding the trial, length of prison terms, and other kinds of information should be included “took too much time when relayed in cinematic language,” and, besides, were not only unnecessary, but also “added nothing to the dramatic structure of the film.” (Cinema 184)

As is evident from this analysis of Kamouraska, strict fidelity to a source text is not the standard that determines the success of an adaptation.

Little more than six years later, in 1979, Jean Beaudin directed the adaptation of the thematically similar but relatively unknown novel Cordélia, ou La lampe dans la fenêtre, written by Pauline Cadieux in 1976. Whereas the novel Kamouraska concerns the acquittal of a woman who had plotted with her male lover to murder her husband, in
Cordélia the protagonist and her reputed lover, accused of having murdered her husband but their guilt highly questionable, are convicted and hanged on the basis of circumstantial evidence. Beaudin collaborated with Marcel Sabourin on the screenplay for Cordélia; they had worked together before on the successful J. A. Martin Photographe (1977). Overall, the critical reception of Cordélia was quite good. The principal criticism does not concern whether the adaptation was or was not faithful to the novel, but rather cites the differing style and tone of the first and second halves of the film as problematic. In fact, Bonneville states in his review that he had not even read the book (whose sales escalated upon the film’s release).

Je n’ai pas lu le livre de Pauline Cadieux, La lampe dans la fenêtre, mais je suis allé voir le film deux fois. Dans les deux cas, je suis sorti du cinéma songeur, indécis, perplexe. . . C’est sans doute la seconde partie qui laisse le spectateur insatisfait. Pourquoi? Peut-être à cause de la simplification des événements…tout ici se bouscule. ("Cordélia” 154, 155)

Other critics cite the same aspects of the film as problematic in their reviews. For instance, Dressel states that the spectator is distanced by “the latter part of the film, whose claustrophobic, surrealist tone clashes with the smooth, natural style of the first part” (27). The only specific reference to a possible shortcoming due to the film’s being an adaptation is made by Mark Leslie, who states that there are plot details introduced in the film that are not dealt with adequately:

the determination of the legal system to find them guilty for, what is presumably, someone else’s crime, is carefully documented in the film. But the motivation for this persecution is only half-explained in a rapid series of mysterious meetings… This issue is inadequately dealt with, perhaps because of a too-strict interpretation of the book on which it is based, La lampe dans la fênetre. (38)
Once again, the comments refer to questions of style, the “rapid series of meetings” failing to satisfy the spectator’s expectations. Interestingly, Leslie does not even introduce the fact that the film is an adaptation until one-third of the way through his article. Perhaps this is a comment on the relative unimportance of such information to his criticism. Contrary to the failure of Kamouraska to live up to expectations of inevitable success due to the renown of the work of Jutra and Hébert and to the celebrity of Geneviève Bujold (whom many assume to be French, not Québécoise), Cordélia, based on a relatively unknown novel, was in fact quite successful at the box office. In light of the critical reception of these two films, it would appear that Véronneau’s comments concerning adaptation are correct:

A film must be able to stand on its own regardless of the quality and popularity of the written narrative from which it has been adapted. Indeed, at times the fact that a film is an adaptation and is recognized as such may prove to be a disadvantage. Fidelity is not the standard that determines the success of an adaptation.

Stam reminds us that fidelity criticism is not a meaningful criterion for the study of film adaptation. In “Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation,” Stam’s suggestions relative to the study of film adaptation will be the most helpful for my research. Stam describes the process of film adaptation as
a matter of a source novel hypotext’s being transformed by a complex series of operations: selection, amplification, concretization, actualization, critique, extrapolation, analogization, popularization, and reculturalization…The film adaptation of a novel performs these transformations according to the protocols of a distinct medium, absorbing and altering the genres and intertexts available through the grids of ambient discourses and ideologies, and as mediated by a series of filters: studio style, ideological fashion, political restraints, auteurist predilections, charismatic stars, economic advantage or disadvantage, and evolving technology. (68-69)

In the chapters to follow, I discuss film adaptations by Simoneau, Pool and Baillargeon in the context of the transformation of a source novel (hypotext) to a visual narrative (hypertext), paying particular attention to the similarities and differences in the content, style and form of each narrative. In addition, I investigate the conditions surrounding each film’s production (including pre-production trials and the critical reception following its release) in order to situate the adaptations relative to potential economic and ideological constraints. Following this, I offer background information about each director and his/her body of work, providing a critical context for the discussion of the artistic predilections manifest in each adaptation. Lastly, I examine the representation of gender and sexuality in both the source texts and their adaptations, suggesting that each director has adapted this aspect of his/her source text(s) in a manner consistent with the ideology of his/her film.
Notes to Chapter 1

1 Reines notes that independent producers had tried to create a francophone film industry as early as the 1920’s, but that due to economic (not artistic or technical) constraints these small companies had ceased operations by 1953 (“Future” 74).

2 According to figures stated in Variety magazine, and keeping in mind that the article is dated 1980, Cordélia, “having opened at Odeon’s flagship theatre, Le Dauphin… promptly hit new marks. Box office take for the first three weeks was (1) $27,000, (2) $25,000 and (3) $19,000. Total take for that theatre at the end of seven weeks was $125,000” (7).

Furthermore, in “Public Debate,” it is noted that “reports from Films Mutuel are that the film is still holding well in Montreal and Quebec, and has reached a gross of $100,000 playing in one theatre in each city” (7).
CHAPTER 2

YVES SIMONEAU’S LES FOUS DE BASSAN: A PORTRAIT OF VIOLENCE

“Le metteur en scène étant un homme a vu le film d’après sa vision d’homme.”

Anne Hébert

In 1986, Yves Simoneau agreed to direct the adaptation of Anne Hébert’s novel Les fous de Bassan on two conditions: “‘Premièrement, refaire le scénario complètement. Deuxièmement, avoir l’accord de l’auteur. Si Anne Hébert refusait, je refusais de faire le film”’ (in Petrowski C-10, cited in Slott “Agent”). Simoneau was not the first but the third filmmaker to be asked to direct the adaptation, a project which had originally been proposed in 1982. Kathryn Slott does an excellent recount of the various trials and tribulations leading up to the final production of Les fous de Bassan in her article “From Agent of Destruction to Object of Desire.” The pre-production trials for the adaptation of Anne Hébert’s novel were long and complicated; the project changed hands several times between production companies, directors and screenwriters. In the beginning, Francis Mankiewicz, a filmmaker working with the Office National du Film (ONF), was interested in directing the adaptation, thus prompting the ONF’s purchase of the film rights in 1982. When two years later the ONF sold the rights to Cinévidéo, a
privately-owned production company, Mankiewicz retained his position as director of the film, having made sure that his interests were protected at the time of the original ONF purchase. Nonetheless, less than a year later, Cinévidéo’s producer Justine Héroux replaced Mankiewicz with Radio Canada’s Richard Martin (Slott “Agent” 18). Mankiewicz had been working for Cinévidéo without a contract.

The selection of a suitable screenwriter, and the need to gain Hébert’s approval of the scenario before it could be put into production, further complicated matters. A number of writers drafted screenplays for the adaptation, but each was rejected in turn. Having previously worked as a documentary screenwriter with the ONF, and having worked with Claude Jutra on the scenario for Kamouraska in 1973, Anne Hébert herself drafted the first screenplay for the adaptation of Les fous de Bassan. Yet Mankiewicz rejected Hébert’s scenario and promptly went to work with Colo Tavernier on a second version of the screenplay. The proposed Mankiewicz/Tavernier scenario was discarded as well.

At that point, upon Mankiewicz’s suggestion, Héroux hired Sheldon Chad to write an English-language scenario for the adaptation, intending to translate it into French for the French-language version of the film. This time, both Mankiewicz and Hébert rejected the proposed screenplay. In spite of their disapproval, Héroux, having by that time replaced Mankiewicz with Richard Martin, fully intended to put the adaptation into production. As a result, Hébert contacted Pascal Assathiany, Seuil’s Montréal representative. (Seuil had published Les fous de Bassan in 1982.) Serving as Hébert’s representative, Assathiany threatened to take legal action against Cinévidéo on her behalf.
should Héroux carry out his plans to put the adaptation into production. Assathiany claimed that Héroux’s plan to put the Martin/Chad adaptation into production was a breach of the original ONF contract, according to which

“Anne Hébert garde un droit de regard sur le scénario, même après la vente des droits à Cinévidéo,” and thus, according to Assathiany, the author and the publisher “se réservent le droit de prendre les mesures nécessaires pour faire respecter l’esprit et la nature de l’œuvre.” (Roberge in Slott “Agent” 19)

As per the terms of the agreement, Héroux had to respect Hébert’s wishes or else Cinévidéo would be faced with a lawsuit.

Hébert’s public protestation of the proposed Martin/Chad adaptation stalled the production process long enough for other complications to curtail Richard Martin’s further involvement with the adaptation. Martin, threatened with the loss of his position at Radio Canada if he continued to work with Cinévidéo, a privately owned production company, stepped down as director of the film. Thus, the stage was set for Yves Simoneau to come onto the scene. After Martin’s resignation, Héroux approached Simoneau and asked him to direct the film. As noted, Simoneau agreed to direct the adaptation on two conditions: “‘refaire le scénario complètement’” and “avoir l’accord de l’auteur” (in Petrowski C-10, cited in Slott “Agent”). Héroux accepted these terms, and Simoneau went to work immediately on a new version of the scenario. When Simoneau presented his first version of the screenplay to Anne Hébert for her approval, she rejected it. Back at the drawing board, Simoneau collaborated with Marcel Beaulieu on the fifth and final screenplay to be proposed for the adaptation. This time, Hébert approved the scenario and the film went into production—four years after the ONF had originally purchased the film rights to the novel in 1982.
In an era where the film industry in the United States dominates the global market, Simoneau is recognized for his ability to make films that both attract general audiences conditioned to Hollywood cinema and reflect the personal style and vision of a true film artist.


Directed by Simoneau and released at about the same time as *Les fous de Bassan* (1986), *Pouvoir intime* (1986, a contemporary crime story/thriller) and *Dans le ventre du dragon* (1989, having elements of both comedy and thriller genres), fared well at the box office. These films are noteworthy not only for their appeal to the general public, but also for their non-traditional depiction of gender and sexuality. As a case in point, *Pouvoir intime* features an uncharacteristically strong and resourceful female lead as a member of a small group of bank robbers who plan and botch a job. One of the supporting actors in the film plays the role of a gay security guard who, unbeknownst to the criminals, is in the back of the armored truck at the time of the attempted heist. Once they become aware of his presence, the thieves do everything in their power to try to convince him to surrender the armored car and its contents—including having his lover come to the garage to try to coax him out. Yet the security guard refuses to surrender in spite of the fact that he has been mortally wounded. Becoming a hero in the film, he refuses to give in even when they promise that they will not harm him and that they will split the money equally with
him. Neither fear nor greed sways him. This is not the stereotypical representation of male homosexuals in Hollywood cinema.

Simoneau’s work in Pouvoir intime challenges conventional representations of women and gay men. It should come as no surprise to followers of his work that in Les fous de Bassan, Simoneau challenges traditional representations and understandings of gender and sexuality. Drawing upon Hébert’s novel as a source of inspiration, Simoneau critiques the sexual politics underlying the relationships between men and women in Griffin Creek, a small anglophone village founded by British Loyalists in the late 1700s. In the adaptation, Simoneau focuses on the representation of masculinity and sexual desire as experienced by Stevens Brown in the novel.

Upon its release, Simoneau’s adaptation of Les fous de Bassan was harshly criticized for being unfaithful to the written narrative. Many critics argued that Simoneau had betrayed Hébert’s text as he had not tried to recreate Nora and Olivia’s points of view. They asserted that Simoneau had not only wrongfully attributed narrative authority to Stevens Brown, but also that his character had been transformed “From Agent of Destruction to Object of Desire” (Slott 1989/90). The controversy surrounding the film was intense. Most critics contested one or more of the following aspects of the Simoneau’s adaptation: the exclusion of significant female characters (Pat and Pam, Felicity); the privileging of Stevens Brown’s point of view; Stevens Brown’s return to Griffin Creek in 1982 (in the novel he does not); and linguistic dissonance due to the fact that the actresses portraying Nora and Olivia were French, not Québécoises—and did not make any attempt to fake a québécois accent.
Hébert’s personal response to Simoneau’s adaptation is particularly interesting. In an interview held after a private screening of the film, Hébert seemed to be quite impressed with his work. According to Cauchon, Hébert said that she was “tellement émue qu’elle avait hâte de le revoir pour mieux décanter ses émotions” (cited in Véronneau “Attraction” 28). Initially, or so it seems, Hébert praised Simoneau’s adaptation as worthy of and faithful to her novel: “‘c’est une adaptation fidèle à l’esprit de mon roman’” (28). However, she must have later reconsidered her first impressions of the film, as

at a meeting of the CIEF in Montréal on 15 April 1988 Hébert herself added fuel to the fire [of critical controversy] by indicating her displeasure with the results of the film. She contended that, whereas she had intended to make the little girls in her story the objects of the villagers’ desire, the filmmaker had turned the situation into a sort of free-for-all in which “just about everyone viewed Stevens Brown as an object of desire.” (Slott in Pallister Cinema 184)

Like Hébert, for the most part, those familiar with the text before seeing the film thought that Simoneau’s adaptation betrayed the message of the novel. This is not an unusual reaction to the adaptation of a popular novel; filmgoers often expect a director to try to translate a written narrative directly to the screen. Yet Simoneau had no intention of simply recreating the written narrative in visual form; “loin de lui l’idée de suivre [un] roman page par page. Au contraire, selon Simoneau, l’adaptation doit faire des détours, créer une dramatique, bref faire du cinéma…” (Véronneau “Attraction” 28). The content, style and form of Simoneau’s adaptation are indeed different from that of the Hébert’s novel. Still, the message of the film is not entirely unrelated to that of Hébert’s novel. Hébert’s narrative portrays the inescapable death and destruction not only of individual men and women, but also of Griffin Creek itself: a community wherein all those who
exist either tacitly or actively engage in a long-standing, gendered battle of sexual warfare. Simoneau’s adaptation depicts just such a world-view, where hierarchical relationships between men and women, based on male domination and violence and legitimized by the Church, destroy all.

According to Simoneau, the film is a faithful adaptation of the novel. In an interview with Bolduc, Simoneau indicated that

Ce qui le rend d’ailleurs le plus fier, c’est d’avoir réussi à respecter l’esprit du livre tout en réussissant à donner une propre valeur au film. “Tout ce qui se trouve dans le livre, que ce soit au niveau de l’esprit ou de l’atmosphère, on le retrouve dans le film.” (in Bolduc “le bébé” 3A: 33)

If Simoneau maintains that his adaptation is faithful to the novel, then why do the majority of the critics who reviewed the film, and of the scholars who have written critical articles on the work, contest the validity of his assertion? If we follow Stam’s suggestions and look at adaptation as an intertextual relationship between a “‘hypotext’” (the written narrative) and a “‘hypertext’” (its film adaptation) which “transforms, modifies, elaborates, or extends” the hypotext (66), our investigation will prove to be much more fruitful. Along these lines we may ask: in what ways does Simoneau’s Les fous de Bassan reflect a transformation, modification, elaboration and/or extension of Anne Hébert’s novel? I propose a reading of the film based on its own merits, its representation understood to be an extension of the content, style and form of the novel. To enable readers to grasp more fully the intertextuality of the rapport between the adaptation and its source novel, I will discuss the basic structure of each narrative (plot, setting, structure, characterization), and propose a rationale for Simoneau’s artistic choices in the film. Following this, I will examine how Hébert’s use of myth and irony
play into Simoneau’s adaptation. Finally, I will discuss the representation of desire as expressed/repressed by the primary characters in the film.

In the novel, Hébert presents the story of a small community inhabited by the descendants of British Loyalists who left the colonies and headed north in the wake of the American Revolution. Located on the tip of the Gaspé peninsula overlooking the ocean, Griffin Creek is isolated from the rest of the province of Québec. The village sits high atop the cliffs to which the *fous de Bassan*—gannets—return every year to build nests and raise their young, despite the strong winds blowing in off the coast that threaten to destroy their homes. Situated by the sea, the villagers support themselves primarily by fishing, but they also farm and hunt to provide for themselves. Like the gannets, they are creatures of the land and sea. The majority of the children born in the village remain there as adults, where they marry and raise their own young. In Griffin Creek, the problems associated with small, closed communities are apparent; inbreeding has produced such mentally- and emotionally-challenged off-spring as Pat and Pam, Stevens Browns’ younger twin sisters, and Perceval, his younger brother. Of course, it is also in this closed community that Stevens himself was raised, where he spent the most formative years of his life learning what it means to be a man in patriarchal culture.

The novel is composed of six chapters. Presented first, “Le Livre du Reverend Nicolas Jones, automne 1982” situates the reader with respect to the importance of the Church and of religious doctrine in the novel. Stevens Brown narrates both the second and last chapters; the second chapter is a collection of letters he wrote in the summer of 1936 to a friend he met while in the United States: “Lettres de Stevens Brown à Michael.
Having situated the events to take place with respect to the importance of religion and masculine discourse in the first two chapters, Hébert introduces the first of the two chapters narrated by women: “Le Livre de Nora Atkins, été 1936.” Hébert prefaces Nora’s chapter with a quote from Hélène Cixous’s “Le Rire de la Méduse”: “rit à torrent et ventre à terre et à toute volée et à tire-d’aile et à flots et comme elle l’entend.” In this chapter, Nora gives her first-person account of the frustrations she experiences as a young woman coming of age in Griffin Creek. Harlin rightly suggests that “Nora’s narrative owes much to écriture féminine with its almost exclusive concern with her nascent sexuality, the new experience of her body” (133). The fact that Hébert frames Nora’s chapter within masculine discourse as represented by the voices of Reverend Nicolas Jones and Stevens Brown emphasizes the point that “writing the body” is not an effective strategy when countered by the essentialism of femininity in patriarchal cultures.

The fourth chapter, “Le Livre de Perceval Brown et de quelques autres, été 1936,” is the only chapter which presents more than one character’s perspective. This chapter represents primarily the voice of Perceval, but also includes passages narrated by several other villagers whose identities are uncertain. Nora’s cousin Olivia narrates the fifth chapter, “Olivia de la haute Mer, sans date.” In this chapter, Olivia’s spirit tells of her continuing desire for Stevens Brown, of their encounters as innocent children, and of her female ancestors’ whispered warnings to stay away from Stevens Brown. Olivia explains in the novel that for her, Stevens

est comme l’arbre planté au milieu du paradis terrestre. La science du bien et du mal n’a pas de secret pour lui. Si seulement je voulais bien j’apprendrais tout de
lui, d’un seul coup, la vie, la mort, tout. Je ne serais plus jamais une innocente
simplette qui repasse des chemises en silence… L’amour seul pourrait faire que je
devienne femme à part entière et communiqué…du mystère qui me ravage, corps
et âme. (Hébert 216)

Hébert portrays Olivia’s innocence, naivety and fascination with Stevens at length in this
chapter. The efforts of Olivia’s female ancestors to teach her “la méfiance vis-à-vis du
masculin” are in vain (Boyce 296-97).2 Even after her death at his hands, Olivia
continues to seek fulfillment through a relationship with Stevens, believing that he can
teach her what it means to be a woman and therefore usher her through this adolescent
rite of passage. The following chapter, “Dernière lettre de Stevens Brown à Michael
Hotchkiss, automne 1982,” is prefaced with a citation of A. Rimbaud: “J’ai seul la clef de
cette parade sauvage” (227). Narrator of the closing chapter, Stevens Brown has the last
word in the novel; his chapter holds the key to understanding what took place the night of
August 31, 1936 in Griffin Creek. In this sixth and final chapter, Stevens confesses to the
crimes he committed that night—his rape and murder of Olivia and the murder of her
cousin Nora.

The order of presentation of the individual chapters is striking. The first, second
and final chapters are narrated by men; “‘la vision masculine a donc plus de poids,
d’autant que ce sont Stevens et le pasteur Jones qui parlent les premiers et mettent en
place un univers…” (Saint-Martin in Ancrenat 9). Both Nora and Olivia’s voices, as
read in the third and fifth chapters, are bound within the limits of masculine discourse.
Hébert’s structural choices are significant, for women have no authentic voice in
patriarchal society. As we shall see, the fact that Simoneau privileges a male voice does
not detract from this questioning of the psycho-social structures that maintain, reinforce and perpetuate violence and male domination in patriarchal cultures.

In Simoneau’s film, the plot of the adaptation is consistent with that of the novel; however, there has been some synthesis of characters and events in order to actualize the story’s telling as a visual narrative. In the film, Simoneau focuses on Stevens Brown’s emotional and mental time travel from Autumn 1982 back to the summer of 1936, and his return to Griffin Creek after a five-year sojourn in the United States. As is the case with any narrative, the beginning and ending of a film, its establishing shots and conclusion, are highly significant with respect to its plot and narration. The narrative structure of Les fous de Bassan demonstrates that the events that take place are told from Stevens Brown’s point of view. At the beginning of the film, Simoneau reveals the catalyst for the telling of the story: Stevens’ rape and murder of a young woman named Olivia. The film opens with an extreme long-shot of Olivia walking quietly along the beach at night. Wrapped in a blanket for warmth, she walks diagonally toward the viewer, from upper-screen left to lower right; there is little if any wind. Simoneau cross-cuts to a close-up of Nora, Olivia’s younger cousin, who remains at home alone in bed. Her head on the pillow, Nora pulls the covers up over her shoulder. With a concerned, anxious look in her eyes, she says quietly: “N’y vas pas, Olivia. N’y vas pas.”

Following this, Simoneau cuts back to a medium-shot of Olivia standing alone on the beach. She turns her head left, and in the next moment we see Stevens curled up in a fetal position, his face to the ocean waves that wash gently toward him. Olivia walks up to Stevens and kneels behind him; she touches his shoulder gingerly at first, but then tugs
at his sweater in earnest to try to rouse him. It is unclear whether he is alive or dead; Stevens does not respond. Finally he stirs, turning toward Olivia and raising himself on his elbows to see her more clearly. Cool and distant, she returns his gaze, a series of shot-reverse shots highlighting their silent communication. Stevens’ eyes roam suggestively up and down Olivia’s body. She is wary of his intentions yet lingers, standing her ground. To encourage her approach, Stevens takes her by the shoulders to draw her closer, but she resists. In frustration, he aggressively wrestles her to the ground. At this moment Simoneau cuts back to the close-up of Nora; this time her eyes are wide with fear. Hearing Olivia’s screams, she pulls the blankets up to her chin as if to protect herself from what is happening down on the beach. At the end of the scene, Simoneau cuts back to a long shot of Stevens straddling Olivia on the beach. Simoneau has set the stage for the recreation of the events that took place in Griffin Creek in the summer of 1936.

Following the introduction of Olivia, (young) Stevens and Nora, Simoneau cuts to a long-shot of a ship at sea under a clear-blue sky; it is a new day in Griffin Creek. The year is 1982—time present—and Simoneau prepares to introduce the narrator of his story. The camera draws back to reveal that this is the privileged vantage point of old Stevens Brown. Unshaven and unkempt, old Stevens stands in the entrance of the old Church looking out at the horizon. Revisiting the past in his mind’s eye, he wonders slowly through the “Gallery of Ancestors”—a collection of the portraits of Griffin Creek’s inhabitants in 1936. It is clear that viewers are to accompany Stevens Brown on an emotional journey back in time from Autumn 1982 (time present) to the summer of 1936 (time past). Simoneau cuts back to old Stevens at important moments throughout
the film to remind the viewer that it is he who grapples psychologically with the crimes he committed in his youth. In the closing scene, perched on a rock and looking aimlessly out over the ocean, young Stevens sits alone, Olivia’s lifeless body not far from his side. As the opening and closing sequences demonstrate, Simoneau’s primary focus is on the experiences of Stevens Brown; the visual narrative is told from a male perspective.

The emphasis on Stevens Brown’s experiences—from Stevens Brown’s point of view—is one of the primary points of critical contention with Simoneau’s adaptation. Many film critics and literary theorists have condemned Simoneau for his creative choices. How could he have attributed narrative authority to Stevens Brown and omit Olivia and Nora’s perspectives? How could he justify the omission of Felicity, the “matriarch” of Griffin Creek, or of Pat and Pam—Stevens’ twin sisters—who are as important to the women’s presence in the novel as Perceval is to the men’s? Simoneau’s attribution of narrative authority to a male is consistent with Hébert’s work for a variety of reasons. Structurally, the novel both begins and ends with chapters by Stevens and Reverend Nicolas Jones, and males narrate four of the six chapters. Ancrenat and others have noted that in the Hébert’s novel “la narration au masculin est nettement privilégiée” (9). It would have been reasonable for Simoneau to privilege either the Reverend’s or Stevens’ point of view in the film. Yet Reverend Nicolas Jones does not have a strong and consistent presence throughout the novel; Stevens does. Stevens’ return to Griffin Creek touches each of the villagers. Without Stevens, there is nothing to provide the coherence necessary for the film to be understood. Reverend Nicolas Jones or Stevens Brown? Simoneau explains his choice between the two in this way: “Celui qui
se souvient, c’est Stevens. Son imaginaire met tout en place”” (in Bonneville “Aventure” 44).

While it is true that Stevens Brown’s perspective is privileged in the film, Simoneau has not created a film that facilitates a spectator’s easy identification with any character, male or female. Bolduc suggests that the film frustrates the spectator’s attempts to identify with individual characters:

Même si tous les éléments semblent réunis pour faire un film d’une excellente qualité, il semble qu’il manque un petit quelque chose à cette production. Les personnages sont bien définis, mais demeurent quelquefois difficiles à saisir. (my emphasis, “Chaque image” 3A: 33)

While Bolduc interprets this as a defect of the adaptation, this is perhaps one of its greatest assets. Through imagery and characterization, Simoneau facilitates the critical distance necessary to enable a spectator’s more profound consideration of what s/he views on-screen versus his/her passive identification with, and effortless consumption of, the image. This aspect of the visual narrative reflects Simoneau’s

travail conscient en vue de ruiner l’idée standard du personnage cinématographique…un travail de dé-référentialisation des personnages…en vue de tuer les effets de réel, en vue d’empêcher une identification facile avec les personnages, en vue de créer une distance vis-à-vis de l’action… (Sanaker 63)

There is little if any possibility that a viewer might somehow appropriate sexual pleasure from the crimes perpetrated by Reverend Nicolas Jones (Nora’s molestation) and Stevens Brown (Olivia’s rape and murder).

Moreover, the majority of the critics cite language use in the film as another flaw in Simoneau’s work, asserting that the varying accents and levels of spoken French among the primary characters destroy the credibility of the narrative. Yet the paradox of
language use in the film is not far from that of the novel, where descendants of British
Loyalists communicate in a foreign language—in French not English. In the film version,
the dissonance of the varying accents serves Simoneau’s vision well, further distancing
the spectator from the illusory reality depicted on-screen. Nora and Olivia’s “Parisian”
French disrupts the audience’s learned involuntary suspension of disbelief, frustrating a
simple objectification of, or identification with, either of the two adolescents.

The fact that Nora and Olivia are set apart by their accents reinforces the idea that as
female members of a patriarchal society, they live in a world where they have no voice of
their own.

Simoneau’s use of defamiliarization to destabilize language and characterization
can be seen as an extension of Hébert’s use of irony and myth in the novel. Hébert uses
irony to “make strange” what a reader would otherwise perceive as a naturalized
narrative. Harlin suggests that

Hébert’s irony leads the reader to question what s/he considers to be a natural
worldview. By contorting the familiar so as to question its validity, she adeptly
practices what Barthes claims to be the only way of successfully fighting against
myth. According to Barthes, simply waging an outright battle against a myth is
destined to fail: “le mythe peut toujours en dernière instance signifier la résistance
qu’on lui oppose” (222). The only way to fight against a myth is to “mythify” it…
(135-36)

The use of irony and myth in both Hébert’s novel and Simoneau’s film defamiliarizes
what is read and seen, thus enabling the critical distance necessary to an active and
involved engagement with what is perceived. As a case in point, Simoneau constructs the *mis en scène* in such a way as to critique the role of the Church and organized religion in the maintenance of cultural myths of gender and sexuality. In the beginning of the film, as young Stevens pilots his small boat toward Griffin Creek, the Church, situated high above the cliffs overlooking the sea, dominates the landscape. Religion plays a powerful role in the lives of the villagers, as demonstrated symbolically by the authoritative presence of the Church on the horizon. In the film as in the novel, the villagers, descendants of the British Loyalists who founded Griffin Creek, practice Protestantism. Yet in Griffin Creek, the “Protestant religion…functions as the Catholic Church does to characters in other québécois artworks, forming the basis of their morality and politics…” (Pallister *Cinema* 185). The fact that the villagers practice a religion other than Catholicism, and worship in French rather than their native tongue, calls attention to the impact of religious doctrine on social practice.

Reverend Nicolas Jones is the religious authority in the community, and the parishioners are subject, at least in theory, to his jurisdiction. Still, this does not mean that they always appreciate his advice. The influence of the Church is diminishing as evidenced by his parishioners’ irreverent attitudes toward the Reverend. In one incident, the Reverend reminds Timothé Brown of his parental duty toward Stevens, and Stevens of his duty to his father as his eldest son. The two have been estranged for several years, a fierce physical confrontation between them having resulted in Stevens’ flight from the village five years before. When Reverend Jones tells Brown *père* that he should be grateful for his children and look after them, he responds spitefully, “Toi, les enfants,
qu'est-ce que tu en sais?” All of the villagers know that the Reverend desperately wants a son; his wife Irène is sterile. Stevens shows the Reverend the same disrespect as his father. The Reverend is well aware of the reasons for Stevens’s estrangement from his family. Seeing Stevens coming up the hill toward the church, he hails Stevens and admonishes him to seek his father’s forgiveness: “Tu peux ressembler à l’enfant prodigal—celui qu’on pardonne…” Stevens will not stand for this affront to his pride; turning away from the Reverend and firmly replacing his hat, he responds curtly, “Je peux ressembler au Christ aussi!” Stevens refuses to acknowledge any authority other than his own—religious or otherwise.

As head of the Church in Griffin Creek, Reverend Nicolas Jones is “le porte-parole de l’ordre patriarcal et prône la soumission ainsi que la mortification du corps et de l’esprit” (Green “Structures” 192). According to religious doctrine as interpreted by the Church, sexual relations outside of marriage are prohibited, children are to honor and obey their mothers and fathers, and women are to obey their husbands. The Sunday following Stevens’ return, the theme of the Reverend’s sermon is how to remain virtuous. Citing the Bible chapter and verse, Reverend Nicolas Jones warns the villagers not to give in to the temptations of the flesh. To avoid damnation, the villagers must repress any feelings of sexual desire; sex is for procreative purposes only, and sexual pleasure is sinful. During the Reverend’s sermon, the assembled villagers are bored and distracted; the camera scans their disinterested faces. To the amusement of all those seated around him, Perceval starts and gasps at each mention of le démon who could lead the faithful away from the true path of spiritual enlightenment. When the Reverend warns the
villagers, “il faut se méfier du regard des autres, et surtout de nous-mêmes,” Stevens
Brown appears at the back of the Church. Nora turns around to look back at him, then
whispers coyly in Olivia’s ear, “C’est le démon.” Two young women coming of age, they
look at each other and smile knowingly. The Reverend must tell Irène twice to play the
closing hymn, as she has been concentrating on the ants crawling across her sheet music.
In the end, no one listens to Reverend Nicolas Jones. Not one member of the
congregation pays any attention to the Reverend’s sermon; they gather at Church on
Sunday out of tradition and a lingering sense of duty and obligation. “Vivant par tradition
les uns aux côtés des autres, les hommes et les femmes de Griffin Creek étouffent”
(Chevillot 124). The Biblical scriptures, as interpreted by organized religion, are no
longer relevant to the villagers’ daily lives.

The Church, as one of the primary institutions of socialization, instills the
traditional values, customs and mores of the community in its members. The relations
between men and women in Griffin Creek are fundamentally structured by gender role
assignments ascribed and reinforced from the moment of birth. According to traditional
gender role assignments, women are nurturing mothers who care for their children and
serve their husbands as cooks, maids, and sexual partners. Girls are servants in their
fathers’ homes until they are old enough to marry. This is not to say that all young
women look forward to a life of domestic and sexual servitude in the private sphere.
When Olivia asks Maureen if she might seek to remarry, Maureen responds that she has
no intention of doing so. She enjoys her freedom, telling Olivia, “ ’suis bien comme ça.
Je fais ce que je veux.” Married women are not free; widowed and financially
independent, Maureen is not obligated to serve any man in any way. In patriarchal societies, men are invested—whether consciously or unconsciously—in the maintenance of cultural myths of masculinity and femininity that serve as the foundation of male power and privilege. The “making strange” of religious practices in the film, much the same as in the novel, calls for an examination of such social structures that have been in place for hundreds of years. In the novel, it is clear by the end of “Le Livre du Reverend Nicolas Jones” that the Church and its teachings, as well as the patriarchal order they serve, are obsolete. Already positioned to question the credibility of what s/he sees on-screen, the actively-engaged spectator is encouraged to take a more objective and critical look at Stevens’ actions as the extreme end result of ingrained beliefs concerning masculinity, male dominance, and sexuality in patriarchal society.

In order to facilitate a critical examination of gender and sexuality, Simoneau selects and adapts elements of Hébert’s novel that reveal the characters’ understandings of what it means to be a man or woman in Griffin Creek. Whereas women are to be sensitive, nurturing and understanding, men are rugged, rational and stoic. The breadwinners in the family, men work in the fields, hunt and fish to provide food and shelter for their brood. According to social myth, men and women are opposite sexes, and masculinity and femininity are likewise mutually exclusive domains. In the novel, Olivia remembers her father asking her mother not to kiss or hug his sons; he feared that they would turn into sissies—effeminate men.

Mon père a demandé à ma mère de ne plus embrasser ses fils parce qu’ils sont trop grands à présent et qu’elle risque d’en faire des sissies. Depuis longtemps déjà mes frères ont fait poser des fers à leurs semelles. Ils parlent fort. Jurent dès qu’ils se croient seuls. (Hébert 207-08)
Olivia’s father teaches his sons to repress their emotions; in his world, men do not express love or affection openly. Moreover, Olivia’s father teaches all of his children that to be feminine, or woman-like, is undesirable. The seeds of misogyny, sown by the Church, are further cultivated in the home. For over two thousand years, religious doctrine has been used to legitimize male dominance and perpetuate rigid gender role prescriptions. “‘Wesley rightly attributes the misogyny of Stevens Brown to the destructive gender roles’” (Anderson “Puritanism” 100).

In order to minimize the threat of femininity, in conversations with their peers, young men often refer to women not as multifaceted individuals but as highly-sexualized objects. Their attitudes toward women are learned in the family and reinforced in the community at large. Consider, for example, the conversation of Stevens and several of his male peers who mill around outside the Church after the service. When the young men ask Stevens how he supported himself during his travels down the east coast, he explains that while in Florida, he worked on the docks cleaning the day’s catch. Smiling, Stevens explains, “je préparais des poissons frais. Je déshabillais au couteau pas mal de poissons… Il fallait un couteau très coupant… je leur faisais *sauter* les entrailles!” With a gleam in his eye, one of the young men asks, “et les femmes… tu les as déshabillées aussi au couteau?” In this case, the men compare having sex with women to cleaning and gutting fish with sharp phallus-knives. For these young adult males, sexual relations are not about love and equal exchange but about power and domination; sex is a violent conquest and the phallus a weapon used to protect oneself from the threat of femininity.
Sadly, this is the case whether one is a “Man of the Cloth” or a layman. In both the film and the novel, Reverend Nicolas Jones and his wife Irène are fated to remain in a loveless, fruitless marriage. In the film, she openly declares her lack of love and desire for her husband. Moreover, Irène is aware of her husband’s attraction to Nora, reminding him that she is no longer a child, but a young woman capable of giving him the son he so desires. The Reverend’s attraction to Nora is evident in the hunt scene, when he accompanies the other men (Olivia’s father and brothers) out tracking fox in the woods. While the men settle down to eat lunch, Nora circulates among them serving coffee; she is the only female present. Patrick comments on the Reverend’s careful aim and skill in the hunt. Reverend Nicolas Jones has already bagged several fox but refuses to accept Patrick’s compliment; he humbly replies “Dieu est mon guide.” Hearing this and refusing to allow the Reverend to downplay his skill, Olivia’s father reminds him, “Tuer les animaux ne blesse pas Dieu, mon Révérend.”

When Nora offers more coffee to the Reverend, he asks if she still holds a grudge against him for his gruffness the previous day. Reverend Nicolas Jones and Nora stand less than one foot apart, Nora to the right of the tree against which the Reverend leans. Simoneau uses a medium two-shot to frame their exchange. Speaking softly so that the other men might not overhear, he asks, “Les renauds, ça te ferait plaisir d’avoir les peaux? Tu pourrais en faire un chapeau à coller. Tu aurais l’air d’une petite bête sauvage.” Nora does not respond; she bows her head, turns, and walks away in silence. The Reverend offers the fox pelts to Nora as a token of his affection and in evidence of his regret for having manhandled her. He suggests that with a fox-skin hat—“un chapeau
à coller”—Nora would resemble “une petite bête sauvage”. Note that the word “coller” in French means to adhere one surface to another, and that “un chapeau à coller” would be a hat made from adhering fox pelts to one another. Yet the word “coller” in French is pronounced in the same manner as the word “collet,” and its signification is quite different. A “collet” is a snare or small noose used to capture small animals by the neck. The Reverend’s offer is double in its intent; through the gift of the pelts, he seeks not only to gain Nora’s forgiveness, but also to lay a snare for her future entrapment. Both the introduction and conclusion of this scene emphasize God’s hand in the hunters’ aim, and by extension, the role of religious doctrine in men’s treatment of women. At the end of this scene, as the men prepare to continue their hunt, Patrick makes the remark “Dieu nous guide tous, mon Révérend.” God guides the Reverend’s aim, as He does the efforts of all the men; they worship a patriarch whom they have shaped in their own image. Men see themselves as superior to women whom they liken to small animals to be captured and/or killed—like the foxes that are the object of the hunt.

As a male, Stevens has a privileged stature that grants him power and authority. In the second chapter of the novel, Stevens feels ill at ease as he approaches the village in the summer of 1936. To alleviate his anxiety, he consoles himself that he is no longer a child but a man protected by the symbols of virility: heavy boots and a firmly-set hat.

J’ai mesuré mon corps d’homme, de la tête aux pieds, et j’éprouvais quelque chose d’obscur, de très fort et irréfutable à l’intérieur de moi: la présence intacte de mon corps d’enfant, avec ses joies, ses peines et ses peurs… Je me suis dit qu’un homme n’a rien à craindre, chaussé de bottes viriles, été comme hiver, le chapeau vissé sur la tête, ne se découvrant ni pour l’église, ni pour les femmes. (Hébert 60-61)
Stevens wears his hat and boots like a shield of armor to deflect any real or imagined threat to his virility. His sense of security lies in an identity based on cultural myths of masculinity; while he projects the image of a strong, self-assured man, he has the fears and insecurities of a child. The armor he wears merely obscures his human vulnerability.

In the film as in the novel, Stevens’ hat and boots represent his virility and his status as a powerful male, impervious to any rebuke or reproach from others. The image that he projects does not betray his lack of self-confidence. Perceval’s reaction upon seeing Stevens for the first time in five years underscores the strength of Steven’s physical presence. Waiting for Perceval to become aware of his presence, Stevens stands nearby as Perceval slides across the plateau on his belly watching Nora and Olivia bathe below him on the beach. Seeing a pair of heavy boots out of the corner of his eye, Perceval recoils fearfully from the powerful stranger standing near him. Yet once he recognizes his brother, Perceval shouts out “Stevens!” joyfully announcing his return. In another incident, Reverend Nicolas Jones catches Stevens off-guard on his way back to Maureen’s after bantering with “les boys”; it is warm out and Stevens is not wearing his hat. The Reverend attempts to use his religious authority to admonish Stevens’ for having not entered the Church and having yet to ask his father’s forgiveness. He dares chastise Stevens as if he were a child, not a full-grown man in his own right. Placing his hat firmly on his head, Stevens turns his back to the Reverend and strides briskly away.

When Stevens does pay a visit to his childhood home, he has no intention of begging his father’s forgiveness; he does so because he wants to see his mother. During
the visit, Stevens and his mother sit facing each other in the living room. Not having removed his hat, he does not fear that someone might sense how very childlike and vulnerable he feels beneath the armor of his projected virility. Stevens presents himself before his mother in a suit that once belonged to Maureen’s late husband; his understanding of what it means to be a man—the armor with which he protects himself—is donned like a costume for a stage performance in live theater. Toward the end of the visit, Stevens’ mother fawns over him, telling him how strong and handsome he has become and cooing that she would like very much to see him without his hat. After a moment’s hesitation, he removes his hat and kneels before her to receive her blessing. Having dared to remove part of his armor in his parents’ home, and thus to let his vulnerability show, he quickly puts his hat back on and heads for the door, ignoring her pleas to wait for his father’s return.

By the conclusion of the film, Stevens has exhausted the courage and bravado with which his armor has provided him; bare head hung low, Stevens is distant, somewhere far away trying to understand what has happened the night before. Perceval walks slowly down the beach toward Stevens. Seeing his brother’s hat lying washed up on the sand; he picks it up and places it on his own head. Symbolically, Stevens and Perceval are one and the same person. Simoneau confirms this in an interview with Gaudreaut: “‘Steven Brown [sic] ne forme en réalité qu’un seul personnage avec son frère Perceval, habité par la folie’” (in Gaudreaut “Yves Simoneau élargit son horizon” E1). The difference between Stevens and Perceval is the image of virility Stevens projects to those around him. The villagers recognize Perceval’s emotional and mental
illness, and accept his struggles to communicate and interact with others. Stevens’s insanity, however, is not readily apparent to others in Griffin Creek; his external appearance does not immediately betray his emotional and social dysfunction.

In Griffin Creek, men accept and perpetuate male dominance; violence and aggression are seen as natural elements of masculine behavior and are used to maintain power and control. Men are socially dysfunctional—their attitudes and behaviors contributing to the destruction of both self and Other. Stevens’ crimes are examples of the many unseen landmines ticking away silently beneath the social fabric and threatening to explode at any time. In both the film and the novel, Stevens’ anguish over the crimes he committed ravages him emotionally and spiritually, and by the end have resulted in self-destruction. Still, Stevens is not the only one afflicted by the ills which plague patriarchal society; “all the characters [in the film], male and female, [are] victims of a very dark inner world…[T]he old Hébertian Jansenistic fatalism seems quite present in th[e] novel, and that as tone and determinator is carried into the film” (Pallister Cinema 190). The violence of Stevens’ crimes is symptomatic of that which characterizes patriarchal societies in general. Les fous de Bassan is

“l’histoire d’une communauté de gens très fermée, très réduite, là où le drame peut couver pendant très longtemps, où les sentiments sont contenus, retenus longtemps; et quand ça éclate au grand jour, ça rejoint la violence et la sauvagerie des éléments.” (Hébert in Ewing 100)

The society that has evolved through the years is no longer functional; men and women can no longer live according to dualistic gender role expectations based on male dominance and female subordination or repress their emotional and sexual natures.
During his five years’ absence, Stevens has come into his own as a young adult male, adopting the aggressive behaviors associated with virility and embracing the power and privilege attributed to males in their community. Stevens Brown did not return to Griffin Creek in the summer of 1936 to commit rape and murder, nor did he return in the hopes of rekindling family ties—he detests his father. In both the film and the novel, Stevens is only genuinely interested in his brother Perceval and in Olivia Atkins. Logically, Stevens’ decision to return to Griffin Creek must therefore be tied to either Olivia or Perceval—or both. When the Reverend Nicolas Jones asks Stevens “Pourquoi es-tu revenu?” it is clear that Stevens does not how to respond. As Stevens turns away from the Reverend, Simoneau cuts from the medium close-up of young Stevens to a medium close-up of old Stevens Brown in 1982. Old Stevens knows the answer: “Pour me libérer de la fureur du vent.” In the film as in the novel, the wind—le vent—is symbolic of longing and sexual desire. Hébert ties its importance to organized religion in the first chapter of the novel, where Reverend Nicolas Jones speaks of the wind’s dominant presence in Griffin Creek and of the need to beware of the demon of sexual temptation. Old Stevens emphasizes the omnipotence of the wind in his monologue in the beginning of the film:

Dans toute cette histoire, il faudrait, il faut, il faut ne pas oublier du vent, du savoir de son souffle dans nos oreilles, de son haleine salée sur nos lèvres. Pas un geste d’homme ou de femme qui ne soit pas accompagné par le vent…cheveux, robe, chemise, pantalon claquant dans le vent sur nos corps nus.

The sensuality of this passage is evident; the wind blows “dans nos oreilles…sur nos lèvres … sur nos corps nus”.

55
In the adaptation, the wind symbolizes the presence of a sexual tension that affects each of the villagers’ lives; “for both male and female characters, the wind is linked with their own repressed sexuality” (Harlin 133). The Reverend tells the villagers that they must beware of the weakness of the flesh, that they must “se méfier du regard.” “Le regard—female and male, young and old, bird and human—is…a rampant sign, operative at every juncture of the novel, and in every scene of the film” (Pallister Cinema 185). The Reverend himself is consumed by his attraction to Nora. Nora, however, is not interested in the Reverend; she is attracted to Stevens. During the hunt scene, she imagines herself a huntress and Stevens her prey as she peers at him from behind the bushes. Yet Stevens is not interested in Nora but rather in Olivia, watching her as Nora watches him as they pick berries. Simoneau underscores the importance of the gaze as a symbol of desire throughout the film. Olivia is drawn to Stevens as well, yet she is wary of his presence and trusts neither her feelings for him nor his intentions, “de plus en plus alertée par le vent” (Hébert 77). Simoneau focuses on Stevens’ relationship with Olivia in the film, emphasizing his attraction to Olivia and his rejection of Nora’s sexual overtures toward him.

A number of critics have denounced the representation of Olivia’s desire for Stevens in the film, however their mutual attraction to one another is based on that described in Hébert’s novel. In her chapter, Olivia speaks at length not only of her interactions with Stevens as a young adult, but also of their childhood fascination with one another. Stevens does not discuss the childhood encounters at any great length in his chapter of the novel. Simoneau does not try to represent these childhood encounters in
the adaptation, as the narration privileges Stevens’ point of view, and the childhood setting is inconsistent with that of the film, the summer of 1936. All of the incidents that take place between Olivia and Stevens in the film as young adults are based on those described in the novel: Olivia at the ironing board (page 214); Olivia walking home alone, arms filled with clean linen (page 204); Olivia hanging laundry on the clothesline (pages 202, 216); and Olivia at the barn dance (page 219). In one scene, Olivia and Nora are walking home together at night. As they approach Olivia’s house, they part company and Nora continues on her way alone. Once Nora has left Olivia’s side, Stevens appears as if out of thin air, entreating Olivia to spend some time with him alone before going up to the house. Standing close behind her, he takes her by the shoulders and whispers softly, “reste encore avec moi.” He stands near her, brushing his cheek against hers and his lips against the back of her neck. Olivia says that she cannot linger but does not leave him. It is obvious that she takes pleasure in the warmth of the intimacy they share.

There are also several daydreaming episodes where Olivia gazes absent-mindedly at Stevens, for example, as he repairs the roof of Maureen’s shed. That day, Olivia, Nora and Maureen are preparing decorations for the upcoming barn dance. While Olivia and Maureen remain outdoors tearing sheets, Nora goes into the house for a snack. Looking back over her shoulder, Olivia watches Stevens as he busily repairs Maureen’s shed. Aware of the growing distance between them, Maureen calls Olivia back to the present moment with the comment “Olivia, tu es dans la lune! Tu rêves…” Olivia is far, far away, dreaming of a place where she and Stevens might find happiness together. Olivia’s expectations of love and marriage are based on a childhood understanding of storybook
romance. Olivia will never have an idyllic relationship with any man, let alone Stevens; such relationships do not exist. The quote that Hébert selects to preface Olivia’s chapter conveys this point well: “‘Ton coeur se brisera et tu deviendras écume sur la mer.’ H.C. Andersen” (197). Olivia’s idealization of what it means for a man and a woman to be together could very well have been drawn from a children’s fairytale, as Hébert’s reference to Hans Christian Andersen suggests.

Simoneau uses editing techniques and camera angles to emphasize the naivety of Olivia’s perceptions of Stevens and of heterosexual romance. Two weeks after his return to Griffin Creek, on the pretense of paying a family visit, Stevens goes to Olivia’s home hoping to speak with her alone. The scene opens with a medium-shot of Olivia standing behind an ironing board and pressing one of her brothers’ shirts. Instinctively, she looks up over her left shoulder to the open door behind her, seeming to have sensed something or someone stirring about just outside. At that moment, Stevens appears on the doorstep and peers back at her through the screen-door. Olivia is aware of his presence, but does not ask him in. When she asks Stevens why he came, he claims that he is there to pay a family visit rather than tell her he came hoping to speak with her alone. Patrick is upstairs asleep and the others are not home, she tells him; he will need to return another time. Stevens finally invites himself in, opens the door, and steps into the kitchen. Walking slowly toward her, il lui chante la pomme, cooing softly that he saw her bathing on the beach…that she is even more beautiful than before. Simoneau uses a close-up of Olivia to show that she is flattered by his attention; his physical closeness and sweet words intoxicate her, and she is off in another world.
To demystify this air of storybook romance, Simoneau crosscuts to a medium close-up of two *fous de Bassan* standing close to one another on the beach, one gannet using its beak to preen the feathers on the nape of its mate’s neck. The brief shift from the two-shot of Olivia and Stevens to a two-shot of *fous* in a similar posture foreshadows the doomed nature of their mutual attraction and desire. Pallister, among others, has noted the symbolism of the gannets in Simoneau’s film. According to Pallister, the birds represent, “among other things, the tearing and hatred of these people for one another” (Cinema 202). The violence of Stevens’s behavior is evidenced throughout the film: Stevens overpowers and rapes Olivia in the establishing shots, strangles Maureen’s pregnant doe, and is known to have beaten his father to within an inch of his life: “il a dû faire venir un médecin du continent pour le [Brown père] sauver.” The two-shot of the *fous de Bassan* implies the fatal nature of Stevens and Olivia’s relationship to one another as man and woman in a patriarchal society. Born and raised in Griffin Creek, male and female, they have learned to relate to one another as man and woman through violence and domination.

Simoneau follows this two-shot of the *fous* with a medium two-shot of Stevens and Olivia standing side by side. Realizing that the shirt she was pressing when Stevens arrived is being singed, she hastily pulls the hot iron away from the board, glancing Stevens’ right hand in the swift motion. Apologetic, she takes his hand and blows softly on his burned fingers, drawing his hand gradually toward her until it brushes her lips. Then, startled by the sound of Patrick’s footsteps as he comes down the stairs, they quickly move away from one another. Seeing Stevens standing in the kitchen below,
Patrick invites him to have a seat at the table then pours each of them a drink; Olivia returns to her ironing. Taking a sip, Stevens remarks that the alcohol is very strong. Patrick reminds him that it is not for children—they are grown men. The tender moment that Olivia and Stevens shared is gone.

In the novel, this scene ends with Patrick and Stevens getting drunk; Olivia is no longer in the picture. In the film, Simoneau expands on the novel’s description of this encounter, using camera angles to critique the naivety of idealized heterosexual romance. In the adaptation, Patrick asks Stevens to tell him about his time in the United States. Stevens describes the South as “plus frais et plus propre” than Griffin Creek. Though Stevens responds to Patrick’s question, his eyes seek out Olivia. When their eyes meet, a shot reverse-shot sequence serves as a reminder that Stevens has come for Olivia, not for her family. Patrick goes on to describe the luxury of a Buick in which he had once ridden to Québec with a friend, but no one hears him. Stevens gazes at Olivia and tells her he will take her to the South—both he and Patrick tell her she would love it there. By this time, Olivia is far, far away in another world; ethereal background music implies that she dreams of traveling South with Stevens and living happily ever after.

At this point, Simoneau uses a shot-reverse shot sequence to demystify storybook ideals of a woman being swept off her feet by Prince Charming. When Olivia looks at each of the men in turn as they assure her that she would be happy in the States, the close-ups of Patrick and Stevens from her point of view shift counter-clockwise in turn and remain off-center. Olivia looks directly at Stevens and at Patrick, but sees only what she wants to see in her childlike naivety. Her perception is skewed, as evidenced by the
odd camera angle of the reverse-shots of Patrick and Stevens. As Winspur explains, in
Les fous de Bassan,

Stevens Brown, as a man, holds out the possibility of her liberation from other men—the father and brother whose shirts she has been ironing ever since her mother died. Therein lies the problem: the liberation of which the young Olivia dreams…can in fact merely bring back her present enslavement. (25-26)

Olivia dreams of the day that she will be able to escape the drudgery of her life of servitude and self-sacrifice, imagining that Stevens may be a “knight in shining armor” come to spirit her away from Griffin Creek. Women’s options in Griffin Creek are limited; it is clear that Olivia is expected to remain in Griffin Creek for the rest of her life, to marry and serve a man and raise his children. When Olivia tells Maureen that her father might send her to school on the mainland to become a schoolteacher, Maureen dismisses the idea and asks whether she might not prefer to marry.

Stevens’ attempts to speak to Olivia alone have been fruitless until one day he finds her, outside hanging laundry. Striding purposefully toward her, Stevens walks up behind Olivia and brusquely tries to turn her toward him. In response to his gruffness, she coldly shrugs his hand off her shoulder. Stevens reacts by stepping back to try to regain his composure, telling her that he has been looking for her, and insisting that they go elsewhere to talk. When she asks why, he explains that the wind is too strong; he is unable to bury or otherwise ignore it: “Je ne suis pas capable de l’enterrer.” Stevens and Olivia stand on the very spot where Patrick had earlier told his father how beautiful Olivia had become and how lucky they were to have her. Patrick, the oldest son, is the most protective and controlling of Olivia. On her father’s soil and wary of her older brother Patrick’s possessiveness, Stevens senses the wind—the sexual tension between
them and the threat of her brother’s jealousy. Stevens wants to speak with her alone, away from her family’s domain, and more importantly, out of Patrick’s reach. Yet Olivia is unwilling to go elsewhere; Stevens must confront her where she stands. Rather than ask Olivia to accompany him when he heads back to the States, he accuses her of being afraid to leave Griffin Creek with him. As they bicker, Olivia uses the sheets hanging on the clothesline as a barrier between them. Finally, at the end of his rope, Stevens charges through the sheets hanging on the line and grabs Olivia by the waist, pulling her forcefully to his chest. At the sound of their struggle, Patrick comes running from the house to defend his sister. He and Stevens fight until Olivia, pleading with them to stop, pulls them apart; Stevens storms off in anger. When Patrick says that he cannot even imagine what would make a man act like that, Olivia replies that the two men are not so very different from one another. When men gaze at women, theirs is a “regard masculin à la recherche de contrôle” (Sanaker 65).

Stevens heads back to Maureen’s, where he storms into the shed, kicks a pail, and overturns a bench. Throwing himself down onto sacks of grain lying on the floor, Stevens pounds them with his fists like a child having a temper tantrum at not getting his own way. His moans and stifled cries reveal his feelings of anger, frustration, and anguish. Sunlight pours into the shed through the window and door, bathing the rear of the screen with soft light. The crown of Stevens’ head is to the front of the screen facing the audience, his feet pointing away. The upended bench lies in such a way that it seems to support Stevens’ feet. Arms outstretched, feet braced by the bench, head in the forefront of the image, Stevens’ lies in a position not unlike that of a man condemned to death by
crucifixion. The inverted human form on-screen symbolizes Stevens’ impending death, a soul-death experienced as a result of emotional and spiritual bankruptcy. A number of film critics have compared Stevens to an antichrist; in fact, in the novel, Reverend Nicolas Jones refers to Stevens as the antichrist—“le dépositaire de toute la malfaisance sécrète de Griffin Creek, amassée au coeur des hommes et des femmes depuis deux siècles” (Hébert 27). Stevens’ return to Griffin Creek marks the beginning of the village’s decline and the diaspora of its inhabitants. Overwhelmed by his desire and unable to persuade Olivia to leave with him, Stevens resorts to using his phallus-knife to dominate and possess her; his violent crimes are symptomatic of the years of social and emotional dysfunction that have characterized life in Griffin Creek.

When asked why she thought Simoneau’s work was so different from her own, Hébert replied, “‘Le metteur en scène étant un homme a vu le film d’après sa vision d’homme’” (Slott “Agent” 24). Both Hébert and Simoneau depict the violence that results from living in a “‘communauté de gens très fermée, très réduite…où les sentiments sont contenus, retenus longtemps’” (Hébert in Ewing 100). Hébert portrays this violence from a woman’s point of view, Simoneau from a man’s. “Simoneau’s regard, though inevitably masculine, does not make him a sympathizer with rape and murder. The sickness of all the characters is adequately demonstrated by Hébert and preserved by Simoneau” (Pallister Cinema 189). Stevens Brown has been socialized to function in a world where violence and aggression are considered to be natural components of masculine behavior and justifiable means to maintain power and privilege. Rape is an act of violence, an attempt to dominate and control—two characteristics
traditionally tied to masculinity. At the end of both the film and the novel, Stevens’ anger, frustration and rage rejoin “‘la violence et la sauvagerie des éléments’” (100). The explosion of Stevens’ repressed emotional and sexual energy is reflected by the violence of the tempest that ravages Griffin Creek the night of the crimes.

Marie Couillard points out that Hébert’s novel reflects the general tendency of works written by Québec women at the end of the twentieth century that underscore the dire need for “une remise en question radicale non seulement de la condition faite à l’homme par les structures imaginaires et sociales d’un monde androcentrique, mais aussi de la nature des rapports hommes-femmes que de telles structures supposent” (97). While the adaptation is significantly different from the novel, the two narratives convey a similar message. Traditionally-defined male and female gender roles are revealed to be as destructive and as limiting for men as they are for women, and the violence that characterizes relationships between men and women based on male domination is made clear.

No one wins in Les fous de Bassan… There is no joyful victory for either sex in this community which has regarded life as a battle between masculine and feminine. The battle itself destroys all… Hébert’s characters self-destruct because they believe that masculine and feminine are opposing aspects of humanity which result in a hierarchical and conflictual relationship. (Harlin 134)

With his adaptation of Les fous de Bassan, Simoneau has conducted a subversive and innovative critique of gender and sexuality in patriarchal culture from a male point of view. Such an endeavor is consistent with, and worthy of, the novel that served as his inspiration.
Notes to Chapter 2

1 “Writing the body” is a feminist strategy used to challenge the limits of patriarchal discourse; by “writing the body” female authors seek to reinscribe women’s voices in a literary tradition that has refused to acknowledge their existence. Some critics assert that this strategy is ineffective as it essentializes traditional definitions of femininity.

2 As Olivia is the only character in the novel to hear the voices of the female ancestors, and as Stevens’ point of view is privileged in the adaptation, Simoneau does not attempt to use voice-over or sound off to symbolize their ethereal presence. Perhaps Olivia’s hesitation and discretion when approached by Stevens in the film might be interpreted as her awareness of their presence.

3 The two young adolescents playing Nora and Olivia in the adaptation are French and do speak with a Parisian accent. The film’s production was financed by both Canadian (80%) and French (20%) sources. The agreement stated that three French actors as well as several French technicians had to be used in its production (Cauchon C1). While the two French actresses playing Nora and Olivia could have faked québécois accents, the French accents serve to denaturalize their presence in a film where the politics of language is central to its ideology.

Le film est produit au coût de $3 million [canadiens] par Cinévidéo (productrice exécutive: Justine Héroux). 80% du financement provient de fonds canadiens (Téléfilm-Canada, Société générale de financement, Radio-Canada, Viva Film, Super-Écran et la société Le Permanent). Le 20% suivant est assuré par la chaîne française TF1. Une co-production, donc, qui a commandé l’engagement de trois comédiens français et de deux ou trois techniciens d’Outre-Atlantique. (C1)
By the time that Léa Pool decided to try her hand at adaptation, she had already distinguished herself as a filmmaker worthy of international recognition. Léa Pool directed A corps perdu in 1988, which, while her first attempt at film adaptation, was not her first full-length feature film. Pool had already directed three successful feature films before undertaking work on A corps perdu: Strass Café (1980), La femme de l’hôtel (1984), and Anne Trister (1986), each of which received prestigious international awards. La femme de l’hôtel alone garnered seven awards, including le prix L.-E.-Ouimet-Molson, le Génie de la meilleure actrice for Louise Marleau, and le Prix pour la fiction, in Crétail, France (Coulombe and Jean Dictionnaire 523). Of Pool’s earlier films, La femme de l’hôtel and Anne Trister are best known; each features a female protagonist who is an artist (a filmmaker in La femme de l’hôtel, a painter in Anne Trister), and treats the themes of wandering, loss, isolation, and alienation. In addition, both films have a lesbian subtext, as do Pool’s sixth feature film Emporte-moi (1999) and her latest work Lost and Delirious (2001) which, incidentally, is her first English-language film. To date, Pool has directed more than ten films, including seven full-length feature films and two
television documentaries; she “has achieved one of the most stable positions in contemporary Quebec cinema” (Marshall 231).

In this chapter, I present an overview of Pool’s body of work as a whole, a brief examination of her work on La demoiselle sauvage, and a substantial analysis of A corps perdu, her adaptation of Yves Navarre’s novel Kurwenal ou la part des êtres. Using Stam’s suggestions to look at adaptation as an intertextual relationship between a “‘hypotext’” (the written narrative) and a “‘hypertext’” (its film adaptation) which “transforms, modifies, elaborates, or extends” the hypotext, I argue that Léa Pool’s work in La demoiselle sauvage and in A corps perdu represents a legitimate extension of the formal and thematic elements of the written narratives from which they were adapted (“Beyond” 66). In this chapter, the question to be addressed is this: in what ways do Pool’s La Demoiselle sauvage and A corps perdu reflect a transformation, modification, elaboration and/or extension of Bille’s “La Demoiselle sauvage” and Navarre’s Kurwenal ou la part des êtres? To enable readers to grasp more fully the intertextuality of the rapport between the adaptation and its source novel, I will discuss the basic structure of both the written and visual narratives (plot, setting, structure, characterization) and suggest a rationale for Pool’s artistic choices in each film. In addition, I will include commentary on Pool’s use of a cinécriture éclatée in A corps perdu, an innovative use of photography (both black-and-white and color), slow motion, black-and-white documentary-style film footage, diegetic and non-diegetic sound, and flashbacks to create a viewing experience that challenges the style and feel of conventional Hollywood cinema. Following this, I will discuss the representation of gender and sexuality in
A corps perdu with respect to several key scenes that depict interactions between Pierre, David and Sarah (the primary characters of both the film and the novel) as a romantic trio and between Pierre and Quentin (Pierre’s lover following the trio’s breakup) as an exclusive couple.

Michel Euvrard classifies Pool as a “cinéaste néo-québécois”: one of the contemporary québécois filmmakers who emigrated to Québec from elsewhere around the globe (74). Born in Switzerland in 1950, Pool did not move to Québec until 1975—ten years after the advent of la Révolution Tranquille, the period of socio-cultural transformation often cited as the birthdate of the cinéma québécois. As Pool was neither born nor raised in Québec, her films do not reflect the socialist-realist tendency present in the dominant works of contemporary Québec cinema. Léa Pool is not so much interested in representing québécois sociopolitical concerns as she is in depicting the emotional nature of the human experience in an existential sense. She asserts that her goal is “‘donner forme à une matière brute, donner des impressions, traduire des émotions, combler une absence. Le cinéma n’est qu’une façon parmi d’autres d’y arriver’” (in Madore 14). Pool uses light and film much the same way as a more traditional artist would use oils and a canvas to convey her impressions and evoke the emotional states of her characters on-screen.

Whether or not Pool’s work can be labeled “feminist” or as belonging to cinéma de femmes has been argued by several well-known feminist film critics, including, among others, Janis Pallister, Mary Jean Green and Chantal Nadeau. In The Cinema of Québec, Pallister includes a lengthy discussion of Pool’s work in her chapter “Women’s Cinema,”
where she praises Pool’s ability to direct films in which “visual structures and ideological…stories fuse to present gyneopathic themes” and maintains that “Pool’s work clearly marks the entrance of the Québec cinema into worldwide feminist cinematic iconography” (121). Unlike Pallister, Green does not suggest that Pool is a feminist filmmaker in her article “Léa Pool’s La Femme de l’hôtel and Women’s Film in Québec.” Green makes a distinction between what it means to be a feminist filmmaker and what it means to contribute to women’s cinema. Not going so far as Pallister to categorize Pool’s work as “feminist,” Green does contend that Pool’s films “constitute a striking expression of a feminine cinematic voice” while “refus[ing] to enter a feminist polemic” (49). Green argues that Pool subverts “traditional cinematic representations of women’s reality” in her films, and that therefore Pool “has made an important contribution to what Teresa De Lauretis has defined as the project of women’s cinema: ‘to effect another vision: to construct other objects and subjects of vision, and to formulate the conditions of representability of another social subject’” (135).

Contrary to the assertions made by Pallister and Green, Nadeau contends that Pool can no more be classified as a feminist filmmaker than her work can be considered part of women’s cinema. In “Les femmes frappées de disparition,” Nadeau explains that “un women’s cinema contribue à construire la femme comme sujet social…dans une perspective féministe” and “non seulement comme sujet de film” (60). Nadeau argues that as Pool does not examine the roles of men and women in a social context, her work cannot be seen as contributing to women’s cinema. In “Les femmes,” Nadeau makes it clear that in her opinion,
Léa Pool pratique un cinéma de mise à distance du social...toute la trame discursive opère dans un univers intérieur intimiste. Et c’est justement parce que Pool fait un cinéma intimiste, construit des relations personnelles en retrait des échos des rapports hommes-femmes dans la société, qu’il apparaît impossible d’y voir les manifestations d’un cinéma féministe. (60)

This being said, as per Nadeau’s analysis, to refer to Pool as a femme cinéaste and to her work as belonging to cinéma de femmes would demonstrate a failure to grasp the sociocultural implications of feminist filmmaking and women’s cinema. “Chez Pool,” Nadeau explains, “les rapports hommes-femmes sont de l’ordre du singulier, du cas par cas” (60). Thus, while on the one hand, Pool does make films that challenge the narrative form of conventional Hollywood cinema, on the other, she does not intentionally create films to challenge the status quo of la condition féminine.

As for the director herself, when asked how she felt about the tendency of film critics to want to categorize her work as “cinéma de femmes,” Pool replied

“Quand on veut me placer dans la catégorie “cinéma de femmes”, je ne comprends pas ce que cela veut dire. La seule chose qui est vraie en ce qui concerne les femmes qui font du cinéma, c’est que nous ne sommes pas nombreuses... Je veux que mes films soient jugés à côté de ceux de Forcier, Lauzon, Arcand; à égalité. C’est pourquoi je ne veux plus qu’ils soient présentés dans les festivals de films de femmes.” (in Loiselle and Racine 49)

Pool considers the label “cinéma de femmes” restrictive; she sees herself as an independent artist with an original vision, not as a woman filmmaker or someone working under the auspices of “women’s cinema.” Pool’s world-view as an artist is more comparable to that of a humanist than that of a feminist; she is not eager to be grouped with other women who make movies—whether in Québec or elsewhere in the world.

Pool explains, “Homme ou femme, je ne fais pas la différence. Ce qui m’intéresse, c’est l’émotion, la beauté et la vérité que peuvent suggérer les images d’un film. Je milite pour
le cinéma” (in Lemieux C1). Nevertheless, the fact remains that Pool is best known for her portrayal of women’s lives in general, and for her representation of lesbian relationships in particular. Interestingly, this seems to exasperate Pool, who maintains that the experience of human sexuality spans a continuum, and that the concept of identity is fluid; she finds it “étrange que l’on se réfère toujours au thème de l’homosexualité en parlant de mes films, alors que les personnages vivent une bisexualité évidente” (Pool in Pérusse “Deux ou trois choses” 53).

Léa Pool has directed three adaptations to date: A corps perdu (1988), La demoiselle sauvage (1991), and Lost and Delirious (2001). Not one of these films is based on the work of a Québécois author. A corps perdu is adapted from Kurvenal ou la part des êtres, a novel written by Yves Navarre, a contemporary gay French author. La demoiselle sauvage was inspired by the novella of the same name penned by S. Corinna Bille, a Swiss author. As can be expected by those familiar with her work, Pool has had a hand in writing the screenplay for each of these films, collaborating with Marcel Beaulieu on A corps perdu, and with Laurent Gagliardi and Michel Langlois on La demoiselle sauvage. Both A corps perdu and La demoiselle sauvage are international co-productions, Québec-Swiss and French-Swiss respectively. Pool’s most recent adaptation, Lost and Delirious, was inspired by Susan Swan’s novel The Wives of Bath and is the first of Pool’s films for which she did not collaborate on the scenario; Judith Thompson is credited with having written the screenplay.

“La Demoiselle sauvage” is the story of a man named Elysée de A. who chances upon an anonymous young woman wandering through the mountainside. Elysée is a
hydroelectric engineer who works in the mountains from early spring to late autumn. He is responsible for the upkeep of a hydroelectric dam in the Swiss Alps, and thus spends a good part of the year alone at the dam. While on-site, Elysée makes his home in the watchtower located near the dam. He is married but lives alone; his wife works in the city and maintains their residence there. One day while trying to locate the source of a freshwater spring, Elysée sees a young woman wandering through the woods; her clothes are in tatters and she has a desperate air. When the young woman suddenly disappears from view, Elysée is unsure as to whether or not he actually saw her in the first place. Approaching the general area where he believes to have seen her, he finds her lying on the ground, having collapsed from exhaustion. Elysée takes the woman in and nurses her back to health. At first she stays in a run-down chalet located not far from the dam, refusing Elysée’s invitation to come live with him in the tower. However, as the summer comes to a close and the chill of the fall air settles in, she finally moves into the tower. Not knowing how to address the young woman, and having found her in the woods, Elysée refers to her as la Demoiselle sauvage. While her true identity remains unknown throughout the short story, it is implied that she was previously known as mademoiselle L., a woman originally from the region. That she is Madame D., the widow of a man believed to have committed suicide, is made known only at the end of the short story when the police find her remains on the riverbank and post a notice to this effect in the local newspaper.

At first, La Demoiselle says very little to Elysée about her past; gradually, she opens up to him and explains that her husband was very abusive toward her, and that he
is responsible for the scars that her body bears. She tells Elysée that she murdered her husband in self-defense, staging both his and her own suicide before rolling her car off a cliff and into the Rhône. As can be imagined, la Demoiselle is hiding from the authorities; Elysée keeps an eye on news updates concerning her case to keep abreast of the continuing police investigation. Eventually, Elysée and la Demoiselle become both emotionally and physically intimate with one another, enjoying a brief affair facilitated by their mutual anonymity. Neither really knows anything about the other or his/her past. Elysée tells la Demoiselle that they are able to love one another only because they are perfect strangers: “tu n’es pas toi mais une autre. Et moi, je ne suis pas moi mais un autre” (Bille 41).

November comes quickly. When Elysée tells la Demoiselle that he is obliged to return to the city, he insists that she remain hidden in the tower; the authorities are still trying to locate her for questioning. Inevitably, Elysée leaves la Demoiselle on her own. At first, he makes a conscientious effort to visit la Demoiselle in the mountains, bringing her food and supplies, and more importantly, providing human warmth and companionship. As time marches on, he finds himself increasingly overwhelmed at work and is unable to find an opportunity to return to visit la Demoiselle a third time. Feeling abandoned and alone, having “retrouv[é] toute sa vulnérabilité et le trouble des émotions dès qu’elle s’est attach[ée] à Elisée [sic],” la Demoiselle pines for her lover; finally, in her despair, she wanders off into the forest alone (Loiselle “Mal” 58). At the end of the story, Elysée is at work at his desk, feeling remorseful because he has not been able to visit la Demoiselle for some time; still, he takes some comfort in believing that she is safe.
and sound in the tower. When Elysée opens the morning paper, he discovers that the police have issued a notice indicating that they have found Madame D.’s remains washed up on the banks of the Rhône, “conservé miraculeusement intact”; Elysée is overcome with sorrow at her loss (Bille 53).

Pallister notes that Pool’s *La Demoiselle sauvage* is “loosely adapted from the novella by S. Corinna Bille,” and this is not in the least an understatement (Cinema 478). While many elements and indeed the basic structure of the written narrative are present in the adaptation, Pool has expanded Bille’s work to create a full-length feature film. The basic plot of the adaptation is consistent with that of the novella: Elysée meets a young woman in the mountains and nurses her back to health. The setting—the Swiss Alps—remains the same. The run-down chalet where Elysée first shelters *la Demoiselle* exists in the film as in the novella, but the tower overlooking the dam in the short story has become a warm, cozy mountain lodge in the film. In the written narrative, *la Demoiselle* pushes the car over the cliff into the river and remains safely on shore. In contrast, in the film, *la Demoiselle sauvage* attempts to commit suicide by driving her car over the cliff into the Rhône, and somehow miraculously escapes from the submerging Renault. Having survived the crash, she is rescued by Elysée with whom she lives “une dernière passion” “entre une tentative de suicide et un suicide réussi” (Loiselle “Mal” 56).

In the film as in the short story there are two primary characters, Elysée and *la Demoiselle sauvage*. However, in Pool’s adaptation, *la Demoiselle sauvage* is known as Marianne, and Elysée is not only married, he also has two young sons. In the short story, Bille demonstrates *la Demoiselle*’s growing dependence upon Elysée though passages
that depict her mental obsession with him and her refusal to leave the tower once Elysée has returned to the city. In the film, Marianne’s growing dependence upon, attraction to, and obsession with Elysée—a stranger who has taken her under his wing and who treats her gently, with kindness and respect—is apparent in scenes, for example, that depict her reaction to the sight of him dancing with his wife and interacting with his children at the fête, her attempts to reach Elysée by phone once he has returned to his family, and her decision to go look for him in the city before wandering off alone into the mountains at the end of the film. In addition to expanding the roles of Elysée’s wife and children in the film, Pool creates that of Elysée’s colleague, who informs him that the authorities are looking for a young Canadian nurse who murdered her husband; in the short story *la Demoiselle* confesses this aspect of her past to Elysée in confidence. This coworker’s comments concerning the murder and the police investigation spark a confrontation between Elysée and Marianne in the film.

While in Bille’s text the menace of the authorities and their investigation remain in the background, in Pool’s adaptation, the police actively pursue Marianne. An inspector and his assistant question Elysée as to whether the young woman might have taken shelter in the abandoned chalet nearby, and later search Elysée’s mountain home, suspicious that he might be harboring the criminal. Furthermore, whereas in Bille’s short story Elysée only mentions his intention to speak with a friend who is a lawyer on *la Demoiselle*’s behalf, in the film he actually meets with a lawyer to discuss Marianne’s situation. Through his conversation with the lawyer, Elysée comes to realize that he and Marianne truly are strangers to one another. The actual presence of a lawyer in the film
calls attention to how little Elysée really knows Marianne, whom the lawyer implies could be on drugs or have self-inflicted her wounds. Thus, in the process of adapting Bille’s novella, Pool has enhanced the characterization of the original work, elaborating on the roles of secondary characters only briefly mentioned in the written narrative (the lawyer, the authorities), and creating those of Elysée’s children and coworker. The more prominent roles of these secondary characters in the adaptation situate Elysée more firmly within a social context and serve as a striking contrast to Marianne’s isolation in the film.

Structurally, there are several differences between the composition of Bille’s text and that of the adaptation. For example, in the short story, both the introduction and the conclusion emphasize Elysée’s point of view. Bille’s novella opens with Elysée catching a glimpse of a young woman in the woods, and closes with Elysée reading a newspaper article that announces that la Demoiselle’s remains have been found in the exact same location where her car had been pulled from the river three months before. The circularity of the written narrative’s structure casts doubt on whether Elysée ever met the strange young woman in the first place; her remains are found exactly where they would have been all along after the accident, her body “miraculeusement intact” (Bille 53).

While the visual narrative also features a circular structure, in contrast to Bille’s text, Pool’s film opens not with Elysée chancing upon la Demoiselle sauvage in the woods, but rather with Marianne’s flight from the residence she shared with her husband. As the film begins, the camera pans the exterior of the apartment building and its surroundings. Little is heard during the opening sequence. The only words heard during
the establishing shots are “N’approche pas!”—Marianne’s warning to her husband not to come any closer. Pool uses sound off to signify the struggle taking place between Marianne and her husband in the upstairs apartment. As the skirmish continues, the scuffling of feet and the sound of breaking china are heard as the couple fights. Finally, the spectator hears a deep moan and the heavy thud of a body dropping to the floor; the battle is over. Marianne rushes out of the apartment, gets into her car, and flees to the mountainside. Coming to a halt at the top of a cliff overlooking the Rhône, Marianne hesitates at first, then guns the engine to propel the Renault over the edge and into the river. The camera follows the vehicle’s descent and submergence, capturing the rush of escaping air bubbles that rise to burst at the water’s surface. In the next image, a high-angle long shot, Marianne’s body has washed up on the riverbank. A black Bernese mountain dog nuzzles Marianne’s shoulder to rouse her from a semiconscious state; she pulls herself to her feet slowly and with great difficulty. Having survived the crash, she is soon to be rescued by Elysée with whom “en quelques semaines, en sursis, entre une tentative de suicide et un suicide réussi,” she lives “une dernière passion” (Loiselle “Mal” 56).

Marianne and Elysée live happily together until the time comes for him to return to the city. Before Elysée leaves, Marianne promises to turn herself in to the authorities after spending a few days alone in the mountains. However, she remains at the cabin for several weeks before finally going into the city to find Elysée in a last ditch effort to rekindle their intimacy. In the end, realizing that any future with Elysée is impossible, she abandons all hope and wanders off into the wilderness to die alone of a broken heart. At
the conclusion of the film, one day while out walking his black Bernese mountain dog, Elysée comes across a small group of villagers congregating near the water’s edge. Several law enforcement officers are examining the body of a young woman that has washed up on shore; a cameraman and news-reporter stand nearby. In voice-off, a reporter announces that

Cette jeune femme que la police a recherchée depuis le 20 août dernier a enfin été retrouvée. Son corps a été retiré du Rhône non loin de l’endroit même où, trois mois plus tôt, jour pour jour, une Renault bleue avait été repêchée. Un fait demeure inexplicable, cependant. Le corps de la jeune femme a été retrouvé intact, mystérieusement conservé.

The camera scans the faces of the gathered villagers, finally coming to rest on that of Elysée who seems confused and distressed by what he sees. Standing alone in silence at the place where Marianne’s body has been found—the same location as that where her body had earlier washed ashore—Elysée looks out over the river into the distance. The film ends where it began; Pool thus replicates the circular structure of Bille’s text, ending the opening sequence of the film with a long shot of Marianne’s body washed up on shore, and closing the film with the discovery of her remains in the same location.

“S’agit-il d’un second suicide, réussi cette fois? Ou bien, comme nous le laisse imaginer le magnifique plan de la fin, avec Elysée et ces habitants qui entourent le corps et qui disparaissent subitement du plan, d’un rêve de l’ingénieur?” (Roy “Beauté” 65).

Directed in 1988, Pool’s first adaptation, A corps perdu, inspired by Navarre’s Kurwenal ou la part des êtres, deals with many of the themes present in her other films—“exile, absence, torn love, the cry of silence, and the atemporality of existence,” and insists “on the sentiment of a perpetual quest” (Roy “Deviated Narrative” 97).
perdu is the story of a photojournalist named Pierre who, having suffered both professional and personal tragedies, tries to come to terms with the loss of meaning in his life by undertaking un dernier reportage on the city of Montréal, “La ville qui dilue.” In an interview with Edith Madore held shortly after the film’s release, Pool explains that she named the film after the French expression “à corps perdu” which means “‘se jeter à corps perdu dans quelque chose, dans une passion, dans une histoire…il y a un jeu de mots; le titre évoque aussi un accord qui est perdu…une relation qui se défait’” (Madore 12). Considering the subject matter treated in the film, the title of the English-language version of the film, Straight for the Heart, might perhaps have been better translated from the French as Heart and Soul.

Very little is written specifically on A corps perdu. The existing documentation includes a handful of brief film reviews, several lengthy interviews with Léa Pool published shortly after the film’s release, and two scholarly articles written on the use of photography in contemporary Québec cinema that include considerable discussion of A corps perdu. According to the available research materials, the only difficulties faced during the film’s pre-production period concerned the representation of male homosexuality in the adaptation. Evidently, the film’s original producers backed out of the project due to its homosexual content. It seems that Pool’s straightforward representation of male homosexuality in A corps perdu was enough to frighten the original producers even though, as Waugh points out,

Pool doesn’t project Pierre’s sexual nonconformity as political except in matter-on-fact terms of its utter ordinariness…this “matter-of-factness” of novel and script was enough…to panic the original producers, who backed out of the project because of the sensitivity of homoeroticism during the AIDS epidemic. (25)
This being the case, Pool was forced to look elsewhere for the financial support necessary to make A corps perdu. When producer Denise Robert, founder of Cinémaginaire, advised Pool to establish her own production company to protect her rights as a filmmaker, Pool did just that, creating Les Productions Léa Pool, Inc. in 1988. Roberts and Pool went on to work together to produce not only A corps perdu, but La Demoiselle sauvage (1991) and Mouvements du désir (1994) as well.

Waugh suggests that in choosing to adapt Navarre’s work, Pool selected a text written by

a novelist of many obvious affinities: for one thing, the filmmaker whose voice more than any other in Quebec film has articulated a certain lesbian sensibility gravitated to the work of France’s prize-winning gay novelist par excellence, Yves Navarre, a fellow chronicler of the risks and commitments on the margins of society. (25)

Interestingly, neither Pool nor Navarre considers the representation of homosexuality to be the most salient aspect of their respective works; for both Pool and Navarre, “l’amour est un et indivisible, de même nature quelle que soit l’orientation sexuelle des personnes concernées…” (Lannegrand 151). Thematically, Pool and Navarre’s respective bodies of work have a great deal in common; the themes of absence, alienation, love, abandonment, loss, and exile are central to both the visual and written narratives.⁴ For both Pool and Navarre,

les recherches de soi et de l’Autre représentent deux des aspects fondamentaux de l’œuvre…l’accordance avec autrui étant l’une des conditions de l’équilibre personnel… [le personnage principal] recherche le lien, la communication avec autrui, il a besoin de la figure de réconfort de l’Autre, de son attention, de son amour… l’identité n’est pas à rechercher dans la différence sexuelle mais dans le sentiment et l’émotion partagés. (147, 151)
Moreover, both Pool and Navarre emphasize the importance of artistic expression in their characters’ efforts to come to terms with their relationship to self and Other in the modern world. In *Kurvenal ou la part des êtres*, Navarre tells the story of a photojournalist who tries to overcome his grief and guilt by undertaking *un reportage* on Paris. In *La femme de l’hôtel*, Pool depicts the story of a filmmaker named Andréa who comes to Montréal to make a movie about a mysterious *comédienne chanteuse* who needs time to find herself, to recover a sense of autonomy that will free her of others’ perceptions and expectations. In *Anne Trister*, Pool again presents a female protagonist, this time a painter named Anne who journeys to Montréal following the death of her father in an effort to come to terms with his loss and to “find herself” through her art. Like Pierre in Navarre’s *Kurvenal ou la part des êtres*, Andréa (*La femme de l’hôtel*) and Anne (*Anne Trister*) use art to make sense of their worlds. Pool explains that like filmmaking or painting, “‘la photographie est un acte créateur…c’est dans la création artistique qu’on trouve le moyen de se reprendre en mains et de passer au travers de charges émotives trop fortes…d’aller jusqu’au bout de [soi]-même, dépasser la folie pour exister à nouveau’” (in Suchet “Vertiges” 94). It is not hard to understand why Pool would be drawn to adapt Navarre’s *Kurvenal ou la part des êtres*, considering the preoccupation with artistic expression and human experience that is evident in both their bodies of work.

Yves Navarre’s *Kurvenal ou la part des êtres* is a story about a photojournalist named Pierre Kurvenal who has a tendency toward the tragic and sordid. In the beginning of the novel, Pierre is on assignment in Lebanon. Having been told to
document the lives of those belonging to an international corps of militiamen occupying the war-torn country, Pierre photographs not only the mundane elements of their daily existence, but also the sordid realities of their guerrilla tactics. One day, while the soldiers scrutinize a deserted village, Pierre notices movement in the distance; women and children are coming slowly down from the mountainside where they had taken refuge from hostile forces. Believing that these villagers have been saved, Pierre eagerly draws the commander’s attention to their approach. Yet instead of instructing his men to assist the returning villagers, the commander orders his men to fire on them at will. Pierre looks on helplessly as the soldiers mow down innocent women and children with their machine guns; he stands motionless as the soldiers mutilate their corpses, using babies’ heads as bayonet ornaments and repeatedly running jeeps over their lifeless bodies. Horrified by what has happened, Pierre experiences a crise de conscience, deeply questioning his passivity in the face of man’s inhumanity to man. Up to this point, Pierre has simply followed the militiamen “comme un automate. Boulot… l’appareil l’isol[ant] quand à l’œil nu, il ne supporterait rien du carnage” (Navarre 42-43). Now, having witnessed such brutality and feeling somehow responsible for what has occurred, Pierre can no longer justify his tolerance of the atrocities that play out before him by telling himself that he is only exercising a detachment necessitated by his profession.

As if the upheaval in his professional life were not enough to substantiate his impending emotional and psychological breakdown, upon returning to Paris the following day, Pierre discovers that David and Sarah, his two long-term lovers, have left him. After living with Pierre for over twenty years, David and Sarah moved out of their home.
shared apartment on *Impasse Gustave-Moreau* while Pierre was away on assignment. By situating their apartment in *Impasse Gustave-Moreau*, Navarre suggests both the inevitable ending of the twenty-year relationship and the existential crisis that calls for Pierre’s radical transformation of his self-concept. Struggling with the ethical questions implying his tacit involvement with the massacre of innocents, and traumatized by his lovers’ abrupt departure and condemning silence, Pierre undergoes a severe depression, having lost the *repères* that gave his life meaning and purpose. In an attempt to cope with the recent tragedies he has experienced, Pierre decides to carry out “un reportage sur Paris: la ville qui dissolue” (Navarre 17). Shielded by his camera, Pierre creates an artificial subject position from which he tries to attribute order and meaning to the world around him. Pierre’s art—photography—combines “perspective and line, suggesting connections and the establishment of some kind of subject position from which to make sense of the world” (Marshall 235). Sadly, he only succeeds in further isolating himself from those around him, remaining on the margins of society, an outsider looking in through the camera eye. By the end of the novel, having totally withdrawn from society, Pierre seeks refuge in a mental hospital.

Lannegrand explains that in *Kurwenal ou la part des êtres*, Navarre privileges “une écriture éclatée, morcelée, dont la forme rappelle le motif de l’errance et de l’exil intérieur… [C’est] un texte qui ne s’inscrit pas dans un genre littéraire précis, qui échappe aux catégories communément admises pour classifier une technique d’écriture” (144). The novel is divided into three distinct parts and begins with a brief introduction of the “omniscient” narrator and his endeavor: to reconstruct Pierre’s life with help “de la
part des êtres,” those whose lives Pierre has somehow touched and who provide letters, photos, journal entries, and taped interviews describing their relationship with him. There are forty-four individual chapters in all that make up the written narrative, each representing a témoignage to Pierre Kurwenal’s existence. The narrator explains that “le véritable portrait sera en creux. On verra les autres. Le défilé des autres…” (Navarre 15-16). The first part of the novel, made up of six individual chapters, is a prologue introducing the narrator and providing background information on Kurwenal’s assignment abroad and his ensuing ethical dilemma. The second part is a section that I shall refer to as “Parallel Lives,” made up of thirteen chapters alternately narrated by Pierre, David and Sarah that cover the events that take place from the time of Pierre’s return late Saturday evening through the following Monday evening. The chapters of “Parallel Lives” alternately portray Pierre, David and Sarah’s emotional states immediately following their separation, implying their continuing presence in each other’s lives and confirming their individual efforts to reconnect with one another. The third and final part of the novel, “Documentation,” is composed of twenty-five brief chapters that represent taped interviews, journal entries, photographs with captions, dialogues, dreams and events (e.g. dinner in a restaurant for the blind, meeting Quentin in a nightclub). By the end of Kurwenal ou la part des êtres, Pierre describes his perceptions of others and his surroundings as a series of qualified snapshots.

While Pierre Kurwenal is the common thread that runs through each of the chapters and binds them together, there is no one character to be identified as the main character of the novel. “La forme adoptée [par Navarre] ne permet pas de se référer à un
caractère unitaire…[La] parcellisation du texte tend à souligner le lien entre réalité et fiction et à rendre compte de la multiplicité de la vie” (Lannegrand 144-45). The text is multi-vocal, featuring témoignages by various individuals who had been acquainted with Pierre during his lifetime, including, among others, his lovers [David Callavagio (a history teacher), Sarah Cardini (a publicity/advertising agent) and Quentin Beulard (deaf-mute, a window-washer by trade)], employer (Stephen Malaurie of Trans World Press France Limited, whom Pierre addresses only as “Patron” in the novel), childhood governess (Noémie Berthollet, who raised Pierre and now continues to serve as his mother’s housekeeper and companion), and psychologist (Dr. J. W. Cruy, director of the mental hospital in which Pierre seeks refuge at the end of the novel). Each chapter represents a different point of view; the various témoignages present a rétrospective of a certain period of Pierre’s adult life, in much the same way as Pierre’s employer, Trans World Press, will publish a rétrospective solo of pictures taken by Pierre during his career as a photojournalist.

It is important to note the presence of several other characters in the text whose voices are represented within the chapters but are not the sole focus of any one chapter in particular. For example, Pierre’s mother is present in chapters depicting his return to his childhood home, and Tristan, Pierre’s feline friend, is a continuing presence at the apartment on Impasse Gustave-Moreau. In addition, there are those whom Sarah and David encounter on their own following the dissolution of their relationship: Michel, a co-worker of Sarah’s with whom she strikes up a rapport, “Jean-quelque chose” whom she meets at work and with whom she has a one-night stand, and Roland, whom David
meets one evening at the cinema and with whom he goes home for the night. Michel, Jean and Roland’s presence in the novel implies David and Sarah’s listlessness and their subsequent efforts to fill the emotional hole resulting from Pierre’s absence.

While Pool was initially concerned with questions of fidelity relative to the source text, Navarre himself dissuaded her from trying to follow his novel too closely. When asked how she felt about producing her first adaptation, Pool shared, “‘for me, it was a new experience to produce an adaptation. In the beginning, I didn’t want to change anything from the book because it was so well written. But he [Navarre] told me, ‘I made the book, you make your film’” (in Bor 67). Pool sketched the main outline of the scenario herself before collaborating with Marcel Beaulieu on its final version. A corps perdu is a film about Pierre Kurwenal’s struggle to resolve an identity crisis brought on by the loss of his long-term lovers and the ethical questions raised during his time on assignment in war-torn Nicaragua. The establishing shots and conclusion of A corps perdu are significant as they frame the visual narrative and situate the story as told from Pierre’s point of view. The introductory sequence positions Pierre relative to the personal and professional/ethical issues that he will face through the course of the film. A corps perdu opens with a still image of a foreign landscape, complete with palm trees, tall grass, and a dirt road winding through the countryside. In a matter of moments, the image comes to life: the wind blows through the trees, the grass sways side to side, and the birds sing. A long shot captures the movement of a rundown commuter bus rolling along the country road, proceeding from the upper left corner of the frame where the road begins, to center screen. Pool quickly draws the viewers’ attention to Pierre by cutting to a
medium close-up of a middle-aged man looking out one of the bus windows. A shot/reverse-shot sequence of Pierre looking out the window, of the scenery that would be glimpsed from this angle, and then back to Pierre emphasizes that it is his perspective that the viewer is encouraged to share on this journey of self-discovery.

Pierre daydreams while gazing out the window at the passing scenery; Pool uses voice-over to introduce Pierre’s relationship with David and Sarah. A voice begins “Mais non, tu ne la regardais pas comme ça,” cueing the transition from the medium close-up of Pierre looking out the window to a black-and-white three-shot of Pierre, David and Sarah seated at a café table, celebrating the tenth anniversary of their relationship with one another. Pierre is recounting the story of how they came to live together as a romantic threesome; a waiter brings a cake to their table. Pool uses black-and-white, documentary-style film footage to differentiate what is taking place in Pierre’s mind from what actually takes place in film-time present. Cutting back to the medium close-up of Pierre gazing out the window, the camera pans right to encompass the image of the man seated next to Pierre on the bus. The stranger is trying to strike up a conversation with Pierre without much success. When Pierre asks the stranger if he is Québécois and gets a positive response, Pierre tells the man that he is Québécois too. The stranger does not seem to believe him; he gives Pierre a funny look, and replies “Vous avez un drôle d’accent.”

The outline of a profound alienation, both personal and professional, is already established in the first few minutes of Léa Pool’s A Corps Perdu: not only does the brooding Pierre have nothing in common with his chatty compatriot, but he seems also to have nothing to say to the Nicaraguans whose struggle he is recording. (Waugh 25)
Both men are *gringos* from Québec, yet they have little else in common with one another. When the stranger takes photos of his wife and kids from of his wallet to share them with Pierre, rather than show photos of his own, Pierre tells him, “J’aime David. J’aime Sarah. Et j’aime Tristan. Un homme, une femme, et un chat.” The stranger lowers his eyes and says nothing; Pierre’s *ménage à trois* flies in the face of conventionality. Pierre’s mention of his two lovers in this brief exchange with the stranger cues another, black-and-white, documentary-style sequence: a shower scene depicting the morning routine of a day in the life of Pierre, David and Sarah’s shared existence as lovers.

When Pool cuts back to the medium two-shot of Pierre and the stranger, the bus driver is slowing to a halt due to having been flagged down by guerilla soldiers: “Merde, encore une fouille.” Pierre and the stranger stand by as the Contras evacuate the vehicle, separate two men from the crowd, and then send the bus and its remaining passengers on their way. The last to reboard, Pierre does not take his seat; he remains standing in the rear exit so that he can better observe the interaction taking place between the Contras and the two civilians at the side of the road. Pool cuts from the long shot of the Contras and their prisoners to a medium close-up of Pierre, camera in hand and at ready, watching from the doorway. The shot taken over Pierre’s left shoulder as he looks out at the events that unfold before his eyes helps the viewer empathize with Pierre’s point of view. When the soldiers gun down the two civilians in cold blood right before his eyes, Pierre, not having the time to think or focus carefully, instinctively points and shoots, capturing the execution on film.10
As the bus picks up speed, Pool cuts from the medium close-up of Pierre to an isolated, slow-motion sequence of black-and-white photos that recap the events that took place just moments before. These images are accompanied by the sound of machine-gun fire in spite of the fact that the execution has already taken place. “La bande sonore laissant échapper les coups de feu des mitraillettes recontextualise, restitue le contexte, [donnant] une durée à ces images photographiques filmées plein cadre” (Pérusse “Statut” 116). Not only does the viewer see what Pierre has seen, from Pierre’s point of view, but s/he is also shown the impression that the tragic events have made on Pierre’s perception of the world around him. “Les lieux, les événements, les individus font ‘impression’ sur lui, au même titre que la mécanique photographique, que l’inscription de la lumière sur la pellicule” (116). By incorporating still, black-and-white photographs into a movie filmed in color, Pool fragments images that would otherwise flow continuously before the viewers’ eyes and enable the mesmerizing illusion of the seamless text. “L’image fixe entraîne une appréhension conceptuelle de l’espace et du temps qui tient compte de l’outillage” and obliges the viewer “non plus à s’abolir dans le processus de ‘fictionnalisation,’ mais à regarder” (Larouche 142).

Following a brief scene depicting Sarah at work in Montréal, Pierre is again seen in the company of soldiers in a small village, where he takes a moment to explain how a camera works. Hearing the sound of villagers coming toward him, Pierre goes out into the middle of the road to take pictures of them as they approach. When a young boy runs out ahead of the other villagers, Pierre goes down on one knee to better capture the boy’s
image on film. When the boy’s father runs out to try to restrain his son, the soldiers gun down father and son in cold blood.

Kurwenal prend fébrilement des photos, avant tout fasciné, “médusé” par l’acte photographique plutôt que par l’événement. En photographiant la mort en direct de l’enfant et la douleur de la mère en deuil, le photographe agit… “comme un pur collectionneur d’images, d’émotions sans [sembler] se soucier de l’état dans lequel cette femme se retrouve.” (Gingras in Pérusse “Statut” 113)

Pierre photographs the villagers’ reactions to their deaths as if oblivious to the human tragedy unfolding before him.

When the boy’s mother realizes that Pierre is taking pictures of her as she cradles her dead son in her arms, she looks him directly in the eyes and cries out “Perro! Assassino!”—“accusing him and all photographers of complicity in their images” (Waugh 25). Assuming that the woman is addressing the soldiers who murdered her child, Pierre looks back over his left shoulder to see the men who must be standing behind him, but there is no one there. It is at this point that the ethical questions facing Pierre are made clear. Does a photographer—or filmmaker’s—passive recording of such occurrences entail his/her tacit collaboration in such tragic events? In A corps perdu, Pool examines “le potential voyeuriste…le désir de voir et la fascination pour le sordid et le morbide [du photographe]”—a potential commented on in the film when Pierre’s mother asks him if he is the one responsible for the photos she sees in newspapers and magazines of the tragedies taking place abroad: “C’est de toi la photo de l’enfant piétonné? Pourquoi tu fais toujours des photos…?” (Pérusse “Statut” 113) This episode is not included in the novel; in Navarre’s text, the massacre of the villagers coming down out of hiding in the mountains prompts Pierre’s introspection with respect to professional ethics.
In the film as in the novel, Pierre, Sarah, David and Quentin are the primary characters. While Pierre’s mother, governess, employer and psychologist are all present in the film, Pool has omitted several of the secondary characters in the novel to facilitate its adaptation to the screen. Kurwenal is the name designated by the title of the original novel, and Pierre’s presence is consistent throughout the written narrative. His character is the thread that ties all of the interviews, letters, and journal entries that make up the novel together. Moreover, the selective focus on Pierre enables Pool to examine her own standpoint as an artist and filmmaker. As in La femme de l’hôtel and Anne Trister, in A corps perdu, Pool takes advantage of a scenario that features an artist as the protagonist in order to examine her own politics as an artist and filmmaker in the modern world.11

Lannegrand describes the narrative form of Navarre’s Kurwenal ou la part des êtres as “une écriture éclatée, morcelée” (144); her assessment is based on Navarre’s use of mini-chapters, multiple points of view, and diverse expository forms (letters, journal entries, captioned photos, and transcriptions of tape-recorded interviews). During an interview with Léo Bonneville, Pool explains that while she was fascinated by the structure of Kurwenal ou la part des êtres, she did not purposefully try to recreate Navarre’s écriture éclatée; nevertheless, in the adaptation, “on retrouve une structure cinématographique assez similaire”—une cinécriture éclatée (“Pool” 14). In A corps perdu, Pool uses black-and-white and color photography, slow motion, black-and-white documentary-style film footage, diegetic and non-diegetic sound, and irregular flashback sequencing to produce a cinécriture éclatée with which she challenges the style and feel of conventional Hollywood cinema.

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While Navarre’s novel is divided into three main sections: The “Prologue,” “Parallel Lives,” and “Documentation,” Pool’s adaptation can be described as having four distinct parts: The “Prologue”—Pierre on assignment in Nicaragua and his return to Montréal; “Parallel Lives (Too)”—Pierre’s discovery that David and Sarah have left him and his efforts to reconcile their differences; “Le reportage”—Pierre’s attempt to come to terms with his loss by undertaking a photo-journal on Montréal, and “The End”—the completion of Pierre’s reportage and his taking refuge in a mental hospital. Both in the novel and in the film, the “Prologue” represents Pierre’s experiences as a photojournalist in a war-torn country and the guilt he feels as a result of his passive detachment in the face of the human tragedies witnessed abroad. While the event responsible for Pierre’s professional crise de conscience in the film differs from that of the source text, the ethical implications of Pierre’s inaction and cool detachment in the face of such tragedies remain. Furthermore, Pool establishes the importance of Pierre’s relationships with David and Sarah early on in the film by twice crosscutting to scenes depicting the happy threesome at home together in Montréal to communicate Pierre’s thoughts as he gazes out of the bus window in Nicaragua. Although physically Pierre is thousands of miles from Montréal, emotionally, he is very much connected to his two lovers back home.

The second part of the film, “Parallel Lives (Too),” functions much the same in the film as it does in the source text, sharing the purpose of demonstrating how interconnected the lives of the three lovers have become. Upon return to his apartment in Montréal, Pierre is unaware that David and Sarah have left him; it is late in the evening, and he assumes that David and Sarah are fast asleep in the bedroom. However, he quickly
figures out that David and Sarah have left him and rushes out of the apartment in desperate search of his two lovers. Pool cuts from a long shot of Pierre descending the stairs that lead up to his apartment to a medium shot of David sitting with his back against the far wall of a large room cluttered with unopened moving crates. David and Sarah are in the middle of an argument about leaving Pierre. David is feeling guilt and remorse at not having been able to prevent the break-up—“Il y a sûrement quelque chose qu’on a mal fait. On aurait pu mieux faire.” Unable to reassure David that the break-up was inevitable, Sarah storms out of the apartment. This begins a sequence of crosscuts from a long shot of Pierre running left to right through the city streets in search of his two lovers to individual long shots of David and Sarah, David in pursuit of Sarah, both running in the direction opposite that taken by Pierre—right to left.

Ultimately, David catches up with Sarah takes her in his arms; Pool uses a medium two-shot to frame the lovers’ embrace, situating David and Sarah as a couple. Pool’s immediate crosscut to a medium shot of Pierre alone makes it seem as if he, David and Sarah have simultaneously come to an abrupt halt on either side of an invisible wall: impasse. In the next image, David and Sarah turn and walk back to their new apartment, this time traveling from left to right; at the same time, Pierre abandons his desperate search for David and Sarah, does an about-face and returns home alone, taking the direction opposite that taken by David and Sarah: right to left. While the wall that has come between them as lovers is not visible to the naked eye, the truth of its existence is irrefutable. A corps perdu is above all a film about “les murs qui existent dans les têtes et
After this sequence depicting Pierre’s anguish over the loss of his lovers, there is a series of short episodes alternately depicting events that take place the following day in Pierre, Sarah and David’s individual lives: Pierre developing the photos he took while in Nicaragua and presenting them to his employer; Sarah and her friend Michèle on the way home from music practice, Sarah asking Michèle if she can stay with her for a few days; David at work in the aquarium, telling a subordinate that one of the dolphins is dying of “une peine d’amoureux.” These three scenes are followed in turn by a triptych depicting Pierre walking the city streets alone at night, struggling to come to terms with his personal and professional dilemma; Pierre confronting Sarah at Michèle’s apartment, and Pierre confronting David at the aquarium. In “Parallel Lives (Too),” Pool has adopted a cinematic structure echoing that of her former films: “une structure construite sur des parallèles, sur des éléments de récurrence, sur une manipulation des notions de temps et d’espace ainsi que sur un refus de raconter une histoire selon des schémas traditionnels” (Suchet “Vertiges” 94). Pool’s work in *A corps perdu* reflects the style of Navarre’s “Parallel Lives” in *Kurwenal ou la part des êtres*, representing the nature of the three lovers’ lives as interconnected despite the physical distance that has come between them.

During “Parallel Lives (Too),” there are three scenes that are particularly interesting with respect to the presentation of Pierre’s perspective following the events that have forced him to reexamine his personal and professional lives. In the first sequence, having stayed up all night to develop the photos he took while on assignment
in Nicaragua, Pierre takes the metro to the offices of Trans World Press France Limited where he submits his photos to his employer Stephen Malaurie. While en route, Pierre scans the faces of the other passengers riding in the same car. Initially, the reverse shots from Pierre’s point of view seem normal enough: a close-up of a young woman sitting on the opposite side of the car, a medium shot of a mature woman riding alone, a profile of an older man standing in the center of the car, a medium close-up of an elderly woman looking out the window, and a medium close-up of a teenage boy. These images are in color; the camera catches the natural movement of the other passengers as they read books, listen to music, and are swayed by the motion of the metro car as it travels through the tunnel. Once the camera eye has surveyed the mundane experience of a morning metro ride, Pool cuts to a black-and-white photograph of Nicaraguan soldiers striding by two corpses lying at the side of the road. The memory of the two civilians murdered in cold blood before his eyes surfaces to alter Pierre’s conscious experience of the world around him in time present.

When Pool cuts back to a medium shot of Pierre on the metro, it is evident that his perceptions of his immediate surroundings have changed. Pierre now sees the others riding with him as lifeless objects, the reverse shots from his point of view are black-and-white photo stills: medium close-ups of a woman reading a book and of a young woman leaning against the side of the metro car, a close-up of the back of a middle-aged man’s head, and a medium close-up of a boy wearing a set of stereo headphones. Pierre’s perception of the world around him is distorted by the growing depression he feels as a result of the tragic deaths he witnessed in Nicaragua and of his abandonment by his two
long-term lovers. “Pierre ‘absorbe’ le réel de manière photographique. Le récit est truffé de photos (filmées plein cadre) sans que celles-ci ne soient annoncées par un geste de Pierre ou son appareil mais qui donnent à voir le regard que Pierre pose sur les êtres ou les choses” (Pérusse “Statut” 116).

Once at Trans World Press, Pierre turns the photos over to Malaurie who raves about their quality and originality. When he congratulates Pierre on his work, Pierre suddenly begins to feel lightheaded. Gazing out the office window at the other buildings in the busy downtown district, he is nauseated by what he sees. At first, when the camera shows a reverse shot of the buildings adjacent to that of Malaurie’s office from what must be Pierre’s point of view, it is obvious that the other office buildings are in good shape and currently in use. However, the initial reverse shot from Pierre’s point of view fades and is replaced by one of abandoned buildings in disrepair, black-and-white footage depicting bare concrete walls and metal construction rods. When Malaurie asks Pierre why he does not respond, Pierre tells him that he is “sur un autre coup…Il faut que je le fasse maintenant…[Montréal:] ‘La ville qui dilue.’” Pierre quickly turns his focus once again to the skyline and to the city streets below, gazing out the office window, watching cars pass through the intersection below. This time, the reverse shot from Pierre’s point of view changes to that of a closed elevator shaft; Pierre suddenly feels as if he is falling and that nothing can prevent the fall. Malaurie’s voice drones on and on, but Pierre no longer hears him. He leans back against the wall, trying to compose himself, but the image of falling though a long tunnel flashes before his eyes once again and he is overcome by a vertigo intensified by his emotional and physical exhaustion.13 Devastated
by the loss of his loved ones and nauseated by the brutality of the events witnessed
abroad, Pierre sees the world in which he lives as corrupt, in ruins, wasting away.

Once having left Malaurie’s office, Pierre wanders the city streets; he is obviously
in emotional turmoil. Striding briskly from right to left, contrary to the left to right
movement considered normal by Western readers, Pierre thinks back to what he
witnessed while on assignment abroad. To illustrate Pierre’s confusion, Pool crosscuts
back and forth between images of Pierre walking through Montréal and images of the
tragedies he witnessed in Nicaragua. The scene opens with a medium shot of Pierre
walking along the city streets, followed by a series of black-and-white photos depicting
the execution of the young boy in the village. From the image of the child’s body lying in
the middle of the road, Pool cuts to a medium close-up of Pierre making his way through
downtown Montréal, a contemplative look on his face.

After reestablishing the fact that the viewer is seeing things from Pierre’s point of
view, Pool cuts to another series of black-and-white photos, this time of the two
Nicaraguan civilians who had ridden the same bus as Pierre and been singled out by the
Contras during a random search. “Les images photos surgissent et s’effacent aussitôt,
détachées de la continuité observée ou vécue par le reporter, brouillant la linéarité du
récit” (Pérusse “Statut” 117). Finally, Pool cuts from this footage back to the medium
close-up of Pierre walking through the city streets alone at night. When a passerby
traveling in the opposite direction bumps into Pierre unexpectedly, striking his right
shoulder, the echo of machine-gun fire is heard in sound off. Taken aback, Pierre recoils
from the impact as if in great physical pain. Pool cuts from the shot of Pierre reacting to
the blow to a black-and-white photo of Nicaraguan soldiers marching past the dead bodies of two civilian men lying at the side of the road. “‘Tout se passe à Montréal, mais le regard du personnage sur la ville est complètement subjective’” (Pool in Madore 15). The extent to which Pierre’s experiences abroad have an effect on his present perception of reality is evident; Pierre’s past experience, his memories, impinge upon his conscious experience of the present. By the end of “Parallel Lives,” having already approached both Sarah and David in turn to no avail, Pierre is ready to begin his reportage on Montréal. “Ce ne sera que dans la réalisation d’un journal photographique (travail de deuil qui consiste à pétrifier, figer, tuer les êtres aimés) et son refuge dans la folie qu’il reviendra à la vie” (Pérusse “Statut” 118).

The third part of the film, “Le reportage” begins with a medium close-up of Pierre at home alone, head down on the kitchen table, cradling Tristan in his arms. When the phone rings, Pierre jumps up but does not grab the handset, preferring to screen his calls. When the answering machine clicks on, it is obvious that Pierre has not changed the greeting that was taped when the three lovers were still together. Pierre leaves the room for a moment, then comes back to stand by the small table in the corridor on which the answering machine has been placed. His memory is jolted by the sound of David and Sarah’s voices on the answering-machine greeting: “Sarah Cardini, David Genton, et Pierre Kurwenal… N’oubliez pas de préciser lequel—ou laquelle—you désirez. Un, deux, trois—au’voir!” Leaning with his back against the wall, Pierre slides down until he is sitting on the floor next to the phone stand. Once Malaurie has left his message, Pierre plays the greeting once more. This time, upon hearing the sound of
David and Sarah’s voices, he flashes back to a morning when they were all having 
breakfast together. Pierre and David are seated at the kitchen table, David reading the 
morning paper, Pierre resting with his head down on an outstretched arm. Sarah is milling 
about the table sipping coffee from Pierre’s cup. When Sarah offers to return the cup to 
Pierre, he does not respond. As such, she places the cup on the saucer to Pierre’s right, 
goes to the opposite side of the table, and has a seat. Then, for no apparent reason, Pierre 
reaches out and swipes both cup and saucer off the table with his free arm; they fall to the 
floor in a clatter. Not one word is spoken. Discord… the sound of breaking china is 
symbolic of the relationship coming to an end, Pierre’s heart breaking as he tries to let go 
of those whom he loves. At the end of the scene, back at the apartment alone, Pierre 
lowers his head, wraps his arms around his knees, and curls up in a fetal position. 

The next day, Pierre “instinctively starts documenting the fragments of his 
identity, his vocation and his relationships as they disintegrate before his eyes” (Waugh 
25). First, he goes to the concert hall where Sarah practices with the other members of the 
symphony orchestra; the hall is vacant. Pierre takes pictures of the empty chairs and 
music stands, black-and-white photos lacking color, lifeless: Sarah is not there. The 
project continues. Pierre wanders the city streets, taking snapshots of graffiti scrawled 
across the walls of an abandoned building (“Y a-t-il une vie avant la mort?”), at the city 
dump, of vacant factories and office towers, in metro tunnels, of city buses and 
abandoned railroad passenger cars in disrepair. “Les divers cadrages de la ville (photos 
souvent décadrées, décentrées) traduisent la dérive, la déroute du personnage. Il y a une 
sorte d’homologie entre les strates oubliées, anonymes de la ville photographiée et les
strates de l’inconscient de Pierre, sa dérive en lui-même” (Pérusse “Statut” 114). Pierre haunts the streets of Montréal, taking snapshots of David walking down the sidewalk alone; of Sarah leaving Michèle’s apartment, in the metro, and at the hairdresser’s; of David leaving the cinema or walking past the café where Pierre sits looking out the window; of David and Sarah walking arm-in-arm together, now a couple. Lastly, Pierre steps into a Polaroid photo booth and takes four black-and-white snapshots of himself: self-portrait. By the end, Pierre has become so introspective, so depressed, so removed from the reality of everyday existence that he has become an object in his own eyes.

Then one night, Pierre decides to go to a nightclub for a drink and chances upon Quentin, a deaf-mute who communicates with others through his eyes. Pierre, a photographer and artist, comprehends the language of the unspoken word, of the look, of gestures. Pierre first noticed Quentin while meeting with Malaurie at Trans World Press. Distracted, Pierre was staring out the window when Quentin—“on duty”—descended from the sky. The fact that Quentin is a window-washer is significant; his skills literally enable others to see more clearly. Symbolically, Quentin has the power to help heal others’ misperceptions. Moreover, if, as often said, the eyes are the windows to the soul, Quentin might also have the ability to soothe others’ soul sickness and heartache. Quentin’s love and affection provide Pierre with a brief reprieve from the heartache he experiences following his break-up with David and Sarah. Through the course of “Le reportage,” Pierre reviews the events of the last three months and begins to realize that he took David and Sarah for granted: “Je me suis conduit en propriétaire avec toi David, et avec toi Sarah…” Looking back over photos taken during their time together, he writes:
“La faute à qui? Jamais de coupables; il n’y a que de l’amour mal exprimé.” The three overlapping photos on the desk with the caption “Jamais de coupables” introduce the sequence that represents Pierre’s awareness that his relationship with David and Sarah is truly over. The caption, written directly on the photos themselves, indicates the true meaning of Pierre’s search, revealed when the elderly woman in the café explains “avoir des comptes à régler, dans le sens que vous voulez, c’est arriver à ne plus avoir mal seul.”

Pool cuts from the close up of the three photos lying on the table to a long shot of Pierre, David and Sarah together at the beach on a chilly day. They run across the sand together, laughing and playing until they finally collapse, their three bodies entwined as if one as evidenced by a close up of their feet. This sequence, two minutes (if that) in length, is composed of a series of ten color photos strung together as if in slow motion, accompanied by the trio’s joyful shouting and laughter in sound off.

La succession des images photographiques évoquant le passé harmonieux de ce trio est tellement dynamisée, animée par la bande sonore (cris de joie des protagonistes, bruit de la mer en off), par le montage et par les cadrages qu’à la réception, on pourrait y voir une séquence filmique (Pérusse “Statut” 117).

The fact that the sequence is in color signifies Pierre’s continuing love for David and Sarah. It seems as if the scene could be part of a home movie recorded during happier times. Still, the discontinuous flow of the images betrays the composition of the sequence, made up of discrete, lifeless photographs. “The photograph is forever deprived of the diegetic combination and linearity of the still. For in spite of various attempts to give it, through sequencing or assemblage, some kind of diegetic quality, the photograph is arrested, suspended,” much as Pierre’s relationship with David and Sarah, having
ended, is arrested, suspended, mere memories of the past forever frozen in time (Durand 144).

The final image of the sequence, following that of the three lovers lying together on the beach, is a black-and-white title card that reads “The End ~ Universal International Newsreel.” The spectator sees an empty theater; the show is over—the “récit photographique…fige un événement dans l’histoire de ce trio, en fixe les détails avec un début et une fin” (Pérusse “Statut” 117). Not only does the title card indicate “The End” of Pierre’s relationship with David and Sarah, but it also indicates a strong correlation between Pierre’s loss and his professional career (“Universal International Newsreel”). Pool explains that

“There is a political and social background in this film which wasn’t present in my previous work…I was interested in moving from something very large in scope, of political and social significance, to something very precise inside a person. Slowly, the film goes inside Pierre, but what is inside him is pretty much like the war. We have an inside war and an outside war.” (in Bor 67)

In A corps perdu, Pierre’s personal and professional lives are inextricably linked; each has an effect on the other. Pierre’s inability to interact with others in a genuine, intimate way is the cumulative effect of the years of detachment he has exercised as a photojournalist in the face of human tragedies. Pool frames Pierre’s process of coming to terms with David and Sarah’s loss with the anniversary scene at the beginning of the film and the beach scene near its end. The anniversary scene, edited into the film as if from Pierre’s point of view during his assignment in Nicaragua, has the appearance of black-and-white, documentary-style footage—time past. In contrast, the Beach Scene, a discontinuous color photo-montage of the trio together in happier times, symbolizes
Pierre’s increasingly-conscious awareness of the fact that his relationship with David and Sarah is truly over.

The Beach Scene serves as the transition from “Le reportage” to the fourth and final part of the film, “The End.” In “The End” Pierre completes his project, takes leave of his loved ones, and commits himself to a mental hospital. Pierre’s reportage on Montréal, “La ville qui dilue,” encompasses two of the living-room walls of the apartment, an exhibition made up of eighty 8 1/2 x 11, black-and-white photos displayed in a sixteen-by-four lattice framework.

C’est surtout lorsque David pénètre dans l’appartement de Pierre et balaie du regard les deux murs couverts de photos que la photo est réintégrée dans le dispositif filmique et condense sous forme de récit dans le récit la déroute du personnage central. (Pérusse “Statut” 117)

Reportage terminé, Pierre says his goodbyes to Sarah and David in turn, then to his mother and Noémie. First, Pierre goes to find Sarah, waiting for her one night as she comes home from work. When she rounds the corner of a building, he reaches out and grabs her; she knows that it is Pierre and does not struggle. He kisses her on the lips and then kneels down “embrasser le ventre de Sarah qui est enceinte…un signe d’amour très profound pour cette femme” (Pool in Bonneville “Pool” 16). As Sarah does not respond and is holding up her hands as if to push him away, Pierre gets up and walks away. The next day, Pierre finds David having coffee in a small, neighborhood café. After telling him “C’est la dernière fois, je te le promets,” Pierre kisses David passionately on the lips. Outraged, David immediately jumps up to confront Pierre and aggressively shoves him away, causing a scene. Pierre turns and walks out of the café. Finally, Pierre proceeds to his mother’s home where he stages an elegant dinner party for her pleasure, setting the
table with the fine china and silverware reserved for special occasions—much to
Noémie’s dismay. (“L’argenterie, c’est pour les jours de fête.” “C’est fait pour vivre. Pas
pour rester dans les armoires.”) In the end, having said his goodbyes, Pierre takes leave of
his loved ones and commits himself to a mental hospital. “On retrouve à la fin du film un
lieu clos fermé à la lumière du jour (rideaux des fenêtres tirés en plein jour) où le
personnage, en proie à la mélancolie, décroché du monde extérieur, amorce sa longue
descente en lui-même” (Pérusse “Statut” 115).14

Those familiar with Pool’s work would agree that A corps perdu is thematically
consistent with Pool’s body of work as a whole. However, the centrality of women and of
relationships between women so prominent in Pool’s earlier films is conspicuously
lacking. There is no lesbian representation in A corps perdu; as such, it is a distinct
departure from Pool’s earlier work. A corps perdu concerns a ménage à trois between
two men and a woman (heterosexuality and bisexuality, Sarah/David and Pierre) and a
male homosexual relationship (Pierre and Quentin). In the novel, Navarre gives Pierre’s
relationship with David significantly more weight than either of their individual
relationships with Sarah. Pierre and David are an established (homosexual) couple; Sarah
is invited to come live with them after the fact. In the film, it is clear that Pierre and Sarah
were living together as a (heterosexual) couple first before asking David to move in with
them. What’s more, in the novel, Sarah only gets involved with Pierre to facilitate her
intimacy with David.15 Pool concedes that “‘dans le roman, [l’amour de Pierre] est plus
fort pour David… je voulais rendre cet amour égal. Je voulais que l’amour qu’il a pour

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David et pour Sarah soit équivalent… Je crois avoir essayé de dire qu’il [Pierre] les aimait autant l’un que l’autre” (in Bonneville “Pool” 16).

During the establishing sequence in A corps perdu, Pool cuts from an image of Pierre riding a bus in Nicaragua to a black-and-white flashback in which Pierre, David and Sarah are seated together at a small café table celebrating their tenth anniversary. Pierre reminds Sarah of her comments about David upon seeing him for the first time. As Pierre tells it, Sarah leaned over to him and whispered “Il [David] n’est pas mal, celui-là,” to which Pierre replied, “Tant mieux. Il sera invité à venir habiter avec nous.” Pool’s imaging of Pierre and Sarah in the film implies that they share a stronger bond than that indicated in the source text. Moreover, the fact that Pool has eliminated Michel, Jean and Roland from the adaptation, characters whose presence adds credibility to Sarah and David’s respective heterosexual and homosexual preferences in the novel, minimizes these differences and further strengthens the representation of a more conventional (heterosexual) bond between them in the film. In Kurwenal ou la part des êtres, this is not at all the case. When David and Sarah leave Pierre, they have no intention of establishing a committed relationship as a heterosexual couple. In the novel, David and Sarah do not live together after the break up; David takes a hotel room and Sarah returns to the apartment she maintained throughout her relationship with the two men. Following their break-up with Pierre, David and Sarah only agree to maintain contact with each other for the sake of their child.

In the film, the emotional intimacy shared by Pierre, David and Sarah prior to the break-up is apparent. For example, Pierre’s flashback to their tenth anniversary
celebration during the introductory sequence of the film (described above) evidences the love they feel for one another; they look into each other’s eyes and reminisce about the first time they met. In addition, the amount of time that Pool contributes to the representation of Pierre, David and Sarah’s individual attempts to come to terms with the separation further evidences the strength of their emotional commitment to one another: Pierre and his photo-journal, Sarah staying with her friend Michèle, David arguing that “il y [avait] sûrement quelque chose qu’on a mal fait.” Their commitment to one another is further demonstrated by the farewell scenes that take place between Pierre and David on the one hand and between Pierre and Sarah on the other toward the end of the film. Finally, there is the Beach Scene that depicts a more harmonious period of their lives together and signifies Pierre’s growing awareness that his relationship with David and Sarah has come to an end. The depth of the emotional intimacy shared by Pierre, David and Sarah is clearly identifiable in the film as indicated by such episodes as these.

In contrast, there are only two scenes in A corps perdu that allude to the sexual nature of Pierre, David and Sarah’s intimacy: the Shower Scene and the Bedroom Scene. The Shower Scene, shot in black and white, is no more than three minutes long; it is the second of Pierre’s flashbacks that take place during the establishing sequence of the film. The sound of running water cues Pool’s transition from a medium close-up of Pierre looking out the bus window to a medium two-shot of David and Sarah in the shower. Neither David nor Sarah’s body is visible below the waist, and Sarah has her back turned to the camera, thus preventing the viewer from seeing her breasts. Standing under the showerhead, David leans back, opens his mouth, and fills his cheeks with water;
gesturing to Sarah to do the same, he nods his head toward someone or something just outside the frame. Turning away from the running water, they lean forward toward the camera, which tracks back to include Pierre in the frame. Then, David and Sarah lean forward outside the shower stall to spray Pierre with water and draw him into the tub. Sarah and David stand on either side of Pierre, whom they have thrust under the showerhead. Bracing Pierre’s chest with his left hand, David uses his right hand to massage Pierre’s chest and stroke his hair as if applying soap and shampoo to lather him up. Visibly calmed by David’s touch, Pierre turns to Sarah and kisses her affectionately on the lips. Then, he turns to David, drapes his arm around David’s shoulders, and draws him gently forward for a passionate kiss. Not a word is spoken; the depth of their love for one another is apparent. The physical intimacy that they share is implied by the immediacy of their interaction; there is nothing sexually explicit about this scene.

The Bedroom Scene is the second of the two scenes in the film that allude to the sexual nature of Pierre, David and Sarah’s relationship. It takes place during “Le reportage” and opens with a black-and-white two shot of Pierre and Sarah together in bed late at night. Pierre is kissing Sarah tenderly on the lips as she lies back resting her head on a pillow. At first, David is barely visible in the image; only his right hand is present in the frame, cupping the back of Pierre’s head. In a matter of moments, the camera pans slowly left to take in David. Pool uses a medium close-up to frame the trio as they make love together. David looks deep into Pierre’s eyes and gently draws him closer; they kiss passionately as Sarah looks on. Then David, pulling away from Pierre, takes Sarah in his arms and kisses her. Looking on in silence, Pierre strokes David’s hair as he (David) and
Sarah make love. When David and Sarah’s bodies come together as one in a passionate embrace, Pierre is no longer in the picture. The camera pans right, away from the two lovers, coming to rest on a left-profile shot of Pierre, eyes right as if watching David and Sarah make love. In the beginning of this scene, Pierre and Sarah shared a tender embrace; in the end, the focus has shifted from a medium two-shot of Pierre and Sarah to a medium two-shot of David and Sarah. In a matter of moments, the camera zooms slowly in to a close-up of Pierre. Literally in the blink of an eye, the image goes from black-and-white to color. “Le passage du noir et blanc à la couleur exprime avec délicatesse et raffinement le passage du réel au rêvé, du passé au présent, de l’inconscient au conscient” (Suchet “Vertiges” 95). Pierre remains in the same position, gazing off into the distance. Finally, he turns his head so that his eyes face forward—another sleepless night for the heartsick lover. The camera pulls back from the close-up of Pierre to a medium two-shot of Pierre and Quentin together in bed; Quentin, fast asleep, rests his head on Pierre’s chest and drapes his right arm over his waist. Pierre gently pushes Quentin to the other side of the bed. Rolling over on his left side, Pierre turns his back to his gentle lover. While physically he is upstairs in bed with Quentin, emotionally and spiritually Pierre is far, far away.

Interestingly, this is only time during the film that Pierre and Quentin are seen in bed together, and Pierre pushes him away. Pool makes it clear that

There are several scenes that evidence the emotional and allude to the physical nature of the relationship between Pierre and Quentin in the film, including the “Bar Scene,” “The Bath,” and “Je vole.” Although Pierre gets his first glimpse of Quentin when meeting with Malaurie to review the photos he took in Nicaragua, he does not actually meet Quentin until later in the film. One evening, feeling “le besoin de la figure de réconfort de l’Autre, de son attention, de son amour,” Pierre goes out to have a drink (Lannegrand 147). When Quentin sees Pierre enter the club, he leaves the dance floor and goes over to join him at the bar. Taking the seat next to Pierre, Quentin orders a beer and tries to catch Pierre’s eye. A medium two-shot of Pierre and Quentin seated next to one another at the bar indicates the potential for their relationship. “Prisonnier de son monde d’images, Pierre retrouvera l’amour auprès d’un jeune homme sourd, Quentin (Jean-François Pichette) qui, comme lui, communique par son seul regard” (Madore 12).

Making the first move, Quentin gently rests his hand upon Pierre’s, prompting Pierre to turn toward him. Pierre and Quentin look into each other’s eyes at length but say nothing to one another; finally, Quentin grabs Pierre’s shoulder and draws him close for a kiss. However, instead of kissing Quentin, Pierre turns away and leans over to rest his head against Quentin’s chest. Astonished by this expression of vulnerability, Quentin takes Pierre in his arms and gently strokes his hair. Quentin says nothing, his eyes full of compassion and concern for this vulnerable stranger who seems so desperately alone. After what seems an eternity, their tender embrace ends. Pierre and Quentin gaze at each other in wonder as if searching for something or someone. Finally, Quentin signals for Pierre to join him on the dance floor, communicating this to Pierre with his eyes and
smooth hand gestures. Quentin goes out on the dance floor, swaying to the musical vibrations filling the air, rich bass tones pulsating through the wooden floorboards. At first, Pierre gets up as if to join Quentin on the dance floor, but then, changing his mind, he grabs his leather jacket from the back of the barstool and heads for the door. When Quentin realizes that Pierre is leaving, he quickly goes after him. Pool uses a long shot to frame the image of Quentin standing outside the nightclub alone. Determined to connect with Pierre, he stares deliberately at Pierre as he (Pierre) climbs into the taxicab. A shot-reverse shot structure conveys Pierre’s awareness of Quentin’s unrelenting gaze and his inability to disregard Quentin’s persistent presence; Pool zooms in from the medium shot of Quentin from Pierre’s point of view to a medium close-up. When Pierre finally gets into the cab, he does not shut the door; Quentin’s perseverance has paid off. Pierre slides over to the far side of the cab to make room for Quentin on the back seat, and they go together to Pierre’s apartment. The next morning, while Pierre sleeps on the couch, wrapped in a blanket, Quentin is in the kitchen making coffee, getting ready to leave for work. Both men are fully clothed; there is no indication that anything physical took place between them the night before. Still, the emotional bond that has been established between them is evident.

In “The Bath,” Pierre is seated at his desk journaling while Quentin takes a bath. A long shot of Quentin in the bathtub frames his nude body when he stands up to towel off. This is the only image of full frontal nudity in A corps perdu, and it has a male, not female, subject. Having his back turned toward Quentin, Pierre sees nothing; he is focused on his writing. Pool uses voiceover to communicate his thoughts:

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“Il a le sexe de David et la peau de Sarah. Comme eux, il n’entend plus et ne parle plus. Mais je l’entend, et je lui parle. Je ne peux pas m’empêcher de penser qu’il est le messager de David et Sarah. Même s’il était le seul sourd de cette ville, je l’aurai rencontré.”

In the back of the frame, David steps out of the tub, wraps a towel around his waist, picks up Tristan, and walks over to where Pierre journals. David gestures to Pierre that it is time to go to bed; Pierre acknowledges what Quentin has communicated, but continues to journal. Finally, Quentin reaches over and pulls the pen away from Pierre. Taking Pierre by the hand, Quentin gently pulls him to his feet. Then, bracing himself, Quentin drapes Pierre’s arms around either side of his neck and carries him into the bedroom.

In “Je vole,” Pierre goes to work with Quentin, who is responsible for cleaning the windows of an office tower. When Quentin asks Pierre if he is happy, Pierre assures him that he is: “Oui, idiot!” Donning the appropriate jumpsuits and security gear, they climb onto the scaffolding, secure their harnesses and prepare the descent. Quentin washes windows while Pierre admires the skyline and looks down at the cars and people below, having finally mastered his vertigo. At lunchtime, they go down to the employee cafeteria to have something to eat. Using the tablecloth as a notepad, Quentin tells Pierre that he waited until it was time to clean the side of the tower with the best view before inviting Pierre to join him at work. Then he asks Pierre about what, or whom, he is always thinking: “C’est moi le tour de l’oignon. Quand c’est fini d’un côté, je recommence de l’autre. J’ai attendu le plus beau pour toi… À quoi qui penses-tu tout le temps?” Pierre writes back “David + Sarah!” When Quentin asks “Les photos de la chambre?” Pierre shrugs his shoulders, turning up the palms of his hands as if helpless to change the situation. At this, Quentin lowers his eyes and turns away from Pierre, who
reaches out to take Quentin’s hand only for Quentin to pull it away. The close-up of the writing on the table (“David + Sarah!”) and of Pierre’s hand reaching out for Quentin fades from color to black-and-white. Pool cuts from this image of Pierre’s right hand resting alone on the table to first one and then another black-and-white photo of David and Sarah out together as a couple. Quentin is well aware that he will never replace David and Sarah in Pierre’s heart. The emotional depth of Pierre and Quentin’s intimacy is clearly identifiable in the film as conveyed by scenes such as these.

“Déjà avec La femme de l’hôtel, Pool avait évoqué l’homosexualité masculine, à travers le personnage du frère d’Andréa. Mais il a fallu attendre A corps perdu pour voir se réifier sous nos yeux une représentation plus explicite de cette orientation sexuelle” (Pérusse “Femmes” 62). Pool’s portrayal of the emotional intimacy shared by Pierre and Quentin in A corps perdu is more candid than that of any physical expression of that affection in the film. The same can be said of Pool’s treatment of Pierre and David’s relationship in the film. Nadeau suggests that in general, the representation of sexuality in Pool’s films is

mise en scène non pas en ombres chinoises, mais plutôt derrière le paravent du non-dit. Si l’on veut parler de sexualité dans ces films, on doit résolument demeurer du côté de l’innocence: la sexualité pure, sans danger, celle qui ne dérange pas. En effet, la sexualité est quelque chose qui souffle sur les films de Léa Pool sans vraiment en menacer l’équilibre précaire. (“Femmes” 62)

While the representation of sexuality in Pool’s film is indeed subtle, the fact remains that there are few filmmakers who treat both gay and lesbian material in such an honest and straightforward manner. Pool’s bedroom scene in A corps perdu, where Pierre, David and Sarah make love together, is unprecedented in Québec cinema. There is very little
representation of any romantic involvement between homosexual men in mainstream film as a whole; gay men are usually represented as another (straight) character’s eccentric friend or relative. As “there is a tendency in Quebec political culture to view sexual relations as outside the public domain…[Pool’s] matter-of-fact portrayal of male homosexual desire (Andrée’s brother Simon…in La femme de l’hôtel; Pierre and David in A Corps perdu; even Catherine’s ex-lover in Mouvements du désir) represents an advance in Quebec cinema” (Marshall 232, 233). Pool’s representation of bisexuality and homosexuality in A corps perdu is undeniably pioneering.

With La demoiselle sauvage and A corps perdu, Pool has both incorporated and expanded on artistic and thematic elements fundamental to the original written narratives penned by Bille and Navarre. In La demoiselle sauvage, Pool has maintained the circular structure of Bille’s short story as well as the principal elements of its plot. Her decision to elaborate on the original characterization of the novel by adding several secondary characters—Elysée’s young sons, coworker, and lawyer, serves to further the depiction of Elysée and Marianne’s relationship as situated within a social context. Similarly, in A corps perdu, Pool has maintained the most important elements of the novel’s plot and retained the majority of its original characters. However, Pool’s decision to omit Sarah and David’s respective post ménage-à-trois lovers both softens the sexual nature of Pierre’s relationships with David and Quentin and strengthens Pierre’s relationship with Sarah in the film. This may be interpreted as an attempt to neutralize the more unconventional aspects of Pierre, David and Sarah’s romantic triangle. Structurally, in A corps perdu, “on est convié à une sorte de narrativité en pièces ou photos détachées,
feuilleté narratif dont nous ne comprenions pas nécessairement toutes les couches, tout le sens ou toute la portée” (Pérusse “Statut” 117). Pool’s development and use of a *cinécriture éclatée* complements the *écriture éclatée* characteristic of Navarre’s work in *Kurwenal ou la part des êtres*.

Coulombe rightly asserts that in adapting *Kurwenal ou la part des êtres*, Pool n’a pas cherché à en respecter, coûte que coûte, la structure et les personnages, l’esprit et la lettre. En fait, évitant d’entreprendre la scénarisation de son film pieds et poings liés, elle a tiré *Kurwenal* de son côté pour en faire *A corps perdu*, un film qui lui appartient complètement, qui soit fidèle à sa manière et parfaitement dans la continuité de sa filmographie. (16)

This is the case for *La demoiselle sauvage* as well. Both *A corps perdu* and *La demoiselle sauvage* deal with the issues of absence, alienation, isolation, and loss, themes characteristic of Pool’s body of work as a whole. Pool has left her artistic signature on each of these films; once again, she has used camerawork and alternative editing techniques in such a way as to subvert the narrative practices used in the mainstream cinema. While *A corps perdu* and *La demoiselle sauvage* were inspired by Bille and Navarre’s written narratives, Pool has fashioned visual narratives that are completely her own.
It is interesting to note that while in Bille’s novella Elysée talks about consulting a male lawyer, in Pool’s adaptation this lawyer is a woman.

The real photographer for *A corps perdu* is Luc Chessix, who took more than 3,000 photos for the film—of course, not all were included in the finished production.

It is interesting to note that as indicated by these sources, there was no controversy concerning Pool’s adaptation of Navarre’s novel as being “faithful” or “unfaithful” to its source text. Navarre, of course, is French not Québécois; perhaps the controversy surrounding Simoneau’s work on *Les fous de Bassan* was to be expected considering the fact that Hébert is perhaps one of the best known, if not the best known, of Québec’s contemporary authors.

Pool defines “exile” as “‘more a question of how you feel in society and in front of other people and how you try to find your own values and identity’”(in Bor 64).

Michel has become “Michèle”, a female friend with whom Sarah—a concert violinist in the film, an advertising consultant in the novel—performs as a member of a symphony orchestra. Neither Jean “quelque chose” nor Roland is in the picture any longer.

Pool says that when she begins to write a screenplay,

“je ne possède pas de thématique, mais comme un funambule je marche sur le fil tenu de [son] cheminement intérieur. Sortant du cadre narratif classique, je brise ainsi toute notion de temps et d’espace, comme dans la peinture pointilliste. Je laisse de grands trous pour que le spectateur se sente à son tour libre de créer, d’imaginer.” (Madore 12)

The footage of Pierre on assignment abroad was actually filmed in Cuba.

Pool explains that “‘Quand on rentre dans l’univers de Pierre, dans ce qui se passe dans sa tête, il faut…un langage différent, un langage qui joue plus sur l’imaginaire. Par l’imaginaire, je veux dire une succession d’images qui transmettent les emotions des personnages’” (Pool in Madore 14).

Pierre’s accent further sets him apart from those around him “Les accents étrangers des films de Pool nous amènent vers le s ailleurs…[et] individualisent la quête d’identité” (Bérubé 64).

Pierre Mignot, Pool’s cameraman, followed Pierre around with the camera on his
shoulder in order to create the documentary-style feel of this scene. Pool explains this in her interview with Edith Madore:

“Au début du film, il y a un massacre…une scène extrêmement violente à laquelle Pierre est heurté comme journaliste et on a presque l’impression qu’il est là avec une caméra documentaire pour filmer cette scène. Pierre Mignot tenait une caméra à l’épaule, de sorte qu’on bouge avec les personnages. Le traitement est très réaliste et c’est normal puisque je voulais donner l’impression que Pierre était au milieu d’une guerre.” (14)

11 Pool tells Bonneville that she has ‘‘toujours senti le besoin de questionner ma propre démarche cinématographique à travers un de mes personnages’’ (in “Pool” 14).

12 In A corps perdu, Pierre tells Malaurie that “Ça pourrait être n’importe quelle ville…” In an interview with Perreault, Pool explains that in her opinion, “Toutes les villes finalement se ressemblent. Il n’a pas été difficile de replacer l’action [de Paris] à Montréal” (in Larouche 141).

13 Pool insists on the importance of Pierre’s nausea/experience of vertigo. In an interview with Madore, Pool explains

“‘la notion de chute est importante, le vertige, une chute…Il y a effectivement toujours une rupture avec quelque chose au départ, c’est vrai. Je pense que les moments où on avance le plus, où on fait les pas les plus importants dans nos vies, sont les moments de déséquilibre. Un déséquilibre pas nécessairement psychologique mais une instabilité où on est obligé de questionner nos choix, ce qu’on fait et pourquoi on le fait…Cheminer, essayer de trouver le plus possible une direction à la vie que je mène’’(16).

14 The adaptation could have ended here. In Navarre’s novel, Pierre never leaves the mental hospital. Pool said that she did not want to end the film on such a disheartening note.

15 In the novel, Sarah describes herself as positioned “entre Pierre et David, plutôt tournée vers David que vers Pierre, plus volontiers saisie par David que par Pierre…” (Navarre 101).
CHAPTER 4

SCREENING GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN PAULE BAILLARGEON’S LE SEXE DES ETOILES

“Qu’est-ce qui fait qu’on est un homme ou une femme en dedans de soi? Est-ce qu’on pense et qu’on réagit de la même façon suivant qu’on est un homme ou une femme? Évidemment, il y a l’atavisme, l’éducation, mais indépendamment de cela, y a-t-il quelque chose de vraiment féminin ou masculin?”

Monique Proulx

Paule Baillargeon directed Le sexe des étoiles, the adaptation of Monique Proulx’s novel of the same title, in 1993. Baillargeon had met Proulx by chance earlier that year at a roundtable held to discuss the screenplay for a different film. Before the session ended and everyone went his or her own way, Proulx approached Baillargeon and personally requested that she read her scenario for the adaptation of Le sexe des étoiles (1987). Extremely busy at the time, Baillargeon warned Proulx not to expect to hear back from her before the end of the month. Yet, when Baillargeon got home she decided to skim the first few pages of the scenario out of curiosity and once engaged, she was hooked.

“J’ai ouvert les premières pages et j’ai lu le texte d’un seul trait, parce qu’il était très surprenant. Ce qui m’a le plus étonnée, c’est que le lecteur entre dans un univers auquel il n’est pas habitué dans le cinéma québécois. Je parle des œuvres de fiction où on invoque totalement une réalité. C’est la qualité de Monique
Proulx d’inventer des personnages plus grands que nature comme le transsexual du film: personnage très grand, touchant, moderne, fin de siècle. C’est ce qui m’a accroché: l’étonnement.” (in Bonneville “À la recherche” 11)

Le sexe des étoiles is one of the first—if not the first—full-length feature films made in Québec to include a transsexual character and to represent this character in an open and sympathetic light. To date, little has been written on the novel or its adaptation. Only one article has been written exclusively on the novel (Smart, “Au-delà des dualismes: identité et généricité (gender) dans Le sexe des étoiles de Monique Proulx”), and only two focus solely on Le sexe des étoiles as an adaptation (Falzoni, “Le sexe des étoiles de Monique Proulx: le roman et le film” and Proulx, “Détournement d’images ou éloge de la vie réelle”.)

Stam suggests that we look at adaptation as an intertextual relationship between a “‘hypotext’” (the written narrative) and a “‘hypertext’” (its film adaptation) that “transforms, modifies, elaborates, or extends” the hypotext (“Beyond” 66). This proposition is quite effective when discussing Baillargeon’s work on Le sexe des étoiles. Along these lines, we may ask: in what ways does Baillargeon’s Le sexe des étoiles reflect a transformation, modification, elaboration and/or extension of Monique Proulx’s novel? I propose a reading of the film based on its own merits, its representation understood to be both a modification and extension of the content, style and form of the novel. First, in order to situate both the film and the novel, I will provide background information on Baillargeon and Proulx’s respective works. Then, to enable readers to grasp more fully the intertextuality of the adaptation and its source novel, I will discuss the basic structure of each narrative (plot, setting, structure, characterization) and propose a rationale for the artistic choices made in the film. Following this, I will examine how
the transgender/transsexual representation in the film is instrumental in challenging the conflation of the categories of sex, gender and social identity (male–masculine-man, female–feminine-woman) in the dominant culture. This will be accomplished through an investigation of the relationships between Camille Deslauriers (the main character of the film), her transsexual father/mother Marie-Pierre Deslauriers, and Lucky Poitras, a boy at school on whom Camille has a crush. Naturally, this analysis will involve a closer examination of several scenes in the film that challenge traditional representations of sex, gender, social identity and sexuality.

Like many of today’s women directors, Baillargeon started out as an actress and eventually worked her way into filmmaking. Baillargeon began her career as a student at the École national du théâtre of Canada in the late 1960s. However, she and several of her colleagues left the École abruptly in 1969, refusing their diplomas in protest of what they considered to be a stifling atmosphere and the lack of opportunities for creative collaboration and innovation (Coulombe and Jean 26). Shortly thereafter, Baillargeon and several of her like-minded colleagues formed Le Grand Cirque ordinaire, a theatrical troupe that aspired to create original productions of their own. Baillargeon worked with Le Grand Cirque ordinaire for almost ten years before finally quitting the collective which, according to Baillargeon, “malgré ses aspirations créatrices et révolutionnaires, [a continué] à perpétuer les schémas traditionnels de l’inégalité des sexes, contraignant la minorité féminine au silence subalterne” (Petrowski “Quand les Yvettes” 13). Nonetheless, by the time that she left Le Grand Cirque ordinaire, Baillargeon had distinguished herself as an actress worthy of note through secondary roles in such films...

In addition to these ventures in performance, Baillargeon has worked on the screenplays for a number of movies, having either written or collaborated on the scenarios for such films as *Vie d’ange* (Harel, 1979), *Le petit cheval* (Saint-Jean, 1989) and *Montréal vu par…* (sketch directed by Arcand, one of six that make up the film co-directed by Arcand, Brault, Egoyan, Leduc, Pool and Rozema in 1991). *Le sexe des étoiles* was the first adaptation that Baillargeon had directed, but it was not her first film. While she has been quoted as saying “‘Je n’aime pas l’idée de mettre ma pensée originale et individuelle au service d’une cause, peu importe laquelle,’” Baillargeon’s interest in sex and gender representation is apparent from her earliest works (in Petrowski “Entre la cuisine et la cour” 19). Baillargeon wrote and directed her first film, *Anasthasie, oh ma chérie*, in 1977. *Anasthasie, oh ma chérie* is a short film about a young woman named Anasthasie who decides to cut herself off from the modern world in an attempt to reinvent her life. However, the dominant culture will not let her fulfill her intentions.
Refusing to let Anasthasie renounce her role in contemporary society, various representatives of the patriarchal institutions of power attempt to recuperate her. First, policemen break into the apartment where Anasthasie has barricaded herself determined to escort her to a (male) psychologist to be cured of her “illness”: a desire for self-determination. Before removing her from her new home, they have Anasthasie dress according to their expectations of how a woman should present herself in society: sporting a red dress, wearing heavy make-up, and maintaining a quiet and deferent composure. When Anasthasie meets with the psychologist, it turns out that “le malade n’est pas celui qu’on pense; le psychologue est pris de tics nerveux incroyables et Anasthasie veut s’enfuir” (Carrière 171). Undoubtedly, Anasthasie, oh ma chérie is a political film; through it, Baillargeon critiques the difficulties faced by women who would choose to define themselves apart from the roles assigned them as Women in the dominant culture.²

Baillargeon’s second film, La Cuisine rouge (1979), is perhaps her most notorious work. In the information distributed to the press on the eve of the film’s début, Baillargeon and Frédérique Collin (her co-director) described La Cuisine rouge as a political narrative that exposed

l’impasse de la société québécoise, une société défaite dans laquelle les femmes condamnées à la cuisine ne trouvent plus de terrain d’entente avec leurs partenaires condamnés à leurs tavernes, société sectaire où chacun se retrouve dans son petit ghetto socio-culturel et socio-affectif et où la rencontre n’est plus possible ni même plus nécessaire. De facture instable, le film relate une époque tout aussi instable, transitoire, un tournant en même temps que la certitude que les choses ne peuvent plus rester telles qu’elles sont. (in Petrowski “Quand les Yvettes” 13)
The production history of La Cuisine rouge begins with one of the ONF’s producers approaching Baillargeon about making a film on striptease artists after having seen Anasthasie, oh ma chérie. While at first hesitant to accept the project, Baillargeon decided to work with Collin, one of her colleagues from Le Grand Cirque ordinaire, on a synopsis for the film. Shortly thereafter, Baillargeon presented this synopsis to the ONF’s Comité du programme, whose members approved the proposal and committed $35,000 to its production. With the blessing of the Comité, Baillargeon and Collin wrote the scenario for the film and went ahead with their pre-production preparations. However, when several months later a newly-appointed Comité du programme reviewed Bailargeon and Collin’s plans for the film, they decided to shelve the project and denied them any further financial assistance from the ONF.

Of course, by that time Baillargeon and Collin had already devoted more than a year of their time and energy to the film. Rather than resign themselves to abandon the project, Baillargeon and Collin set about obtaining other funding for La Cuisine rouge. Going public about their situation, Baillargeon protested loudly that “Une fois de plus, les fonctionnaires de la culture renvoient à l’assistance sociale les artistes qui s’acharnent à vouloir parler” (in “A l’Outrement” n.pg.) As a result, they got the attention of Roland Smith, a local businessman who at that time owned Montréal’s Outremont cinema. Smith volunteered the use of the Outremont for a benefit to run two consecutive nights in early August; all proceeds would go to support the production of La Cuisine rouge. The spectacle was christened “Un Evénement doux: Le Comité du programme,” implying that the theatrical program would include a satire of the ONF Comité that withdrew its
support from the project at the last minute in addition to live musical performances. Dubbed “‘un show bénéfique pour le cinéma québécois,’” “Un Événement doux” was a success; Baillargeon and her colleagues gained $10,000 from the fundraiser—enough to cover basic production costs but not enough money to pay the salaries of the cast and crew (13). This seed money, along with a grant of $10,000 from the Conseil des arts and in time a grant of considerable size from the Institut québécois du cinéma, secured the production of the film—at least financially.

While the financial needs of the production had been met, the struggles on behalf of La Cuisine rouge were far from over. Like the women in the film who decide to go off on their own but then must surmount their own differences in order to coexist, Baillargeon and her feminist friends had a number of problems to overcome in order to be able to work together on the set. Baillargeon’s authority as director of the film was constantly challenged by


To make matters worse, following the release of La Cuisine rouge, the majority of the critical reviews as well as the general audience reception of the film were very negative. A few critics, such as Bruce Bailey, grasped the significance of the storyline and suggested that Baillargeon and Collin’s parable “ought to be hand-delivered to self-satisfied ‘Yvettes’ and male chauvinists” (81). In contrast, others harshly criticized the
film as a boring waste of time and money. Gay claimed that “les auteurs de La Cuisine rouge n’ont pas su investir leur métaphore d’une société perdue de suffisamment d’éléments et de situations signifiantes. L’ensemble se renouvelle mal et perd ainsi de son intérêt…” (16). The film critic for La Presse quipped:

La thèse est belle, la parabole limpide. Tellement limpide qu’on bute dessus chaque image…Comme telle la thèse féministe qui sous-tend toute cette entreprise ne me paraît ni très originale ni très révolutionnaire. Le thème de la femme comme maîtresse, servante ou putain, on l’a déjà suffisamment rabâché merci! (“Le torchon brûle dans la cuisine” 16)

Undoubtedly, the controversy surrounding the production trials of La Cuisine rouge once the ONF had dropped the project thrust the directors and their work into the spotlight, increasing both general audience and critical expectations of the film. Anderson suggests that in spite the societal changes brought about by the Révolution Tranquille and the women’s movement of the seventies, “audiences were not prepared for the ‘radical’ approach of the film—the total rebellion of the women against traditional marriage roles” (“Subjects” 80). Whatever the case may be, “La cuisine rouge demeure l’un des jalons importants du cinéma des femmes et du cinéma indépendant au Québec” (Coulombe and Jean 27).

Like Anasthasie, oh ma chérie, La Cuisine rouge deals with relationships between men and women—or the lack thereof—in the modern world. The film opens at the end of a marriage ceremony taking place at City Hall. After the ceremony, the wedding party proceeds to the site where the reception is to be held, a striptease bar. When they arrive, they find that nothing has been prepared. The tavern is filthy; empty beer bottles are lying about on the tables and rubbish is strewn throughout the bar. Consistent with the
traditional gender roles assigned by the dominant culture, the men tell the women to go prepare a meal, while they wait to be served in the dining area. As soon as the women have gone off on their own, they begin to realize that they do not want to serve men anymore. Once they manage to work through their differences, the women go out into the courtyard and enjoy traditionally feminine rituals together such as putting on make-up, taking luxurious baths, and sunbathing. Meanwhile, the men continue to wait in the bar, drinking beer and discussing “manly” topics such as work, sports and politics. In the end, the women return to the kitchen and prepare the meal. Once dinner has been served and the music has started to play, the women perform a halfhearted striptease. While the women have realized that they no longer want to serve men, they still do; nothing has changed. In La cuisine rouge, the men and women are literally worlds apart. At the end of the film Estelle, the girl who has been watching the women throughout the film, abandons the scene and goes out on her own; packing her suitcase, she exits quietly by the back door. “Si la partie est perdue pour une génération, Baillargeon et Collin ont gardé l’espoir que l’autre génération saura faire ce qu’elles n’ont pas eu la force ou le courage d’accomplir par elle-mêmes” (Petrowski “Quand les Yvettes” 13).

Following La Cuisine rouge, while Baillargeon did have roles in a number of movies, she did not direct another film until 1986. Baillargeon explains that “‘après La cuisine rouge, j’ai été tellement, tellement frappée d’ostracisme, que ça m’a pris cinq ans pour me remettre’” (in Roy “Entretien” 11). In 1986, the ONF commissioned Baillargeon to make a film about Alzheimer’s disease. Baillargeon wrote, directed and starred in Sonia (1986), a film about the relationship between a daughter, a well-established adult
out on her own, and her mother, an art professor experiencing the first stages of Alzheimer’s disease. After Sonia, Baillargeon directed two more films, both made for television: a short film entitled Le complexe d’Édith (1991) and a full-length, feature film entitled Solo (1991). Then, in 1993, Proulx asked Baillargeon to direct Le sexe des étoiles. Initially, Baillargeon was hesitant to take on the project: “je ne croyais pas du tout que ce scénario était pour moi. Finalement, j’ai décidé de me lancer parce que je croyais qu’il y avait un défi à faire ce film. Je trouvais surtout que c’était un scénario qui avait une qualité populaire” (8).

Le sexe les étoiles, written in 1987, was Monique Proulx’s first full-length novel. Proulx is a prolific author who has written several novels and a number of plays, articles, and short stories; much of her work has been translated into English and is distributed throughout Canada, the United States and Western Europe. Proulx has also written a number of screenplays (several of which are adaptations of her own works, but many are original scenarios) and a handful of television and radio dramas (60- and 30-minute categories). Proulx’s short stories have been published in a variety of magazines, newspapers, and anthologies. Moreover, two collections of her short stories have been published as independent works: Sans coeur et sans reproche (1983), which won the Prix Adrienne-Choquette in 1983 and the Grand Prix littéraire du Journal de Montréal in 1984, and Les Aurores montréalais (1996). Many of the short stories that appeared in Les Aurores montréalais have been adapted for the screen, their scenarios written by Proulx, including “Léa et Paul par exemple,” adapted as A la vie, à l’amour (Carrière, 1989); “Le
futile et l’essentiel,” adapted as Le futile et l’essentiel (Bourbonnais, 1991); and “Jouer avec un chat,” which inspired Le grand serpent du monde (Dion, 1997).

Proulx’s highly-acclaimed second novel, Homme invisible à la fenêtre (1993), perhaps one of her best known works, was adapted to the screen as Souvenirs intimes (Beaudin, 1998). Proulx wrote the screenplay for the film. In Homme invisible à la fenêtre, Proulx’s interest in sex, gender, social identity and le corps humain come to the forefront, and go beyond. Homme invisible à la fenêtre concerns a paraplegic painter named Max and the people who frequent his company. The story is told from Max’s point of view; the others visit him in the hopes of being absolved of their own insecurities as physical beings (Maggie is too beautiful, Julius is overweight) and accepted as they are. Bordeleau points out that in Homme invisible à la fenêtre, on n’assiste plus à la guerre des sexes, mais à la guerre des corps. Normalité contre différence…la dictature du regard affecte désormais les hommes comme les femmes. . . « Je suis capable de vous voir comme personne d’autre ne vous verra jamais… j’ai payé cette habilité très cher », pensera Max à propos du corps obèse de Julius Einhorne. Le prix payé, c’est de faire soi-même l’apprentissage d’un corps marginal, différent. (93)

Smart classifies Monique Proulx as belonging to the second-generation of women writers in Québec whose work related the feminism of the 70s to the realities of daily existence in the 80s and 90s (67). According to Smart, “Bien que moins ouvertement théorique que le féminisme de la génération précédente, l’écriture de ces femmes représente un renouvellement et un approfondissement des questions d’identité sexuelle posées par leurs aînées” (67).
Proulx wrote *Homme invisible à la fenêtre* several years after having published *Le sexe des étoiles* (1987), a novel that she describes as “‘une immense question sous forme de conte philosophique qui prend le transsexualisme comme déclencheur d’interrogation sur le dualisme sexuel’” (in Ferland C-9). *Le sexe des étoiles* tells the story of the relationships between a male-to-female transsexual (MTF) named Marie-Pierre Deslauriers, his daughter Camille Deslauriers, a novelist named Dominique Larue, and a woman named Gaby who works for a popular radio talk-show. Proulx’s interest in the politics of sex, gender, social identity and sexuality is evident throughout the body of her work, most particularly in *Le sexe des étoiles*. Proulx explains that by addressing the issue of transsexualism in *Le sexe des étoiles*, she was able to investigate a number of other related themes, including “la recherche de l’identité sexuelle, la revalorization des apparences, l’intolérance de la société, la marginalité condamnée, [et] le yin et le yang[, le féminin et le masculin,] en chacun de nous...” (“Détournement” 161). The novel is set in contemporary Montréal (late 1980s) and is made up of seventeen individual chapters, each of which is alternately narrated by one of the four main characters and privileges his or her voice. As for the structure of the novel, Proulx explains,

“J’ai mis une année à structurer mon histoire; les situations de départ, les rencontres des personnages, leurs relations, etc. A partir de ce plan bien établi, j’ai laissé les caractères des personnages se déveloper en parallèle. Je savais où ils devaient aller et comment, mais quelquefois c’était eux qui me conduisaient.” (in Ferland C-9)

Along these lines, the development of the novel, its style and form, may be considered analogous to that of the “Big Bang” theory of the origin of the universe and the subsequent formation of diverse galaxies. “Autour d’un astre central, Marie-Pierre la
Transsexuelle, gravitent trois satellites [Gaby, Camille et Dominique] qui, chacun dans leur univers respectif, subissent son influence”” (Proulx “Détournement” 161). The novel features an expansive structure radiating out from a thematic core pertaining to issues of sex, gender and social identity—“le transsexualisme comme déclencheur d’interrogation sur le dualisme sexuel”—rather than the more traditional linear, chronological framework (Proulx in Ferland C-9).

The four primary characters are introduced in turn through the first four chapters of the novel. Le sexe des étoiles opens with Gaby in the process of ending a six-year relationship with a live-in boyfriend named René. René is taking it very badly; he assumes that she must be sleeping with another man and demands to know with whom. It seems that Gaby has been paying his way for years, and he is not about to let go of his emotional and economic security without a fight. They argue, rather, René argues and Gaby sits quietly, waiting for him to leave. Once he has left, Gaby finishes her meal and goes on about her business. Later, Gaby arrives at work to find two men waiting impatiently in her office; both are scheduled to appear as guests on the talk-show that day. Gaby’s job at CDKP is to find the most unusual, most interesting, most bizarre characters possible for Bob Mireau’s talk show, “Pas si fou.” Gaby coordinates the guest lists for Mireau, who then exploits the eccentricities of the various guest speakers on the air, providing sensationalistic entertainment at their expense for CDKP’s listening audience. Once this particular day’s episode of “Pas si fou” has ended, Mireau asks Gaby whom she is lining up for his next show. In response, Gaby offers what is in effect the reader’s first glimpse of Marie-Pierre, la Transsexuelle.
— “Quelle gibelotte nauséabonde es-tu en train de me concoter?…

- “Des morceaux de choix, mon beau. Une fille qui lit l’avenir dans les articulations des genoux. Un motard qui s’est converti à la foi bahai’ie. Pis [sic] la semaine prochaine, une transsexuelle.”

- “Une transsexuelle. Miam miam. Couilles et tétons: c’est un mélange qui m’a toujours excité.”

- “Navrée de te décevoir. Tétons seulement. Kaput, les couilles…”

- “Tu veux dire que le pauvre type se les est RÉELLEMENT fait couper?…

- “ELLE se les est fait couper. Oublie pas de lui parler au féminin.” (Proulx Le sexe des étoiles 17)

Neither man nor woman, both man and woman, the existence of Marie-Pierre, la Transsexuelle, problematizes the dominant culture’s binary gender paradigm, where “naturally” a man is a masculine male and a woman is a feminine female.

The second chapter opens with a professional colloquium where Dominique Larue, a novelist who has not written anything in over twelve years, is scheduled to address the assembly as the keynote speaker. Dominique did not want to attend; in fact, the only reason that he is there is because his lover Mado (a woman) insisted that he go. Mado pays all the bills and seems content to live with Dominique in spite of the fact that he has not written anything in years (his being a writer one of the reasons why she was interested in him in the first place) and that they have not had sexual relations for a very long time; Dominique is impotent. At the colloquium, Dominique sits waiting in the dining hall, unable to connect with the other guests discussing the theme of a lecture that he is supposed to give but has not prepared. When finally the emcee gestures for him to come up on stage to give the speech, Dominique slips out the back door instead. At the
beginning of the third chapter, Camille is standing in front of a classroom presenting an exposé on stars. Somehow, Camille has managed to hold the rapt attention of the other students in her class—something that her teacher had never been able to do. Jealous of Camille’s ability to hold her peers’ interest for so long, the teacher interrupts Camille, informing her that “stars” is not an appropriate topic for a French class and telling her to wrap it up quickly. Humiliated before her peers, Camille gathers up her star charts and heads for the door—ignoring the teacher’s shouts to come back and take her seat.

With the fourth chapter, Proulx introduces Marie-Pierre Deslauriers, “La Transsexuelle.” The chapter opens with Marie-Pierre in a small neighborhood café flirting with a man seated at an adjacent table. Things go well until Marie-Pierre gets up from the table to go to the restroom and inadvertently walks into the men’s room. Quickly realizing her error, she turns around and heads for the door only to be accosted by the same man on his way in. Surprised to find her there, he assumes that Marie-Pierre has been waiting for him and tries to take advantage of her. Marie-Pierre fervently protests his advances to no avail; he refuses to let her go and begins to grope her breasts. In desperation, Marie-Pierre resorts to physical violence in self-defense, delivering a powerful uppercut to the man’s chin as it is the only way to end the assault. Having secured her freedom, Marie-Pierre goes back out into the dining area to wait for Camille. Taking a seat, she tries to regain her composure, quickly downing both of their drinks while watching warily out of the corner of her eye as café employees escort the man outside. At the end of the chapter, Marie-Pierre sees a car pull up outside; Camille jumps out of the car, walks into the café, and cheerfully greets her father: “Âlo, papa!”
Each of the characters in *Le sexe des étoiles* struggles with his or her sense of self relative to the sex and gender roles assigned them by the dominant culture. Camille, for example, is a twelve-year-old girl trying to find her place in a world where girls are expected to be neither intelligent nor independent; she is painfully aware of how these traits set her apart from her peers. This is made clear when Lucky Poitras, the boy at school on whom Camille has a crush, tells her “Chose certaine, je voudrais jamais sortir avec une fille aussi intelligente que toi” (Proulx *Le sexe* 98). Heartbroken, Camille asks herself why Lucky will not go out with her. In truth, she already knows the answer: “l’intelligence était une monstruosité chez les filles et la condamnerait à passer la vie derrière un télescope géant, seule comme une sauvage. Elle s’était trompée de sexe et d’univers” (99).10

Likewise Gaby, a successful businesswoman, suffers from intense loneliness and a sense of isolation that her relationship with René had never been able to dissipate. Having worked at the radio station for many years, she ends up losing her job to a younger woman named Priscille whom Mireau, a long-time friend and colleague, finds attractive. Priscille used her sexuality and feminine wiles to manipulate Mireau, refusing to be involved with him any longer unless she had Gaby’s job. Gaby, of course, is outraged to be let go on such a premise. However, after the initial shock, she resigns herself to her lot as a woman in a society that values beauty and youth over intelligence and competence in a woman. One evening, trying to combat her depression by going out to a neighborhood bar, Gaby meets Luc Desautels, a young man with a decidedly feminine personality. Luc cooks, cleans meticulously, is neat and orderly, and will not
stand for Gaby to do any of the housework as he finds her domestic skills sorely lacking.

One evening, Marie-Pierre tells Gaby that Luc’s personality is quite complementary to her own:

“Tu as un côté yang très très fort. Je t’assure. Mais il n’y a pas de mal à ça, bien entendu… Le yang est mouvement, extérieur, chaud, fonctionnel, agissant, c’est le principe mâle du univers. . . fascination du pouvoir, désir de vaincre et de mort, c’est très clair, quel dommage de retenir tout ça, c’est toute la force motrice qui se trouve ralentie.” (Proulx Le sexe 250, 251)

Gaby is angered by the idea that she may have character traits traditionally associated with men. However, it is the release of this “côté yang” that saves Gaby in the end. By using her knowledge of office politics, feminine wiles and sex to manipulate the station manager, Gaby regains her employment with CDKP, replacing Mireau as the official host of “Pas si fou.”

Dominique, on the other hand, has what Marie-Pierre suggests is an unacknowledged “côté yin,” or “feminine side.” She points this out to him one afternoon when he confesses his attraction to her and asks why she will not consider going out with him. Marie-Pierre suggests that Dominique’s fascination with her, an MTF, is a way to avoid facing his homosexuality.

“Tu aimes l’idée que je représente, tu aimes en moi la Femme avec un F majuscule, justement… Tu es très énormément excité par mon F majuscule. Ne compte pas sur moi pour régler tes problèmes… Il y a en toi plein de zones troubles, ça se hume à plein nez. Pense à ça, la prochaine fois que tu tiendras ta petite femme sur ton coeur, et que ton sexe mignon restera flatte comme un gentil mollusque.” (229)

Dominique cannot deny that he has suffered from impotence in his relationship with Mado. In fact, it is only when he hears Marie-Pierre’s voice on the radio saying “Je suis devenue moi… Je suis moi à cent pour cent: on ne peut pas en dire autant de beaucoup de
monde” that he regains his vitality (88). Mado has no idea that Dominique’s relationship with Marie-Pierre is the reason for his sexual recovery as well as the inspiration of his new novel.

Of course, like the other characters in Le sexe des étoiles, Marie-Pierre has her own issues with which to contend. Née Henri-Pierre Deslauriers, Marie-Pierre has returned to Montréal following sex reassignment surgery in the United States. Before the transformation, Henri-Pierre was a famous scientist who had won a number of prestigious awards. When he made the decision to undergo the transformation, he thought that he would be able to continue working in his current position; nothing could have been further from the truth. In the beginning, he tried to accustom his subordinates and colleagues gradually to the idea that he was becoming a woman by going to work “avec un petit maquillage une journée, un petit bijou le lendemain, une petite jupette un peu plus tard” (262). He learned quickly why it is recommended that those who decide to undergo a sex change save enough money to cover medical costs and to support themselves financially while they make the transition. It is almost always impossible for a transsexual to continue working with the same employer before, during and after the transformation (Bolin Eve 142-143).

After the transformation, Marie-Pierre had little success in securing any but the most menial employment. Part of the problem was that government officials would not agree to change her records to reflect the fact that she was now a woman.11 Nothing that Marie-Pierre could have done would have made them change the “M” in her dossier to “F.” She had presented government officials with ample documentation drafted by both
American and Canadian professionals (medical specialists, surgeons, general practitioners and psychologists) attesting to the fact that she was a woman. However, the general consensus of these officials seemed to be that Marie-Pierre should be willing to accept the consequences of her decision to have sex reassignment surgery, for example, the inability to secure gainful employment or qualify for social assistance (as she is able-bodied, they deem her capable of earning her own living), difficulties paying rent and buying food, and the loss of family, friends and colleagues. Not surprisingly, they hold Marie-Pierre responsible for the discrimination she faces as an MTF in the dominant culture.

According to the dominant culture, one’s sex (assigned at birth as male or female) corresponds to one’s gender (masculine or feminine), which in turn coincides with one’s social identity (man or woman). The dominant culture perpetuates the myth that diverse human traits may be divided into two distinct categories, each of which is “naturally” the exclusive domain of one or the other of two opposite sexes (male or female). With Le sexe des étoiles, Proulx suggests that there can be no such clear-cut definition of human experience. When Gaby protests the suggestion that she may have what some would consider masculine traits, Marie-Pierre rejoins, “‘Tout est tellement tranché au couteau pour vous [les Biologiques], c’est tellement plus facile comme ça, hein? Les Femmes d’un bord, les Z’hommes de l’autre, et swingue la baquaisse dans l’fond d’la boîte à bois!’” (Proulx Le sexe 250). In the novel, “lorsque Marie-Pierre dénonce l’effet limitant des rôles sexuels, disant qu’on n’a pas besoin de changer de sexe biologique pour
When asked to discuss her experience of adapting *Le sexe des étoiles* for the big screen, Proulx explained that she had a difficult time coming to terms with the process: “Avouons-le: je n’aurais sans doute jamais laissé quiconque trafiquer de la sorte mon roman, et personne d’autre, sans doute, n’aurait osé le faire aussi drastiquement” (Proulx “Détournement” 162). There are a number of important differences between *Le sexe des étoiles* (film) and the novel that served as its inspiration, including the fact that Marie-Pierre is no longer *l’astre central* in the cinematic universe. Camille Deslauriers is the main character in the film, an only child struggling with the trials and tribulations of adolescence. Proulx states that for the purposes of the adaptation Camille’s character was “la seule interlocutrice capable d’atteindre en profondeur le spectateur, capable de porter visuellement, poétiquement, tout ce que mon roman avait tenté de dire sur la recherche d’identité, les affres de la solitude, le poids des apparences et des choix existentials” (“Détournement” 162). Thus, while loath to do so, she rewrote the text to privilege one character’s point of view, not those of four as in the novel, to facilitate the story’s telling as a visual narrative.

Baillargeon makes it clear from the very beginning of the adaptation that the viewer is to share Camille’s perspective. *Le sexe des étoiles* opens with a tight close-up of an eye looking through a peephole situated center-sceeen; the frame is masked so that only the “seeing eye” is visible. The camera tracks back, opening up to a medium close-up of Camille, bundled up in a hat and coat, standing next to a telescope in a field
opposite her parents’ house at night. Camille is twelve-years old, soon to be thirteen, slender with delicate features and long, thin, straight dark hair. Baillargeon uses voiceover in the opening scene to communicate Camille’s thoughts:

Cher papa,


When Camille trains the telescope on the front the house, the camera changes its focus to reflect what would be seen through the telescope from Camille’s point of view: the silhouettes of Michèle and her lover J. Boulet kissing in the living room. The curtains prevent Camille from seeing her mother and J. Boulet more clearly, “a barrier to her understanding of sexuality” (Anderson “Subjects” 83).13 Camille continues to watch the two lovers in the window as the voiceover goes on, “Tous se tiennent deux par deux, partout partout…C’est dégueulasse.” Thus positioned in the opening sequence, Camille, with her telescope, becomes a voyeur, offering the film audience an original version of the female gaze…the telescope becomes one with the camera, identifying the subjective point of view as Camille’s… Camille not only protests that ‘couples’ are ‘disgusting,’ but in the position of voyeur she subverts what Mulvey calls the ‘visual pleasure’ that traditional narrative cinema offers the ‘male’ spectator/voyeur. (Anderson “Subjects” 83)

Baillargeon cuts from a long shot of the silhouettes of Michèle and J. Boulet behind the curtain to a slow, left-to-right pan of what must be assumed to be a woman’s belongings (black lace, women’s gloves, make-up, make-up case, jewelry) laid out in conspicuous display on one of two beds in a hotel-room.14 The camera continues its slow
pan right, taking in a woman’s overcoat, a wide belt and other feminine accessories, and several popular women’s magazines scattered on the adjacent bed; whoever is in the hotel room has just arrived in Montréal. The left-to-right pan continues, proceeding slowly; the camera stops momentarily for a long shot of a woman standing at the window, her face unseen by the viewer. At this point, the camera begins to track slowly forward, all the while panning left to right, only pausing for an instant to take in the reflection of the woman’s face on the windowpane. When the mysterious woman looks down on the street below at the Greyhound buses pulling in and out of the station, the camera tilts down, focusing on what she sees; she is no longer in the picture. The words *Le sexe des étoiles* appear on screen over the image of the street, and the pre-show credits scroll.

Once the credits have rolled, Baillargeon cuts to a medium close-up of a woman’s calves as she walks slowly through a rough area of town. Male and female prostitutes wander listlessly up and down the sidewalk, waiting for their next trick. Her back to the camera, the mysterious woman walks past two teenage boys standing on the corner, obviously working the street to earn a living. One of the two boys is Lucky Poitras, the young man on whom Camille has a serious crush. Slender with delicate features and long, thin, straight dark hair, Lucky is dressed in his “tough” outfit: a black biker’s jacket, jeans, and heavy boots. Nonchalant, he smokes a cigarette and talks with a chum while waiting for his next customer. As the woman approaches the corner where Lucky and his chum are standing, Lucky lets out a wolf-whistle. An androgynous-looking teenage prostitute, Lucky whistles at an as yet unknown MTF as she passes by. With this scene, Baillargeon introduces Lucky Poitras and foreshadows the impersonal relationship that he
will have with Marie-Pierre. Moreover, Baillargeon makes an ironic commentary on the politics of sexual difference as inscribed in mainstream representation, where unquestionably macho males whistle at shapely, ultrafeminine females as they walk by, objectifying them sexually.

Throughout the introductory sequence, Baillargeon uses crosscutting to call attention to the relationships that will develop between Camille, Marie-Pierre and Lucky Poitras. This editing technique is symbolic of how their lives will intersect; Baillargeon cuts back and forth between images of Camille (seated at her desk writing a letter, saying good-night to her mother, and lying in bed gazing up through the skylight), of Lucky (working the street, sipping champagne from a glass in a fancy car next to a silver-haired, well-to-do male), and of Marie-Pierre (looking out the window, walking down the sidewalk, and seated on the edge of the hotel bed). Marie-Pierre is not formally introduced until about fifteen minutes into the film. The day that Camille presents her exposé on stars in the film, Lucky walks up to her unexpectedly and asks if she can answer a question for him about stars. Baillargeon frames this exchange with a medium two-shot rather than a shot-reverse shot structure, emphasizing their budding relationship with one another as equals rather than situate them as subject and object. Camille is amazed that Lucky, the object of her affection, is standing so close to her; she eagerly responds to his question. Then, just when she begins to believe that she may have a chance with Lucky after all, he tells her “T’es b’en intelligente pour ton âge…B’en intelligente. ’Chose certaine, je ne voudrais jamais sortir avec une fille aussi intelligente que toi.”
That night, Camille says nothing to her mother of her disappointment at school; instead, she goes outside to try to console herself by looking at the stars. Yet the pain of the day’s events proves too much for her young heart to bear. In voice-over, Camille tells her father, “Cher papa…J’ai le cœur brisé. Ça fait tellement de mal en dedans… Je ne peux pas vivre ici entourée de gens qui ne m’aiment pas…” Believing that only her father’s love can ease her pain, Camille pleads softly, “Viens me chercher, papa.” In a matter of moments, a taxicab pulls up to the curb in front of her house and a tall, stately woman gets out. Camille’s wish is granted; Marie-Pierre has appeared. The power of enunciation underscores Camille’s status as a subject rather than an object in *Le sexe des étoiles*.\(^{16}\) Thus begins the story of the relationship that Marie-Pierre and Camille build with one another as parent and child, father/mother and daughter. Although Marie-Pierre had no intention of spending more than a few days in Montréal, she decides to stay on for a few weeks to try to arrange things with Camille.

Throughout the film, Camille desperately tries to persuade Marie-Pierre to resume her past identity as Henri-Pierre.\(^{17}\) In Henri-Pierre’s absence, she has come to idealize her father as a “knight in shining armor” who upon his return will whisk her off to a better world. In one of the most telling scenes of the film, Marie-Pierre and Camille are spending quality time together looking up at the stars. Camille points out that “La petite fille du lac” is shining brightly up in the sky above them. Coming up close behind Marie-Pierre, Camille wraps her arms around her. Then, resting her chin on Marie-Pierre’s shoulder, she begins:
This is perhaps the only scene in the film that is not directly inspired by a specific episode in the novel. Anderson suggests that “‘La petite fille du lac’ is a tale of imposed gender identity, a *mise en abyme* suggesting that Camille is troubled by her father’s situation” (“Subjects” 84). The scene ends with a medium close-up of Marie-Pierre and Camille huddled close together, a tender, maternal two-shot that communicates the intimacy that they have come to share as father/mother and daughter.

Lucky Poitras plays an important role in Camille’s coming to terms with the reality of her father’s transformation. Camille’s feelings of attraction to Lucky are made apparent early on in the film; yet much as she is attracted to him, they seem to be unable to find a common ground. Ultimately, it is their common experience of marginality, Camille’s father’s transsexualism and Lucky’s prostitution, that provides the foundation for their relationship. One evening, Marie-Pierre and Camille are out walking together in the Village. Marie-Pierre is trying to tell Camille about her transformation, to shed light on the realities of her life in the United States, but Camille does not want to listen. When Camille asks if the laboratory in New York where she works is impressive, Marie-Pierre candidly replies, “Je n’y travaillais pas dans un laboratoire. J’essayais…d’enlever mon déguisement…Comme la petite fille du lac, tu sais?…La nature se trompe des fois. Des fois, il y a des femmes qui naissent avec le corps d’un homme.” Taken aback by this affront to her idealized image of her father, Camille abruptly pulls away from Marie-Pierre and quickly changes the subject. As they approach Metro Berri-UQAM (situated in
Montréal’s Gay Village), Marie-Pierre tells Camille that it is time for her to go home. Camille does not want to go home and makes a scene, attracting the attention of all those around them, including that of Lucky Poitras who just happens to be grabbing a bite to eat at a fastfood restaurant across the street. Seated on the second-story by the window, Lucky has a bird’s-eye view of the scene being played out below. It does not take him long to figure out why Camille does not talk about her father.

When Camille opens her locker the next day at school, she finds a copy of Jamais vu, a transgender publication, on the top shelf. This edition features a photo of a man dressed in women’s lingerie on the front cover underscored by the headline “Quand un homme change de sexe.” Puzzled, Camille takes the magazine down to have a better look, uncertain of where it came from and of what it might mean. Lucky walks up to Camille and asks sympathetically, “C’est un tranvesti ou un transsexuel, ton père?…Tu peux m’en parler. Je connais ça, ce monde-là. Je ne suis pas né de la dernière pluie, moi.” Camille says nothing and looks away. In the next shot, they are sitting under the stairs at school where Lucky and his friends usually play cards and do drugs. Symbolically, Camille has entered Lucky’s inner circle of friends. Flipping through the magazine together, Camille turns the pages as Lucky explains the photos. As there is not much light under the stairwell, Lucky shines a flashlight on the magazine from above—literally and symbolically shedding light on the world of the transgendered. By sharing his street experience with Camille, Lucky demystifies what it means to be a transsexual, explaining the difference between a transvestite and a transsexual by pointing at the pictures and talking about the surgical and hormonal process of changing from one sex to another.
That night, Lucky takes Camille to “Le Néfertiti,” a nightclub that caters to a transgender clientele. After Lucky explains the reason for the visit to the two men in drag guarding the front door, they motion for Camille to come in. Once inside, Lucky leads Camille upstairs so that she can better observe what is going on below. The club’s patrons are watching a live performance; a slender, shapely young man in feminine drag stands center-stage singing a sentimental song about loneliness, one-night encounters, and true love. “I looked so hard just to find you…here at the end of the rainbow…Will you still love me, when the evening’s gone? Will you still love me, when the evening’s gone?” As Lucky and Camille look on from above, the camera scans the room from their point of view in the balcony. This is not a conventional representation of the sexual underground, where “according to the mainstream media and popular culture, the marginal sexual worlds are bleak and dangerous…portrayed as impoverished, ugly and inhabited by psychopaths and criminals” (Rubin 23). The people in the audience sway slowly side-to-side, respectfully attentive to the performer as s/he sings; they are obviously enjoying the show. As the song ends, the performer does a small pirouette, gyrating his/her hips to the beat of the music as s/he turns.

With “Le Néfertiti,” Baillargeon presents a “vision of the fluidity of gender options…a glimpse of ‘a world outside the order normally seen or thought about’—a utopian prospect of release from the ties of sexual difference that bind us into meaning, discourse, culture” (Kuhn 50). The club’s clientele is a mix of male and female transgenders, heterosexual, bisexual, and transsexual, gay men and lesbians. Camille is understandably taken aback by what she sees. Her reaction is a very common response to
transsexuality, a phenomenon described by Bolin and others as disruptive of the dualistic gender paradigm characteristic of the dominant culture. As Bolin points out,

The transgenderist is disquieting to the established gender systems and unsettles the boundaries of bipolarity and opposition in the gender schema by suggesting a continuum of masculinity and femininity, renouncing gender as aligned with genitals, body, social status and/or role. (“Transcending” 63)

At “Le Néfertiti,” there are men dressed as men and men dressed as women; women dressed as women and women dressed as men; androgynous men and androgynous women; transgender women consorting with transsexual men and transgender men consorting with transsexual women; gay male couples and lesbian couples. When Camille sees someone below who could very well be her father, an MTF in a red dress, walk over to a dark-skinned androgyne dressed in leather and begin to fondle and kiss him/her affectionately, she bolts from the club. It is not the idea of an interracial relationship that alarms her, but rather the reality of her father’s identity as an MTF. At “Le Néfertiti,” she comes face to face with the truth of her father’s existence.

Lucky immediately goes after her. When he finally manages to catch up to Camille, he sits down next to her and tells her that she cannot live up in the stars, that a person must have money to survive. At school, everyone thinks that Lucky has a wealthy, successful father who gives him everything that he wants. As Camille has had the courage to share her secret about her father, Lucky opens up and shares his own. “Moi, j’en gagne, mon argent. Tu sais comment j’en gagne? Je baise, Christ, je couche avec un bonhomme.” Overwhelmed by everything that has happened that day, Camille begins to cry. Lucky puts his arm around her shoulders to comfort her; she lays her head on his shoulder. While at school Lucky comes off as a troublemaker, a sophisticated poker-
playing tough guy, he is in fact as vulnerable as his peers, just another teenager struggling
with problems of his own. “In the character of Lucky, Baillargeon plays with gender and
role reversals. Lucky, with his long hair and delicate features (despite his adolescent
bravado), is androgynous and nurturing” (Anderson “Subjects” 84). The next day at
school, instead of a copy of Jamais vu, in her locker Camille finds a small gift-box
holding a delicate gold bracelet with a single gold star.

In addition to “Le Néfertiti,” there are a number of scenes in the film that provide
alternatives to mainstream representations of those who challenge conventional
understandings of sex, gender, and social identity. “Le Café” is one of two scenes that
reveal Marie-Pierre’s interactions with others on a more intimate, physical level; both
reinforce Marie-Pierre’s subjectivity as a woman (albeit an MTF) rather than position her
as an object of the (heterosexual) male gaze. In “Le Café,” Marie-Pierre is seated at a
table in a small café waiting for Camille to arrive. While she sits quietly minding her own
business, an attractive middle-aged male seated at an adjacent table, also alone, does his
best to strike up a conversation with her. The scene opens with a close-up of a man’s
hands spreading the two halves of a mussel shell (a visual metaphor for female genitalia)
apart with his fingers. Next, the camera pulls back to a right-profile shot of a gentleman
in a three-piece suit lifting the entire mussel to his lips and pulling the meat from the shell
with his teeth, tongue and lips. Baillargeon cuts from the right-profile shot of the man to a
left profile, also a medium shot, of Marie-Pierre, eyes lowered with a slight look of
disgust on her face; she is obviously put off by his table manners. Turning away from the
stranger, Marie-Pierre directs her attention to a large window at the far side of the café,
expecting Camille to show up at any moment. Then, in sound off, a man’s voice begins, “La nuit dernière…j’ai fait un rêve étrange…” Thus begins a series of crosscutting between shots of Marie-Pierre and of the man seated to her left who insists on telling her about his strange dream. Baillargeon uses crosscutting and parallel shots (i.e. equal camera distance: medium shot, medium shot; long shot, long shot; medium shot, medium shot; medium close-up, medium close-up) to situate the two adults as equals, rather than use the shot-reverse shot structure associated with the male gaze and the hierarchy of sexual difference in mainstream cinema [male subject of the look (shot), female object of the look (reverse shot)].

After listening to the stranger recount his story about eating talking clams that curse him in English, Marie-Pierre gives him her analysis of the dream: “C’était probablement un rêve sur l’identité culturelle…Vous êtes anglophobe, visiblement, et vous projetez votre peur d’assimilation sur les Anglaises clams.” At this point, Baillargeon closes the camera range, pulling in from the medium shots to medium close-ups of Marie-Pierre and the gentleman in turn to call attention to their growing rapport. They smile pleasantly at one another; finally, the man says “J’ai très envie de vous offrir un verre…mais vous allez croire que je vous drague.” Looking away, Marie-Pierre averts her gaze demurely, a femme cue, then, smiling coyly, she tests the waters by saying, “Ce qui est faux.” Knowing the game well, he responds, “Ah non, non! Ce qui est vrai. Mais on a sa fierté!” Just then, Camille enters the café and walks over to Marie-Pierre’s table: “Allô, papa!” At that moment, Marie-Pierre’s smile fades and the stranger drops his fork; it strikes his plate with a loud “clank.” Baillargeon refers to this scene as an example of
comic relief, yet the joke is not at the expense of Marie-Pierre but at that of her male suitor. Having Marie-Pierre, visibly a woman, referred to as “papa” in this scene contradicts the preconceived notions of sex, gender and social identity “embedded in the Western gender schema as taken-for-granted premises” (Bolin “Transgendering” 73).

In “Le Drague,” Marie-Pierre goes to a straight nightclub hoping to ease her loneliness and ends up taking someone home with her. The scene opens with a long shot of Marie-Pierre at the apartment getting dressed to go out. Examining her reflection in the dresser mirror, Marie-Pierre compares her outfit, posture, and profile to the image of a similarly dressed woman (low-cut red dress, dark glasses) pictured in an advertisement of a popular women’s magazine. In the next shot, Marie-Pierre is seated at the bar of a crowded nightclub that caters to a straight clientele. As in “Le Café,” Baillargeon uses crosscutting and parallel shots to deconstruct the shot-reverse shot sequence typically used to situate male/female interactions as a relationship of subject/object. Rather than dwell on the flirtatious aspects of the heterosexual mating ritual as in “Le Café,” this time Baillargeon cuts to the chase. The first image is a medium close-up of Marie-Pierre seated at the bar; the second, a medium close-up of a man seated to her right. Noticing Marie-Pierre standing at the other end of the bar, the man tries to catch her eye and when he manages to do so, smiles invitingly. In the next shot, another medium close-up, Marie-Pierre lowers her eyes for a moment, then looks back at the stranger and smiles, a “femme cue…meet someone’e eyes (usually a butch), glance quickly away, then slowly look back into the butch’s eyes and hold that gaze” (Bornstein 27).
In a matter of moments, they are back at Marie-Pierre’s apartment. The man takes off his jacket, loosens his tie, and sits down on the edge of the bed; Marie-Pierre walks to the far side of the room and looks out the window. “Viens t’asseoir,” he beckons. “Viens,” he says softly, patting the bed with his left hand, gesturing for her to come sit beside him. When Marie-Pierre does not respond, he gets up, walks over to where Marie-Pierre is standing, and puts his arm around her shoulders. Marie-Pierre leans in toward him, resting her head on his shoulder. He tries to kiss her, but Marie-Pierre says “non” and turns her head away. In spite of this rebuff, the stranger continues his advance; his hands wander quickly over Marie-Pierre’s shoulders and down toward her chest. Marie-Pierre tries to back away, but he grabs the neck of her dress to keep her from pulling away. In his ardent desire to fondle her breasts, the man tears Marie-Pierre’s dress in a clumsy attempt to undress her. In desperation, Marie-Pierre shoves him away, striking him with her fist, and forcefully shouts out “NON!” Taken aback by the force of the blow, the man staggers backward and ends up sprawled out on the floor. Glowering at Marie-Pierre all the while, he pulls himself up, gathers his things and leaves in a huff. The scene ends with a long shot of Marie-Pierre standing by the window, looking quite vulnerable as she folds her arms across her chest as if to protect herself against another sexual assault. As a woman, in spite of her physical stature, Marie-Pierre is vulnerable in a way that she never experienced as a man.

Film critics have variously assessed Baillargeon’s representation of Marie-Pierre, the transsexual, as conservative, subtle, essentialist, garish and sympathetic. Marshall, for instance, has suggested that *Le sexe des étoiles* is “ultimately rather conservative in its
gender essentialism” (238), whereas Roy praises Baillargeon for having “réussi, avec un personnage aussi risqué et difficile à traiter (on aurait pu s’en servir pour en faire une comédie grivoise ou un mélodrame complaisant), un film nuancé et personnel” (“Recherche père” 5). Pallister criticizes Mercier’s portrayal of Marie-Pierre, maintaining that “as a woman he seems a parody of a woman—overplaying arm and leg movements; he is nothing more than a man in drag” (111). On the contrary, Murphy insists that Mercier “is superb as the transsexual dad: a big man, he inhabits his womanly shape and clothes with considerable grace and good humor, so that he can’t be categorized as either male or female, but achieves some truly other, richer sex” (67). Whether critics commend or condemn the representation of the transsexual in Le sexe des étoiles, the fact remains that due to Baillargeon’s candid depiction of Marie-Pierre and her relationships with others in the film, “Marie-Pierre ne peut être qu’accepté, tel quel, par le spectateur” (Roy “Recherche père” 6).

Despite the obvious changes between the novel and the film, Proulx maintains that “ces deux produits distincts puisent à la même source, et reproduisent ce qui [lui] semble être l’essence d’une oeuvre: même vision du monde, même propos fondamental, et surtout même cohérence dans les personnages” (“Détournement”162). Nonetheless, the fact that the film privilege’s Camille’s story over that of Marie-Pierre is problematic. Marie-Pierre is either the exclusive narrator of, or a significant presence in, fifteen of the seventeen chapters that make up the novel. She is central to the lives of the each of the characters in the novel, whereas Camille is not. In the adaptation, 

Marie-Pierre, qui occupait dans le livre une sorte de centre névralgique, s’est retrouvée en arrière-plan… ce n’est plus la Barbie intelligente et frondeuse du
roman, mais un être vulnérable, tourmenté, à la troublante masculinité; au lieu de proférer des confidences lyriques sur son cheminement et son état, elle se contente d’être là et de vivre, comme quelque chose de terriblement normal. (Proulx “Détournement” 162)

Furthermore, whereas the novel is made up of individual episodes alternately narrated by one of the four main characters, the film privileges a linear, chronological narrative with a definite beginning and end that traces Camille’s personal and social maturation. Moreover, while the novel “se termine avec la représentation du personnage transsexuel comme une femme qui a finalement trouvé sa dimension” (Falzoni 90), the film ends with a shot of Camille and Lucky riding off into the sunset together. As they cruise down the highway on Lucky’s scooter, we hear Marie-Pierre say in sound-off:

C’est moi. Je t’écris avant d’aller dormir.


En ce moment, je vois ton signe dans le ciel: le Capricorne. C’est comme tu étais avec moi. Quand tu vas venir me rejoindre tu vas voir comme tout est merveilleux ici.

Pense à moi, Camille. Pense à moi.

The voice-over at the end of the film echos that at the beginning, only this time it is Marie-Pierre reaching out to Camille rather than Camille reaching out to her father. At the end of the film, the viewer is left wondering what really happened to Marie-Pierre. The last time that we see her she is dressed in male drag and seated behind the wheel of a sportscar, presumably on her way back to New York. Does Marie-Pierre go back to New York? Does she find work in a laboratory? If she does, is she working as Marie-Pierre,
une femme scientifique, or as Henri-Pierre, un homme scientifique? Must she forsake her true identity in order to survive in the dominant culture? Is she forced to sacrifice her relationship with Camille in order to be true to herself? The film glosses over many of the more difficult issues that transsexuals face as members of an unwelcome minority in a sexist dominant culture. “Ni agressif ni en retrait, le film aborde gravement son sujet, mais sans être lourd, et surtout pas symbolique, déroulant simplement événements et incidents nécessaires et naturels à l’avancement du récit et à ses situations” (“Recherche père” Roy 5). Ultimately, the adaptation is about a young girl’s understanding of herself and her role in the world around her.

Bolin suggests that as a social identity, transsexualism posits the analytic independence of the four gender markers—sex, gender identity, gender roles or social identity (including behaviors and appearances), and sexual orientation—that are embedded in the Western gender as taken-for-granted premises and regarded as “naturally” linked. (“Transcending” 73)

In Le sexe des étoiles, Camille is a young woman coming of age in a world where it is no longer possible to think of men and women as opposite sexes or of masculinity and femininity as mutually exclusive categories. In a traditional family, the man is the head of the household, working outside the home to earn money to provide for his family while the woman, his wife and the mother of his children, stays home to take care of their physical and emotional needs. In the modern world, there are few so-called traditional families. In Le sexe des étoiles, Michèle is a single parent struggling to balance her professional obligations as a successful lawyer with her responsibilities as head of the household and mother of a teenage daughter. Marie-Pierre, once an internationally
renowned scientist, is unable to find work due to the discrimination she faces as a transsexual. On the one hand, due to her success in the business world, Michèle is not able to be as emotionally and physically available for Camille as she feels a mother should be. On the other, as Marie-Pierre is unemployed, she is able to step in as a surrogate mother for Camille in her time of need. In *Le sexe des étoiles*, Marie-Pierre “‘est à la fois un père absent et une mère présente…il devient de plus en plus une vraie mère alors que la vraie est absente, parce que c’est une femme qui a réussi’” (Baillargeon in Roy “Entretien” 10).

De Lauretis asserts that “femininity is purely a representation, a positionality within the phallic model of desire and signification; it is not a quality or property of women” (20). Along the same lines, masculinity is not an innate quality or property of men. Masculinity and femininity are not derivatives of biological sex. In *Le sexe des étoiles*, the inadequacies of traditional understandings of sex, gender, and social identity are made clear. They should not be used to regulate human experience in the modern world. The sympathetic portrayal of social and sexual minorities in *Le sexe des étoiles* is a significant contribution to the efforts of those who work to redefine sex, gender, and social identity as a continuum of human expression that exceeds and transcends the dualistic gender paradigm espoused by the dominant culture. With *Le sexe des étoiles*, “Baillargeon may be calling for a new cinema that is both masculine and feminine in its aesthetic, that challenges society’s attitudes toward sexual difference, for, as Kaplan concedes, ‘we need to think about ways of transcending a polarity that has only brought us all pain’” (Anderson “Subjects” 85).
Notes to Chapter 4

1 Proulx had shown Baillargeon not the first but the seventh draft of her scénario for *Le sexe des étoiles*. She explains,

> il m’a fallu trois ans et sept versions différentes pour en arriver à une oeuvre à part entière, un scénario ramassé et cinématographiable. Les cinq premières versions ont été des tentatives désespérées pour conserver à l’adaptation la plupart des personnages et des actions du roman. (“Détournement” 161)

2 In *Technologies of Gender*, Teresa De Lauretis points out that “there is a constant slippage between Woman as representation, as the [idealized] object and the very condition of representation, and, on the other hand, women as historical beings, subjects of ‘real relations’” (10). Proulx further underscores this “slippage” symbolically in her novel. For instance, Dominique Larue venerates Marie-Pierre as a mythical being, putting her on a pedestal as larger than life. When his point of view is represented in the text, Marie-Pierre is referred to as “Elle” *majuscule*.

3 Baillargeon explained that the request “‘m’a fait peur au début, car je ne me considérais pas comme une réalisatrice’” (in Tadros “Notre Cinéma malgré l’ONF” 13).

4 When asked why the *Comité* had rejected the proposal, Baillargeon replied, “‘On m’a dit qu’il n’y avait pas de cinéma là-dedans, qu’il n’y avait pas de dialogue, pas de personnages, que tout y était cliché… Ils ont mis un acharnement incroyable à me détruire…’” (in Tadros “Notre Cinéma” 13) She went on to protest, “‘Le film existe, les personnages aussi, mais les membres du comité n’ont pas voulu s’abaisser à regarder du vidéo. Ils ont préféré dire non au film’” (in Tadros “A l’Outremont” n.pg.)

5 On the eve of the first referendum for Québec independence in 1980, Lise Payette, a politician affiliated with the Parti Québécois, used the term “Yvette” to refer to women who did not work outside the home. In outdated children’s school manuals, “Yvette” was the name given to the character who fulfilled the traditional female roles of mother, wife and housekeeper while her husband worked outside the home as the breadwinner. Women who fulfilled these traditional female roles took offense to Payette’s remarks about women working in the home being “submissive” housewives,” protesting what they perceived as an insult. As Lise Payette was
affiliated with those working in support of the referendum, the “Yvettes” reacted by lending their support to those working against the referendum.


6 A number of theorists, including Patricia Smart (*Écrire dans la maison du père*, 1990) and Lori Saint-Martin (“The Other Family Romance,” 2001) have pointed out how women writers of the seventies and eighties often turned to the mother/daughter relationship as inspiration for their narratives. Symbolically, the image of the “Father” and the expression “the father’s house” have been used to refer to a patriarchal society and the social institutions (religion, family, government, education, media) that reinforce and assure the continuation of sexist oppression.

Saint-Martin points out the similarity between the conflation of Woman as representation and woman as historical being and Father/father. “The conflation of the father with patriarchy does not tell the whole story: the father is always both singular and plural, linked to powerful myths yet rooted in historical reality” (172). She goes on to suggest that “women’s fiction of the 1990s [such as *Le sexe des étoiles*] tells new stories of ‘detached daughters’ working, sometimes painfully and problematically, toward new visions of the family…” (183).

In *Le sexe des étoiles*, Proulx examines the father/daughter relationship between an MTF, Marie-Pierre Deslauriers, and her daughter Camille. This is not a typical father/daughter relationship as cast in a traditional light. Marie-Pierre is at once father and mother, a strong, tender, intelligent, benevolent and nurturing figure in her daughter’s life.

7 When Marie-Pierre appears as a guest on CDKP’s “Pas si fou” talk show; it is not because Gaby had heard of her and sought her out, but rather that she herself had contacted Gaby and asked to be interviewed on the air. When Marie-Pierre goes on the air with Mireau, it is obvious that she gets the better of him; his attempts to exploit Marie-Pierre as “La Transsexuelle” fail miserably. For example, when Mireau tries to focus on the intricacies of the sex-change operation, asking whether or not the transformation was a success, if her new genitalia are fully functional, whether her breasts are real, Marie-Pierre replies, “Si tu veux, susurre-t-elle, une lueur mauvaise dans le regard, si tu veux, mon petit Bob, je te montre tout ça tout à l’heure, pour que tu te rendes compte, de visu, à quoi ça ressemble…OK?” (Proulx *Le sexe des étoiles* 62-63).

8 Interestingly, Proulx had no transsexual friends or acquaintances to consult when she began work on *Le sexe des étoiles*. As she had no personal or other first-hand experience to draw on to help develop the character of Marie-Pierre, Proulx did a good bit of research on transsexualism before she began to write the novel.
Bolin states that in the transgender community

“Incidents of male appreciation are retold and treated as indicative of transsexual success in passing. Transsexuals derive a great deal of social role performance validation from such encounters. This reinforcement, appreciated during passing endeavors and full-time status, can be a double-edged sword because full-time also raises the question of sexual objectification in the form of sexual harassment.” (Éve 150)

At school, Camille tries to hide her intelligence by sabotaging her grades in an attempt to fit in, something that she so desperately wants to do. When Camille admits to her father that she wishes she could be like everyone else, Marie-Pierre replies “Il faut pas être comme tout le monde. Il faut marcher toute seule à la tête, pis [sic] essayer de trouver un chemin que personne d’autre a pris avant… les chemins des autres ne mènent pas assez loin” (198-99). With her father’s words in mind, Camille decides to no longer hide her intelligence from others, to accept and embrace who she is and to live life on her own terms.

C’est en écoutant les conseils de son père Marie-Pierre, modèle du non-conformisme s’il en est, que Camille apprendra le courage de vivre sa différence. Ce faisant, elle s’anonce ‘gagnante’ et non pas victime, la première des héroïnes ou héros adolescents dans la littérature québécoise à engager la vie selon ses propres termes, au-delà de tous les conformismes. (Smart 75)

Bolin explains that an essential aspect of going full-time for transsexuals is the need for “biographical editing, creating documented histories of themselves as female. This includes creating the paper trails of personal and social identity verification as women so necessary for a number of reasons…” including, but not limited to, employment, banking (and other financial concerns such as credit cards, auto loans and mortgages), insurance needs (health, life, auto), social security and retirement, taxation (city, provincial, federal), and educational records (Éve 145). However, while

the legal name change provides the option of changing all other documents legally…the name change could not be used to change the designated sex on certain documents. These changes were contingent upon a surgeon’s written statement that genital reconversion surgery had been performed. (146-47)

Reflecting on her experience of adapting Le sexe des étoiles for the screen, Proulx laments, “On me l’avait dit, mais je refusais de le croire: au cinéma, il ne peut y avoir
qu’un personnage principal…celui dont la mission ultime est de se charger des emotions du spectateur pour les transporter de l’autre côté du précipice” (“Détournement” 162).

13 Anderson suggests that “this distancing of Camille as voyeur emphasizes her marginality and loneliness, as well as her alienation from the adults in her life” (“Subjects” 84). In addition to the distance represented by the telescope lens, there are a series of scenes in the film that feature glass barriers between Camille and others. For example, at the bus station where Camille meets Marie-Pierre and asks to go to New York with her, Camille remains inside the station while Marie-Pierre stands outside the door trying to decide whether or not to leave.

In another scene, Marie-Pierre and Camille are walking toward the Metro Berri-UQAM station in the Village. When Camille realizes that Marie-Pierre is not going to give in to her request to spend the night, she dashes away, enters the metro station and runs downstairs. Once inside, Camille is overwhelmed by feelings of despair and hurries back upstairs to see if Marie-Pierre is still there—and she is. They have a tender exchange, the palms of their hands touching against either side of the station door. Camille anxiously tells Marie-Pierre, “A bientôt, papa! A bientôt!” and Marie-Pierre nods her head and smiles warmly, lovingly reassuring Camille that she will be there for her.

14 Bolin explains that “the consolidation of identity [as a woman rather than as a male-to-female transsexual following sex reassignment surgery] is reinstated by the consolidation of openly displayed female artifacts including make-up, hair accessories, jewelry boxes, and other gender-labeled cultural baggage that formerly cast suspicion on their identities.” (Eve 148)

15 Straayer points out that “the two-shot binds two characters by framing them together. As opposed to the shot-reverse-shot, which sutures the viewer into the interaction, the two-shot positions the viewer outside. This encourages the viewer to relate to the two characters not individually (or as one’s surrogate and partner) but as an intact pair” (“Redressing the ‘Natural’” 415).

16 Importantly, the fact that Camille does not recognize the woman getting out of the taxicab as her father does not diminish the truth that she is indeed a seeing subject in this cinematic universe, an intellectual young woman who “looks and analyzes, and in usurping the gaze…poses a threat to an entire system of representation” based on sexual difference (Doane 236).

Camille’s confusion on encountering Marie-Pierre for the first time, and subsequent difficulty in accepting her father as a woman, can be understood partly as a consequence of her training in the dominant culture. Camille’s uncertainty regarding her father’s new identity is reflected by that of her mother (Henri-Pierre’s ex-wife),...
Henri-Pierre’s former colleagues at the laboratory, and others in the film (for example, in the café, in the straight bar, and passers-by at the metro station Berri-UQAM) who would seek to classify individuals as necessarily belonging to one of two categories (“men” and “women”) on the basis of their physical appearance as a “natural” matter of course. Chinn suggests that

While we may recognize that gender is coercive, it is familiar; it is ourselves. The neutralizing effects of gender mean that gender feels natural—even the understanding that it is performative, that our subjectivities themselves are constructed through its performance, does not make it feel any less intrinsic. (306-07)

17 Camille refers to Marie-Pierre as “papa” both in public and in private (much to Marie-Pierre’s dismay) and constantly tries to remind Marie-Pierre of quality time spent together before Henri-Pierre left for the United States. Furthermore, she has a secret collection of Henri-Pierre’s personal items (gold watch, polishing cloth, shaving kit, shoes, lab coat, photos) that she keeps in a wooden box hidden in her bedroom closet—in contrast to the feminine accoutrements displayed prominently in Marie-Pierre’s hotel room.

18 “Les Anglaises clams” is an exact quotation from the film and is quite possibly a reference to Diderot’s "bijoux indiscrets." In any case, the symbolism of the clams in the exchange that takes place between the stranger and Marie-Pierre in both the novel and the film is undeniably sexual.

In the novel, the stranger begins by saying that in his dream he was sitting on a café terrasse eating palourdes, then corrects himself by saying that he was eating clams (Proulx Le sexe 52). As he speaks, Marie-Pierre makes the following mental notes:

Cochon… Palourde = mollusque lamellibranche ourlé = symbole très éminemment vulvaire. . . Des clams. Symbolique sexuelle identique. (52)

The stranger goes on to say that the clams were cursing him in English but that he ate them anyway. When asked what she makes of the dream, Marie-Pierre suggests that he is an anglophobe. He replies: “Savez-vous ce que je fais dans la vie? Vous allez rire. Je suis président de la Commission des droits francophones de la personne” (53).

The combination of sexual and cultural symbolism in this exchange is quite interesting. Along these lines, the fact that the man refers to “les Anglaises clams” in the film (les “Anglaises de clams” in the novel) could be construed as a conflation of a fear of Woman as (sexual) Other and a fear of Anglophone as (cultural) Other. The stranger is a white, heterosexual male and a francophone Québécois. On the one hand, as a white, heterosexual male he enjoys a certain amount of privilege due to his status in the dominant culture. On the other, the fact that he is francophone makes him part
of a cultural minority in North America. The politics of power and privilege relative to
sexual and cultural identity issues are evident in this exchange. Unfortunately, a more
in-depth examination of the identity issues specific to this scene is beyond the scope of
this research project.

19 Chinn points out that such magazines and their stylized images belong to “an entire
arsenal of books, films, television, advertisements, parental injunctions and peer
surveillance [generated] to make sure that [gender] performances are (ideally)
unconscious and successful” (306-07).
CONCLUSION

“Film adaptations...are caught up in the ongoing whirl of intertextual reference and transformation, of texts generating other texts in an endless process of recycling, transformation, and transmutation, with no clear point of origin.”

Robert Stam

“If we are ignorant of the structure that holds the gender/sex relationship in place...we are likely to be susceptible to the power the structure holds over us without even realizing it. That is to say, we will not be able to recognize the extent to which sex/gender systems control and limit our actions.”

Diane Elam

With “Screening Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary Québec Film Adaptation,” I am contributing to scholarly research on the changing representation of gender and sexuality in literature and film. Avoiding the quagmire of criticism based solely on questions of fidelity or artistic predilection, I have used Stam’s definition of cinematic adaptation as an intertextual relationship between a film and its source text to evaluate the process of adaptation as an exchange between distinct yet undeniably related narrative forms. Moreover, I have examined how the representation of gender and sexuality in literature and film may be transformed during the process of adaptation due, for example, to artistic predilections, economic constraints, and ideological concerns. In chapter two, I argue that Simoneau’s representation of Stevens Brown in the film is symptomatic of how traditional understandings of manhood and masculinity are in
crisis in Western cultures. In chapter three, I point out that Pool’s privileging of the heterosexual bonds between Pierre and Sarah on the one hand, and David and Sarah on the other, may be interpreted as an attempt to neutralize the more unconventional aspects (bisexuality, homosexuality) of their romantic triangle in the novel. In chapter four, I suggest that Baillargeon portrays the inadequacy of traditional understandings of gender and sexuality by representing a cinematic world where it is no longer possible to think of men and women as opposite sexes, of masculinity and femininity as mutually exclusive categories.

A more recent film, *Lost and Delirious* (2001), calls attention to the complexity of the issues surrounding the representation of gender and sexuality as transformed through the process of adaptation. *Lost and Delirious*, Léa Pool’s first English-language film, was adapted from the novel *The Wives of Bath* written by Susan Swan, a Canadian author, in 1993. *The Wives of Bath* is a story about a young girl named Mary Beatrice Bradford, nicknamed “Mouse,” who is sent to an all-girl boarding school by her stepmother Sal. Mouse’s father Morley is a well-known physician who is always in demand; Mouse has little if any contact with him in spite of her great need for his attention. Swan uses a flashback structure and first-person narration to tell the story of what happened the year that Mouse enrolled in Bath Ladies College; the events are told from Mouse’s point of view. The novel begins with a brief episode in which Mouse tells a little bit about herself and how she came to be a student at the boarding school. In the next chapter, Mouse is in a courtroom where the trial of Pauline Sykes, one of her roommates at Bath Ladies College, has gotten underway. Pauline Sykes is being tried for the murder of Sergeant,
the school’s janitor; the name “Mary Beatrice Bradford” has just been has just been mentioned in the course of the proceedings. Mouse sits alone at the back of the courtroom. As the counsel drones on, Mouse begins to “tendril,” reflecting back on what happened that year at Bath Ladies College. The court is trying to decide whether Pauline Sykes should be held accountable for the murder or whether she should be treated for a mental disorder. The remainder of the text tells the story of the events that lead up to the crime. Swan cuts back to the courtroom at intervals throughout the novel; it is clear that Mouse is telling the events that led up to the murder in hindsight.

As a new student at Bath Ladies College, Mouse meets a number of eccentric characters, such as the dwarf named Sergeant who serves as the school’s janitor, his young helper Lewis Sykes, and Vera Vaughn, the school’s headmistress and a distant cousin of Mouse’s father. It is not long before Mouse meets her new roommates: Victoria Quinn, “Tory,” and Pauline Sykes, “Paulie.” Socially backwards and a bit shy, Mouse is initially frightened by Paulie, as she can be rather intimidating at times. However, Tory intervenes on Mouse’s behalf, and she begins to feel more at ease as their new roommate. Paulie has an older brother named Lewis who works at the boarding school on weekends when Paulie allegedly goes home to be with their grandfather. In reality, Paulie and Lewis are the same person, although no one at the school—including Tory, Miss. Vaughn, and Sergeant—suspects that this is so. Tory and Lewis have been going steady for some time, and Tory’s family does not approve of their relationship. This is not because Tory’s parents suspect that Lewis is a girl; they have never questioned his sexual identity. Tory and Lewis have always behaved as a heterosexual couple, and they have no
idea that their daughter is dating a female-to-male transgender/transsexual. One evening when Paulie and Mouse are out walking the school grounds, Paulie suddenly disappears from sight and reappears a few moments later dressed as Lewis. Admitting that she has been posing as Lewis for some time, Paulie invites Mouse to try on a male persona as well, telling her that it would be easy for her to pass as a boy. Lewis hates “girly girls,” i.e. traditionally feminine females; s/he idolizes King Kong for his power and strength. Once Mouse has agreed to try on one of Willy’s (Lewis’s co-worker’s) outfits, Lewis proposes a series of tests by which Mouse can prove herself worthy of being a man. Mouse is uncomfortable with the idea, but being easily influenced by others and wanting Paulie to like her, she does what she is told.

Toward the end of the novel, Lewis invites Tory to a formal dance at nearby Kings College—an all-boy boarding school. When Lewis goes to Tory’s house to pick her up for the dance, Tory’s parents and older brother Richard refuse to let her go. While Tory’s parents have never questioned Lewis’s sexual identity, Richard is very suspicious of him. Once their parents have gone back into the house, Richard demands that Lewis prove his manhood by showing him his penis. As Lewis was born with female genitalia, there is no way that s/he can pass this test. Lewis storms off in a huff, outraged by Richard’s demand. Lewis is of course very upset that s/he will not be able to take Tory to the dance—all because Richard insists that s/he must have a penis or else s/he cannot be a “real man”.

Later that night once everyone has returned home from the dance, Paulie wakes up Mouse and tells her to come quickly. Something is wrong with Sergeant; there has
been a dreadful accident. When Mouse arrives at the scene, there is nothing that she can do. Sergeant has already passed away. Just a few moments earlier, Paulie had followed Sergeant into one of the school’s utility tunnels. Once having cornered Sergeant, Paulie bludgeoned him with her field-hockey stick, striking two deadly blows to his head. Then, before summoning Mouse, she had used a scalpel to cut off Sergeant’s penis and testicles, hiding them in a small box behind a steamer trunk until she was sure that she could take them without notice. When Mouse sees Sergeant lying on the ground, she runs off to tell Willy, another one of the school’s janitors. While they go find the headmistress, Paulie gets dressed as Lewis, uses tire glue to adhere Sergeant’s genitalia to her own pubic area, and goes to Tory’s house to prove to Richard that s/he really is a man. Richard recognizes immediately that Lewis’s (male) genitalia are not real, and he confronts Lewis with the reality of his/her sexual identity as a girl. (One’s sexual identity as “male” or “female” does not equal one’s social identity as “man” or “woman”.) Paulie is arrested shortly thereafter on suspicion of murder.

Not surprisingly, there has been no scholarly work published on either The Wives of Bath or Lost and Delirious to date; all that exists is a handful of critical reviews and two interviews with Léa Pool that took place shortly after the film’s release. Lost and Delirious represents a return to Pool’s interest in lesbian representation, and is the most recent addition to the all-girl boarding school genre that includes such well-known films as Leontine Sagan’s Maedchen in Uniform (1931), William Wyler’s The Children’s Hour (1961), and Radley Metzger’s Thérèse and Isabelle (1968)—all of which were
adaptations as well. When asked in an interview why she chose to direct *Lost and Delirious*, Pool explained

“This is a project that was suggested to me a few years ago. I was given the screenplay to read…but I was busy with another film at the time… A couple of other directors had begun work on it, but had quit. Greg Dummett, who is now associated with Cité-Amérique, was in charge of its production and he suggested it to Lorraine Richard, who read it and said to herself, ‘Oh, this is for Léa.’ She made me read it. I found the subject very interesting. I thought that it was touching and original, and I liked the way it was adapted.” (in Tousignant 25)

Interestingly, *Lost and Delirious* is the first of Pool’s films for which she did not collaborate on the scenario. By the time Pool accepted the project, Judith Thompson, who adapted the novel, had already spent six years tweaking the scenario to fit the desires of the previous directors and producers. Pool did not ask Thompson to make any further changes to the screenplay of *Lost and Delirious*, but she did make a few changes of her own during the course of its production. Pool explains, “‘It was during the shooting stage that I simplified certain things. My job was to streamline and illustrate rather than reinvent’” (25). While Pool was working in English with the actresses who played the main characters of the film (Piper Perabo, Jessica Paré and Mischa Barton), the majority of the crew were Québécois, native French speakers; this helped minimize any potential language difficulties on the set. When asked about the experience of directing her first English-language film, Pool replied “‘What’s funny is that even though this was the first time I worked in English, it wasn’t the language that worried me, but rather the struggle of working on such a finished project and adapting it to make it my own’” (25).

Thematically, *Lost and Delirious* has much in common with Pool’s body of work as a whole: the search for identity and authenticity; the human need for companionship
and love; feelings of isolation and alienation; absence and loss. *Lost and Delirious* is a
film about the relationship between three teenagers attending an all-girl boarding school:
Mouse (Mary Bradford), Paulie (Pauline Auster), and Tory (Victoria Quinn). The film
opens with a close-up of Mouse riding in the back seat of her father’s car; they are on
their way to the boarding school. Once there, after good-byes have been said, the
headmistress Vera Vaughn introduces Mouse to Tory; Tory befriends her and helps take
her suitcases up to their room. It is obvious that we are to share Mouse’s point of view in
the film, much as the novel is told from her point of view in first-person narration. We
hear Mouse’s thoughts, for example, in voice-over as she rides quietly in the back of her
father’s car at the beginning of the film, looks out the bedroom window at Paulie and
Tory kissing and embracing each other below, and at the very end of the film after Paulie
takes flight from the roof of the boarding school.

Through the course of the film, Mouse comes to realize that Tory and Paulie are
lovers. She thinks nothing of it, and does not assign the label “lesbian” to Paulie and
Tory’s relationship: “‘I know this sounds like, naïve,’” she explains, “‘But at first, I
thought they were, like, practicing for boys.’” Everything goes well for Paulie and Tory
until one morning Ally (Tory’s younger sister Allison, who does not exist in the novel)
and a few of her friends rush into the bedroom to wake up Tory and find Paulie and Tory
in bed together wearing nothing but underwear. This upsets everything; Ally and her
friends immediately assume that Tory and Paulie are lesbian lovers. Tory comes from a
very conservative family, so she feels that she must either deny her deep love for Paulie
or else risk losing her family’s love and support. Therefore, Tory tells Ally that Paulie
just crawled into bed with her one night without her knowledge or consent. Tory explains that she did not report Paulie as she felt sorry for her; Paulie is adopted and has no real family of her own. After much persuasion, Ally agrees to tell her friends that Tory is not a lesbian and that Paulie’s attention was not wanted. More importantly, Ally promises not to tell their parents about the episode. In an effort to protect her reputation at the school as well as her family ties, Tory immediately distances herself from Paulie and repeatedly denies her love for her. When Paulie confronts her about this, Tory replies: “Listen Paulie, it’s time we grew out of it,” as if the same-sex expression of love is merely a phase of adolescent development. Taking up with an older boy named Jake who attends an all-boy boarding school nearby, Tory strives to demonstrate her normalcy by practicing conspicuous heterosexuality. For example, she has sex with Jake on the first date, out on the school grounds in plain view of others (including Paulie and Mouse). Moreover, Tory brags about Jake’s sexual prowess when with her peers, exaggerating the depth of their intimacy by eagerly offering such comments as “Jake has hands like a sculptor!” and “Not Jake, he can go all night long!”

Meanwhile, of course, Paulie is pining away for her lost lover. Unable to make Tory admit that she loves her, Paulie begins to act out in inappropriate ways: making a scene in the school cafeteria by yelling at her peers and turning over a cart laden with trays and dirty china; telling the headmistress to “go fuck herself” when reprimanded, and going to the school library dressed in her fencing uniform, getting down on one knee, and openly proclaiming her love for Tory before their classmates. The day of the school’s father-daughter dance, while the other girls pin their hair up, put on make-up and don
high heels and stylish dresses in traditionally “femme” fashion, Paulie shows up in masculine, or “butch” attire: dark slacks, black flats, a straight-collared blouse, and pinstriped tails). When Paulie arrives on the scene, Tory is dancing with her father. Paulie walks up to them and asks if she may cut in. Tory’s father objects, but Paulie cuts in anyway. As they dance, Paulie tries to make Tory openly declare their love for one another before all those present. Of course, Tory refuses; she turns her back on Paulie, and walks away. Overcome with sorrow, Paulie puts her hands over her face and begins to sob. The other party guests turn away in disbelief, oblivious to the gravity of what has just happened.

Reflecting on the strength and ferocity of the falcon that she has been nursing back to health (another aspect of the film not present in the novel, although somewhat reminiscent of Lewis’s fascination with King Kong), Paulie decides to fight for Tory’s love rather than “lie there and take it [the loss of her lover]— like a girl.” Paulie challenges Jake to a duel “to the death” for Tory’s love, “winner take all.” The day of the duel, Paulie takes two sharp swords from a school display case and goes to meet Jake in the woods. Jake’s friends and Mouse look on in while he and Paulie fence. In the end, Paulie gets the upper hand: Jake lies on the ground, Paulie’s sword at his throat. When Jake refuses to yield, to surrender his love for Tory, Paulie stabs him in the thigh and flees the scene. That afternoon, Paulie frees herself from the pain of her loss by diving off the roof of one of the school buildings as Tory, Mouse, Miss. Vaughn and others look on from below. As the falcon, or “raptor,” takes flight from its perch on Paulie’s hand, Paulie takes flight as well.
Looking once again to Stam, who suggests that film adaptation be studied as an intertextual relationship between a written narrative and a film adaptation that “transforms, modifies, elaborates, or extends” the source text (“Beyond” 66), we may ask: in what ways does *Lost and Delirious* reflect a transformation, modification, elaboration and/or extension of Swan’s novel? As an adaptation, *Lost and Delirious* has many elements in common with *The Wives of Bath*, for instance, characters (Mouse, Paulie and Tory), setting (an all-girl boarding school), and point-of-view (both narratives told from Mouse’s perspective). However, there are several important differences between the adaptation and its source text. With respect to style and form, the film depicts elements taken from the body of the novel in a linear, chronological fashion, while the novel emphasizes the story’s being told in hindsight using a flashback structure and cutting back to the courtroom proceedings (present in the novel but excluded from the film) at regular intervals. With regard to the plot, there is at least one modification made during the adaptation process that significantly alters the content of the source text: the decision to omit the transgender/transsexual and misogynous elements of Paulie’s character from the film. Likewise, the crimes committed by Paulie in the novel, Sergeant’s violent murder and the excision of his genitalia, are excluded from the adaptation. Ferguson contends that

Thompson has made some truly questionable changes to Swan’s original story, and as a result, much of *Lost and Delirious* strains at plausibility… Paulie’s gender confusion, central in the novel, is only hinted at here… This doesn’t provide viewers with much insight into Paulie’s motivations and eventual unraveling. (75)
While I wholeheartedly agree that the exclusion of Paulie’s “gender confusion” is problematic, I do not feel that this aspect of the film prohibits the viewer’s understanding of Paulie’s character. Pool emphasizes the importance of Paulie and Tory’s love for one another throughout the film. In *Lost and Delirious*, Paulie’s emotional breakdown is precipitated by her profound feelings of sorrow at the loss of Tory’s love, and ends in her eventual self-destruction.

Clearly, there is an ambiguity at the core of this film; it both reveals and represses issues having to deal with gender and sexuality in the novel. Pool explains her decision to omit information about Paulie’s gender confusion and violent crimes as follows:

“when you’re dealing with a subject like homosexuality, you have to be very careful. It’s a theme that isn’t easy to swallow for the general public, and to include scenes of violence and drama that would alienate people… we wouldn’t be serving the gay community, we wouldn’t be serving anyone. I wanted, rather, to push the story as a love story and in love people are taken to extremes. I thought it was important to create empathy for the characters” (in Tousignant 25).

This may be so. Still, the fact that Thompson and Pool have omitted the transgender/transsexual element of Paulie’s character in Swan’s novel might be interpreted as their collusion with the discrimination against, and invisibility of, female-to-male transgenders (FTM) in the GLBT (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender) community.

Adaptation and sexual representation may seem to be two very different approaches to the cinema, but as this study has shown they are in fact closely related. In each of the films examined in this dissertation, the representation of gender and sexuality has been transformed through the process of adaptation in such a way as to compromise the strength of their representation in the written narratives. In his adaptation of *Les fous de Bassan*, Simoneau has focused selectively on Stevens Brown’s character
in the novel, depicting a crisis of masculinity often attributed to the male experience in the modern world. As a result, the strong female voices represented in Hébert’s novel have been silenced in the film. In A corps perdu, Pool has downplayed the significance of the (male) homosexual relationships between Pierre and David, and Pierre and Quentin, in Navarre’s novel. Furthermore, she portrays David and Sarah as a more traditional, monogamous heterosexual couple; in the novel this is not the case. In Le sexe des étoiles, Proulx has privileged Camille’s more conventional coming-of-age story in the adaptation, undermining the strength and influence of Marie-Pierre, an MTF and the most essential character of the novel. Finally, in Lost and Delirious, Pool has eliminated the transgender/transsexual aspect of Paulie’s identity in Swan’s novel. Moreover, she has undercut the significance and legitimacy of the lesbian representation in the film.

After a close examination of these films, I have determined that the strength of the representation of gender and sexuality in the source texts has not been replicated in their adaptations. Perhaps this is a direct consequence of the fact that as a popular, or “mass” medium, cinema is compelled to conform to stricter rules of production than those associated with literature. We can only hope that in the future, such diverse and influential literary representations of gender and sexuality may be reflected in film adaptation as well.
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