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IMPOSSIBLE ADAPTATIONS:
VIRGINIA WOOLF AND HENRY JAMES IN THE 1990S

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

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ABSTRACT

Although adaptations of existing literary works have accounted for a substantial portion of narrative film production since at least 1910, and the major works of many canonized authors have been adapted over the years since, neither Virginia Woolf’s nor Henry James’s major works were the subject of theatrical film adaptations until 1992, when Sally Potter’s adaptation of Woolf’s Orlando appeared. Three more adaptations, including Jane Campion’s The Portrait of a Lady, Marleen Gorris’s Mrs. Dalloway, and Iain Softley’s The Wings of the Dove, followed over the next five years. Using a polysemic approach to reading these eight texts, several topics they raise are discussed. These include their unique uses of melodrama in a dynamic tension with another mode, such as comedy or realism; how the modernist aesthetic practices apparent in the literary sources are negotiated in the film medium; how gender roles and types, and complications thereof, are portrayed in each work; and the relation of the adaptations to the heritage cinema of their own eras. In addition, as in almost all adaptation studies, significant alterations from source to adaptation are discussed, as well as the many industrial issues inevitably raised in film production, such as star presence and target audiences. Discussion of these topics as they appear in each pair of source and adaptation is preceded by an overview of both melodrama and modernism, in which the particular use of those terms among several competing uses is outlined. Ultimately, both
the sources and their adaptations demonstrate that melodrama can exist outside the confines either of the traditional 'blood and thunder' of nineteenth-century theatrical melodrama, and outside the confines of the more narrowly-defined woman's film or weepie; and the films as well are distinguished by their pointed critique of the pasts they present, unlike the heritage film tradition with which they are sometimes mistakenly associated.
Dedicated to Mary Ann Brouillette
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Without the encouragement of Professors Judith S. Mayne and J. Ronald Green to seek admission to a Ph.D. program, and Professor Mayne's continuing support as a committee member, this document would never have been undertaken. Professor Linda Mizejewski's generosity and expertise in shepherding me through this process have been extraordinary, and Professor Lisa Kiser's guidance in the early stages of my time in the Department of English at The Ohio State University was invaluable. Professor Mark Conroy has, over these last five years, been a constant source of intellectual stimulation about not only the dissertation, but every other matter as well, and for both that and his friendship, I thank him. The general support offered by other graduate students and faculty over these years has been a crucial communal safety net; they include John McCombe (now Professor John McCombe) and his wife Jessica; Matt Wanat; Johnson Cheu; Cheryl Hendrichs; and Brenda Boyle; and Professors Barbara Rigney, Debra Moddelmog, Sebastian Knowles, Jessica Prinz, and Susan Williams.
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FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: English
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: FILM ADAPTATION, JAMES AND WOOLF

Feature-length theatrical film, whether in the Hollywood mold or in the larger international film community, has long had a voracious appetite for novels as source material. Despite continuing controversy about the practice of adaptation, which will be outlined later in this chapter, that appetite has continued unabated through the 1990s and into the first years of the new century. The decade featured adaptations of current-day best-selling novels such as *The Bridges of Madison County* (Eastwood 1996) and *The Horse Whisperer* (Redford 1998); of contemporary canonized novels, such as *The Remains of the Day* (Ivory 1993) and *Beloved* (Demme 1998); and of more historically removed canonized novels, such as *Orlando* (Potter 1992), *The Portrait of a Lady* (Campion 1996), *Mrs. Dalloway* (Gorris 1997), and *The Wings of the Dove* (Softley 1997), among many others. And the craze for adaptation perhaps reached a peak towards the end of 2001, when the two most widely-anticipated films to round out the year—indeed, perhaps any year—*Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* (Columbus 2001) and *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (Jackson 2001), were both adaptations, and both immensely successful as commercial enterprises.

The attractions to mainstream film of adapting pre-existing literature are by now widely agreed upon, and we need not dwell in any length on them. As an entertainment
medium, mainstream film had fully gravitated towards a narrative mode by 1910, and pre-existing literature offered a vast, ready-made catalog of stories. At the same time, as James Naremore notes, “[Hollywood] recognized from the beginning that it could gain a sort of legitimacy among middle-class viewers by reproducing facsimiles of more respectable art or by adapting literature to another medium” (2), a strategy well-illustrated by the film d’art movement in French film of around 1910 and later. Also significant in the impetus to adaptation is that, in the case of an adaptation of a widely-known work of literature, a certain base-level audience is thought to be already guaranteed, a factor that has become perhaps even more important over the years, as revenues from the first few weeks of release often end up accounting for the majority of theatrical rental revenue. Finally, the introduction of synchronous dialogue gave film the ability to represent not just the action of a literary narrative, but its spoken words as well.

Although it is quite easy to see why mainstream narrative film would be attracted to literature, a variety of questions about the resulting adaptations can be raised, and indeed will be later in this chapter. For the moment, I want to point out one of those questions that is the starting point for this study: As Dudley Andrew noted in 1984, “Although adaptation may be calculated as a relatively constant volume in the history of cinema, its particular function at any given moment is far from constant” (269). In other words, while adaptation has been a substantial ongoing activity in film, what accounts for particular adaptations, or even groups of related adaptations, appearing when they do? In certain cases, of course, the answer to that question might be apparent. Thus, as Naremore notes, both the particular adaptations of the film d’art movement and of Vitagraph around 1910 represented “... an aggressive, concentrated effort to appeal to
the middle class . . .” (2), and the literature chosen for such adaptations, as Naremore
notes, was that by well-known, respected authors such as Shakespeare, Dante, Dickens,
and Goethe, among others. In other cases, such as the adaptations of The Grapes of
Wrath (Ford 1940) and Gone with the Wind (Fleming et al 1939), or the last decade’s The
Bridges of Madison County and The Horse Whisperer, all of which came within just a
few years of the publication of the best-selling novels, Hollywood clearly felt that the
novels’ popularity would carry over to buoy the films’ commercial success.

While these two motives for particular adaptations at particular historical
moments no doubt explain some adaptation choices in the early years of film, and many
others in an on-going way, it leaves large gaps. For one, film has progressed well beyond
its early years and become a thoroughly middle-class entertainment, yet adaptation, and
indeed re-adaptation, of the classics runs rampant; in a mere two-year period, 1995 and
1996, no fewer than seven adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays were released. The
appropriate question that Andrew presses us to ask, then, is not only “Why Shakespeare
in the mid-1990s?,” but also, “Why not other plays from the English Renaissance, such as
those by Christopher Marlowe, Ben Jonson, John Webster, or John Dryden?”

In the case of films adapted from Shakespearean plays, of course, one is tempted
to argue that the apparently eternal return to his works, in generation after generation of
film-makers, might somehow be proof of the timelessness of the original narratives
themselves. However, another group of adaptations mentioned in the first paragraph
stands out for quite a different reason: They are the first mainstream adaptations of any
of Henry James’s major quartet of novels, and the first of any of Virginia Woolf’s novels.
Yes, despite film’s voracious appetite for literature, in the 65 years of sound film
preceding it, Sally Potter's 1992 *Orlando* was the first film adaptation of any of Virginia Woolf's novels; Jane Campion's 1996 *The Portrait of a Lady* was the first adaptation of any of Henry James's major novels. They were followed by Marlene Gorris's 1997 adaptation of Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, and Iain Softley's 1997 adaptation of James's *The Wings of the Dove*. Putting aside for the moment any question of these films' fidelity to their sources, their formal qualities as films or in relation to their sources, as well as their success, artistically or commercially, as films, we are still left with a very tantalizing question: Why these adaptations at this historical moment?

Before embarking on some preliminary answers to this question, I want to stress that, from several perspectives, the appearance of these adaptations at this moment would hardly seem to be merely coincidental. First, both James and Woolf were firmly ensconced in the literary canon by mid-century, and the major works of almost all of their canonized contemporaries—Hardy, Conrad, Lawrence, Forster, Joyce—had been the source of adaptations ranging from much earlier (as early as the silent era, in fact, with the 1915 *Far from the Madding Crowd*) to slightly earlier (Lean's 1984 *A Passage to India* was the first film to use Forster's novels as a source). Thus it can hardly be the case that film-makers in general were unfamiliar with this group of authors, as one might argue that they are unfamiliar with the novels of the Harlem Renaissance, for example.

Second, it is also difficult to maintain that film-makers in practice ascribed to what for years has been a commonplace of adaptation theory: As John Orr expresses that commonplace, film "...cannot dissect the subterranean life of thought in all its verbal intricacies" (2). Thus, what is often referred to as the interior novel, which all four of these novels certainly are, has been deemed by the critical community to be less
amenable to adaptation. But if it is the case, as Orr argues, that “the cinema cannot be Tolstoy and it cannot be Joyce” (2), it is certainly not the case that film-makers maintained a wary distance from those authors’ works; quite the contrary in Tolstoy’s case, whose works are well represented in film, and Joyce’s three major works were the sources of adaptations between 1967 and 1978.

Third, in the case of James, many of his ‘lesser’ works had already been the sources of adaptations, including *The Heiress* (Wyler 1949, from *Washington Square*), *The Innocents* (Clayton 1961, from *The Turn of the Screw*), *Daisy Miller* (Bogdanovich 1974), *The Europeans* (Ivory 1979), and *The Bostonians* (Ivory 1984). The first two, as well as *The Europeans*, are generally regarded as good or even excellent films, and *Daisy Miller* has its proponents as well; thus it can hardly be argued that using James’s works as sources necessarily produced unsuccessful, much less poor films (as might be argued with the Joyce works to the extent that their lack of success might have influenced views about Woolf’s works).

Finally, nothing obvious in the areas of either film technology or in what Brian McFarlane terms film’s enunciation, that is, how it tells a story, seems to have changed in the late 1980s or early 1990s that would explain why these works suddenly became the sources for films. These sources do not depend for their telling on any technological breakthroughs such as computer animation, faster film stocks, special lenses, or the like. Quite the contrary, the source material would appear to have been just as amenable to adaptation twenty, forty, or sixty years ago on this level. Likewise, no revolution in film’s ability to signify, or in the general approach to filmic enunciation, seems evident in this period that would account for the interest in adapting these works. Nor are the films
themselves, while clearly ‘stylish’ in the sense of having high production values, noticeably stylish in the way commonly used in talking about the cinematic stylishness of a Welles, Bergman, or Antonioni.

My argument so far has been from a rebuttal stance, meant to clear away objections from those who might see these particular adaptations as just more adaptations in what historically has been a constant river of adaptations. Each of these films does exist, however, in the context of a particular stream that feeds that river, a stream that European film critics term the heritage cinema. As Ginnette Vincendeau defines the term in general, “Heritage cinema thus refers to costume films made in the past twenty years or so, usually based on ‘popular classics’” (xvii), and her discussion of heritage cinema specifically mentions both Potter’s Orlando and Campion’s Portrait. Likewise included in heritage cinema are most of the adaptations of Forster’s and Austen’s works (not, of course, Clueless (Heckerling 1995)) in the period, Chariots of Fire (Hudson 1981), The Age of Innocence (Scorsese 1992), and The Piano (Campion 1992), among others.

The term heritage cinema, however, needs some further adducing. As Vincendeau notes, “Heritage films constitute a ‘genre’ only in a loose sense. Except for the presence of period costume, they are neither defined by a unified iconography . . . nor a type of narrative . . . nor an affect . . . ” (xviii). Rather than these shared characteristics that help define genres such as westerns, romance, or horror films, respectively, “. . . the concern of heritage cinema is to depict the past, but by celebrating rather than investigating it” (xvii). In addition, heritage films are characterized by a “. . . lavish mise-en-scene [that] typically displays the bourgeoisie or aristocracy” (xvii); Richard
Dyer adds further that heritage films use "... conventional filmic narrative style, with the pace and tone of 'art cinema' but without its symbolisms and personal directorial voices" (204).

On the surface, it would appear that all four of the adaptations under consideration here could in important ways be termed heritage films; however, the more specific analyses of each film in later chapters will call that placement into question in significant ways, particularly on the level of whether the films do indeed celebrate the past, or whether they critically investigate it, which, as I understand the use of the term heritage cinema, is the crucial thematic issue. In this sense, *A Room with a View* (Ivory 1986) can be taken to be the paradigmatic heritage film; the four films considered here, I will argue, come much closer to cracking apart any celebration of a nostalgic past in their more or less explicit criticisms of that past. Indeed, as Vincendeau outlines, a central argument in the field of heritage cinema is the degree to which it represents a conservative ideology bound up, in England for example, with Thatcherism; on the other hand, heritage cinema has been defended as depicting a liberal ideology in particular in its "... ability to challenge mainstream representations of gender and sexuality" (Vincendeau xx).

On the thematic level, then, the ideology of a particular film is crucial in evaluating its relationship to heritage cinema; similarly, ideology is also at the heart of adaptation study, although the terms of the ideological questions are transformed. The history of adaptation in practice and in theory has been accurately outlined at more length in recent work by Naremore, Robert Stam, Robert Ray, and Brian McFarlane, among others, to whom readers may turn for blow-by-blow accounts which will only be glossed here. On the whole, adaptation criticism can be divided into two initial subsets: criticism
of films based primarily on their fidelity to their original sources, and criticism of films essentially independently from those sources. In the case of the latter, critics generally take George Bluestone’s approach, outlined in his 1957 *Novels into Film*, and simply evaluate the film on its own merits entirely free of any connections to an earlier literary source. Thus, one can read many critical analyses of highly-regarded films, such as *Birth of a Nation* (Griffith 1915), *Broken Blossoms* (Griffith 1919), *The Blue Angel* (Sternberg 1930), *Stella Dallas* (Vidor 1937), *Stagecoach* (Ford 1939), *Casablanca* (Curtiz 1942), *High Noon* (Zinnemann 1952), *Rear Window* (Hitchcock 1954), *The Searchers* (Ford 1956), *Midnight Cowboy* (Schlesinger 1969), *Schindler’s List* (Spielberg 1992), and *Forrest Gump* (Zemeckis 1993), to name a mere dozen films adapted from already published novels, short stories, or plays, without even an acknowledgement that the films were adaptations, or with the barest of passing references to that fact.

However, when we turn to fidelity criticism, the situation is quite different. In taking this approach, critics have in practice almost invariably found the film wanting in contrast to its source. As the authors noted above accurately argue, in far more detail, the fidelity criterion was essentially an outgrowth of two separate trends: first, the modernist aesthetic that each art needed to strive to find its own essence, and the concomitant idea that a classic in one art could therefore not become a classic in another art, each art having by definition different essences; and, second, the academic enshrinement from mid-century on of a literary canon that needed to be defended at all costs, including against forays from popular/mass culture.

Historically, of course, these factors have also interacted with the development of the modern university and academic criticism in both film and literature in interesting
ways. While a history of film criticism has yet to be written, as David Denby notes, "Before about 1914 there was very little writing that we would now recognize as criticism" (xx). The next quarter century featured a variety of theoretical works, such as those by Vachel Lindsay, Hugo Munsterberg, and Sergei Eisenstein, among others. However, it was not until the 1930s and 1940s, with the emergence of American writers such as Otis Ferguson, Manny Farber, and James Agee, and then in the 1950s, in *Cahiers du Cinema*, that deeper, more extensive analyses of individual films began to appear with any regularity. Meanwhile, as Gerald Graff outlines in *Professing Literature: An Institutional History*, at just about that time, the decades surrounding 1950, the New Critical approach became entrenched in university English departments; and gradually over the years, as Imelda Whelehan and Deborah Cartmell note, "... horrified defenders of traditional English studies [increasingly] lament the fated take-over by media studies of English" (1). In practice, then, fidelity criterion seems not to have been widely applied in evaluative writing until literature began to be threatened, although cases of individual authors assaulting their own works' treatments at the hands of film are legion.

The recent hegemony of the fidelity criterion as it is applied by both literature-leaning academic critics and the prestige press is a particularly interesting puzzle, however, especially in light of current literary theory. Led by the theories of Barthes and Derrida, literary criticism is now dominated by a concept of the text as a site of multiple meanings and readings, and the modernist texts under consideration here would seem especially, as Vincendeau notes, to be designed "... to elude fixed meanings ..." (xii), or, in Barthes's terms, to be writerly. Thus, as Stam notes, "The literary text is not a closed, but an open structure ... to be reworked by a boundless context. The text feeds
on and is fed into an infinitely permutating intertext, which is seen through ever-shifting grids of interpretation” (57). Yet despite these developments in literary criticism, Vincendeau could still accurately write in 2001 that “...the critical reception of literary adaptations has been plagued with the urge to assess how ‘faithful’ the film version is to its ‘original’” (xii); while one would certainly not want the plague, Stam is even more forceful, noting the moralistic use in fidelity criticism of words “...such as infidelity, betrayal, deformation, violation, vulgarization, and desecration, each accusation carrying its specific charge of outraged negativity” (54).

While fidelity criticism remains the most common approach to adaptation criticism in practice, alternatives to it do exist. As already noted, Bluestone and others endorse an essentially modernist aesthetic which emphasizes judging a particular work by its own merits given its particular art form; thus a good film is a good film regardless of its status as an adaptation or an original. Yet this itself poses serious difficulties. In the case of film, what is its essence? As Stam notes, “Notions of filmic and literary essence, in this sense, impose an oppressive straitjacket on an open-ended and ‘non-finalized’ set of practices” (59), and the history of modern art absolutely bears this statement out. In a very different way, the idea of considering a particular film, or any work of art, without considering its intertextual contexts, including its relationship to some pre-existing form(s), may result in the sterile, purely formalist analysis characteristic of the excesses of New Criticism.

The most recent widely-cited attempt to escape from the fidelity versus free-floating binary that characterizes adaptation theory is McFarlane’s 1996 Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation, in which he proposes a theory of adaptation
derived from Barthes's analysis of narrative. McFarlane's work has many benefits, in particular its attempt to show that much of fidelity criticism is not even that in any objective sense; rather, as he argues, "... the critic who quibbles at failures of fidelity is really saying no more than: 'This reading of the original does not tally with mine in these and these ways'" (9). Ultimately, however, McFarlane's approach, rather than going beyond fidelity criticism, seems designed to put it on surer, less impressionistic footing, since he is concerned with outlining what can be transferred from literature to film, and what cannot be (including what is unspecified in the literary work). To illustrate, then, if Jane shoots Harry with a revolver in the literary work, and the shooting is significant to the narrative progress of the work, her act can be translated to film. However, if the literature mentions nothing about the look on Jane's face as she shoots Harry, while the Jane of the film grimaces, or smiles, as she does so, we are back in a gray area. In terms of narrative development, a murder may be a murder; in terms of the tone indicated by Jane's grimace or smile as she commits the murder, the viewer's interpretation might be quite different. Stam (55-56) analyzes in much more detail on this level a five-line passage from Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* as Ford's film translates it; in McFarlane's terms, the film adequately translates the novel's words, and yet the film's version, as Stam illustrates, contains an excess of meaning that the novel could not possibly attain, and that the film could not possibly refrain from including.

While McFarlane's approach is certainly beneficial in escaping from an impressionistic fidelity reading, other approaches are available that go beyond fidelity in its most basic form. Perhaps the most common of these is what might be termed the historically-embedded approach, which, as the term implies, acknowledges that texts
from disparate historical periods not only can but should translate or adapt issues in ways that will make sense in their particular reception contexts. The most obvious of changes to an original text in this way is on the level of specific cultural/historical references that may have been quite well-known in the original's era, but elusive in a later era; likewise, allusions to narrow locales may be beyond even readers of the contemporary work. Raymond Chandler's *The Big Sleep*, for example, refers in the second chapter both to a room that is "as hot as a slow oven" and to a character who uses his voice "as carefully as an out-of-work showgirl uses her last pair of stockings" (16), similes which give Chandler's work a quality that would be virtually impossible to directly translate to a modern audience.

A useful example of both the possibilities and the limitations of historically-embedded criticism is Shirley Marchalonis's 1999 "Filming the Nineteenth Century: *Little Women,*" which considers the 1933 Cukor adaptation, the 1949 LeRoy adaptation, and the 1994 Armstrong adaptation. On the one hand, Marchalonis is uncomfortable with all three adaptations, not because they discard the plot of the novel, which they do not, but because they violate its historical frame. This violation can exist on a small-scale level, such as the semi-public kiss that Jo and the Professor exchange in Armstrong's version, which, Marchalonis notes, "... was in fact a real issue of propriety and morality for Alcott and her society" (264); it can also exist on a larger scale, such as in the comparative absence of religious overtones in all three films versus the novel. However, as she is forced to note, "The rest of the novel's message [beyond its religious message] seems even less appealing to contemporary audiences: the austere virtues, the non-glorification of self, the idea that the self needs training in restraint and control" (269-
270). I would argue that it is not just a matter of audience appeal, but rather of audience comprehension. From a contemporary audience’s point of view, the absence in even a Victorian romance of one “... tender love scene, including kisses” (264), would more likely be simply incomprehensible. Of course, film-makers can and do opt to avoid such criticism by moving to the opposite extreme, and update entirely the time and place of the original, so that *Romeo and Juliet* is transformed in one era into *West Side Story* (Wise and Robbins 1961), and, in another, to a modern suburb of Miami, as in Baz Luhrmann’s 1996 adaptation. In this version of adaptation, then, story is a migrating phenomena, perhaps consistent across decades and even milleniums, while mise en scene and other elements may be more or less adjusted to reflect contemporary realities.

Another fruitful approach to adaptation is exemplified by Judith Mayne’s *Private Novel, Public Film* (1988) and William Ferrell’s *Literature and Film as Modern Mythology* (2000). In both these works, the issue of fidelity of adaptation to source is a non-issue; rather, both are analyzed in terms of some larger issue, specifically the use of space in Mayne’s work and the use of myth in Ferrell’s. Mayne’s goal is to show how the “... changing relationship between private and public life characteristic of Western industrial societies” (1) has been negotiated in both novels and films; Ferrell, in contrast, seeks to investigate how “Films and novels continue to provide ... a pattern for living” (18, Kenneth Burke uncited). The immense advantage of adaptation studies such as these is twofold: First, they do not necessarily privilege one depiction of a theme, whether it be the contrast between private and public life or the use of myth, in the original work over the adaptation. Unlike the fidelity approach, in which there is a ‘right answer’—do things the way the original did—approaching adaptations from a larger thematic
framework potentially frees the critic from the necessity of comparative value evaluations. However, it is important to note that even in such studies, if they revolve around adaptation, the potential for privileging the original source remains. To its credit, Ferrell’s work, which does rely on sources and their adaptations (unlike Mayne’s), avoids that bias towards privileging the source. Thus, in discussing W. P. Kinsella’s Shoeless Joe and Phil Robinson’s Field of Dreams, Ferrell rightly notes that the novel’s mythology includes twin/doubling issues since the main character has an identical twin; in eliding that part of the novel, as Ferrell says, “The film attempts to make the point with fewer ingredients” (161). Clearly there is no ‘right’ way that a novel or a film adaptation of it should depict mythology surrounding twins/doubles.

Finally, what I term the polysemic approach to adaptation offers a consistently interesting view of sources and their adaptations. Although Andrew perhaps gave the earliest vote to such an approach in 1984, Stam’s more recent outline of it is worth quoting at length:

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

(68-69)

Given both the theoretical praxis that Barthes, Derrida, and others outline, and the practical realities that Stam notes about adaptation, Andrew’s point in his 1984 essay, as Naremore puts it, is that “. . . every representational film (and, I would add, every representational artifact) can be regarded as an adaptation . . .” (9, emphasis added).
Thus, anyone who reads James’s *The Portrait of a Lady*, whether today or in the original time of its publication, possesses an adaptation of the work, an adaptation that varies significantly not only from other readers’ adaptations of the same era, but even more so from the point of view of adaptations of a contemporary reader.

An extended example of a polysemic reading of sources and adaptations that indicates how fruitful the approach can be is Linda Mizejewski’s 1992 study *Divine Decadence: Facism, Female Spectacle, and the Makings of Sally Bowles*. As the title alone indicates, the analysis is simultaneously grounded in both historical and gender frames, and the use of the word ‘Makings’ immediately acknowledges that Sally Bowles is a character who goes through a series of makings, or adaptations, none of which is privileged, first in Isherwood’s short story, then in John van Druten’s play, *I Am a Camera*, followed by a film adaptation of that play, then in another play, *Cabaret*, and finally in a film adaptation of that play. Characteristically for a polysemic reading, Mizejewski rightly refuses to take Isherwood’s fictional creation as ‘the’ Sally Bowles, instead intertextualizing her in the tradition of the showgirl, most iconically, although certainly not only, represented by Dietrich’s Lola Lola in Sternberg’s 1930 *The Blue Angel*. And, while the title of the study indicates two frames, the work itself delivers more, most notably the frames of camp, sexual ambiguity, homoeroticism, and the entertainment industry (theater and film) itself, among others. To put it tersely, Mizejewski’s work and the kaleidoscope of insights it offers makes even the most informed fidelity readings pale by contrast.

A polysemic approach to adaptation shares with the other alternatives to fidelity criticism the central quality that it does not privilege the pre-existing literary work;
however, it differs in significant ways as well. Unlike the Bluestone alternative, it does not demand that the film, first and foremost, stand on its own as a great, or even particularly satisfying, work. As a result, it can find useful and interesting intertextual relationships that exist on a narrower level. An example of the useful insights of such an analysis would be Steve Cramer’s 1997 “Cinematic Novels and ‘Literary’ Films: The Shining in the Context of the Modern Horror Film,” in which Cramer points out that, regardless of the quality of the film as a whole, the alteration of the Wendy character from novel to film has significant intertextual interest. Thus, as he observes, “In King’s novel [Wendy] reprises a succession of female central characters in the haunted house film by relinquishing her nurturing role in favour of indulging her sexuality” (133). The Wendy of the film, by contrast, connects to the older Gothic tradition of women who are presented as “... resisting the sexual advances of male characters in isolated houses on Romantic landscapes ...” (133). Thus, this aspect of the film and novel, although different, is shown to connect to two different, pre-existing textual traditions, Gothic fiction and haunted-house films.

Similarly, a polysemic approach, in its potentially all-encompassing reach, is free to consider aspects of adaptation beyond those that are historically embedded within the particular work. Here we can recall the earlier discussion of Marchalonis’s work on Little Women regarding the semi-public kiss between Jo and the Professor in the Armstrong version as a significant anachronism. Because a polysemic approach relies on a variety of intertextualities, it allows us to note that near the end of James’s 1881 Portrait, published just twelve years after Little Women, Isabel Archer and Caspar Goodwood exchange a semi-public kiss that, far from being just tender, “... was like
white lightning, a flash that spread, and spread again, and stayed . . .” (489). I do not want to suggest that intertextuality authorizes everything; rather, readers of that novel, or spectators of films set in that era, may have encountered precedents for semi-public kisses in Victorian era literature, and to expect that audiences would be able to successfully negotiate such a fine distinction (the mores of 1869 versus 1881, New England versus England, and so forth) is a dubious proposition at best. By putting a variety of related texts into play, either as in those related by genre as in Cramer’s discussion of The Shining, or those related by historical time, the narrow focus of the single text as generating all meanings is fruitfully expanded.

As to a polysemic reading versus reading sources and their adaptations in terms of some single larger thematic issue, this is largely a matter of critical choice and purpose. In the case of both Mayne’s and Ferrell’s works, typically a dozen or more sources are focused on, primarily of course in how they display the particular theme of interest, be it domestic space versus public space or myth. Wide historical generalities are thus possible; Mayne’s work, for example, encompasses significant discussion of works ranging from the 1719 novel Robinson Crusoe through the 1945 Curtiz film Mildred Pierce. By contrast, a book-length polysemic project, such as Mizejewski’s, generally focuses on a smaller number of works, perhaps up to six, that are already related or joined in some way, in that case by the character of Sally Bowles and her presence in a series of adaptations. Discussions of the individual works are, of course, likely to be more extended, and of course to cover a larger group of topics than the narrower thematic approach.
This study of Woolf and James and the film adaptations uses a polysemic approach for several crucial reasons. First, it allows for intertextual readings of each of the two later novels by James and Woolf (*Wings* and *Orlando* respectively) to the earlier ones; it also allows for the play of intertextualities between Woolf and James, a writer whose works Woolf had read, whom she knew personally, and whose works share important similarities with her own. In addition, the dialogic relationships between James’s and Woolf’s works and their contemporaries, such as Hardy and Joyce, is crucial to understanding how both were positioning their fiction vis-a-vis those contemporaries. The polysemic approach also is particularly suited to interrogating issues posed by contemporary audiences confronting adaptations of narratives written in earlier, quite different times. Finally, just as it does with literature, it acknowledges the importance of interplays not only between the films themselves, but also between each and its director’s previous body of work.

It is a rare polysemic project, however, that does not begin by noting the topics of interest to be discussed, which typically spring from the concerns of the works themselves, but invariably have a wider interest. The first frame of particular interest here is melodrama (an exact definition of which will be covered in more detail in the next chapter), immediately suggested as a significant frame for a number of reasons. The importance of the melodramatic mode in film has been increasingly recognized in recent years, to the extent that Linda Williams has recently asserted that melodrama is “. . . the foundation of the classical Hollywood movie” (42), in contrast to what film studies had established as “. . . a bourgeois, classical realist, acritical ‘norm’” (44). Meanwhile, at about the same time that melodrama was just beginning to attract the interest of film studies . . .
critics, the mid-1970s, Peter Brooks’s *The Melodramatic Imagination* made a strong case that James’s major works were thoroughly inflected with melodrama. Thus a principle aim here will be to trace James’s use of melodrama as it migrates not only to a different medium, but into a different historical period. In contrast to James’s, Woolf’s works have rarely, if ever, been associated with melodrama; my readings of *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Orlando*, however, will reveal them as highly melodramatic as well, and once again, how that migration to the films works out is discussed. If Williams is correct, the pressure on the films should be to extend the source works’ melodramatic aspects, but that proposition is less than demonstrated by the actual adaptations. In fact, these adaptations retain their sources’ tension between melodrama and a competing mode, in the case of *Orlando* comedy, and in the case of the other three realism; much as their sources do, although in different ways, they refuse to clearly teeter over into one side or the other of a mode.

All of these source texts are also characterized by another element that would seem initially to be in tension with melodrama, and that is their acknowledged status as canons of a modernist aesthetic practice (or, in the case of James’s *Portrait*, a premodernist one). This frame (which will also be discussed in more detail in the next chapter) results in two important arguments: First, the films are successfully able to negotiate, given the differences in mediums, the characteristic ambiguity and inferiority of their sources. Second, all the films themselves display what can be termed a modernist aesthetic practice to the extent that such a practice can be said to exist in film at all.

A third frame of interest is gender roles and types, and their complications, a frame immediately raised by the source texts. All of these works, both sources and
adaptations, contain a dizzying breadth of gender types: The characters depicted include not just patriarchal and even threatening males, such as Portrait’s Caspar Goodwood and Mrs. Dalloway’s Dr. Bradshaw, but a variety of feminized males as well, including the sickly Ralph Touchett of Portrait, the aesthete Gilbert Osmond of Wings, the hysteric Septimus of Mrs. Dalloway. The women show an even greater range: the practical Henrietta Stackpole of Portrait, the doomed melodramatic heroine Milly Theale of Wings, the mannish Miss Kilman of Mrs. Dalloway, and, of course, Orlando, first man, then woman. That gender issues are strongly raised by these works is no surprise, of course, given that such issues are frequently crucial in melodrama as a mode. The gender complications that Woolf introduces have long been widely acknowledged, because they are clear in passages such as this from Orlando, after Orlando has ‘become’ a woman: “From the probity of breeches she turned to the seductiveness of petticoats and enjoyed the love of both sexes equally” (221). It is only more recently, however, through the work of critics such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, that such complications in James’s works have been noticed. But while they are more repressed in his texts, they are equally as complicated as they are in Woolf’s. Here again, the films, while retaining in all cases the sources’ time settings, appear in a different historical reception era when gender issues are far more open and complex, and these issues are negotiated by the adaptations in a variety of significant ways.

The fourth central frame, as alluded to earlier, focuses primarily on the films and their relation, or lack of it, to the heritage cinema of their era. Of course, it is quite true that novels stand not only on their own, but also in relation to larger traditions, and those will be touched on briefly in the summaries of the novels that begin Chapters 3 through 6.
Clearly, however, space does not permit any thorough discussion of how *Mrs. Dalloway* relates either to Joyce's *Ulysees* or to the stream-of-consciousness novel in general, which would be a project in and of itself. In film studies, however, it is widely agreed that the pressure to conform to an existing and current trend, cycle, or genre, is extremely powerful. My argument here is that, while these films' mise en scene conforms to the norm in heritage cinema, their thematics, on the whole, do not, particularly in their lack of nostalgia for an idyllic, fin de siècle past.

In addition to these four over-arching frames, two other topics of continuing commentary exist, as they do in almost all adaptation studies. Although I have specifically disavowed the fidelity approach, significant alterations from source to adaptation that fit easily into none of the topics noted above are discussed when they are significant. Rather than greet such alterations with outrage, my goal will be to determine their effect(s), effects which frequently "... may be seen in the light of offering a commentary on, or, in more extreme cases, a deconstruction ... of the original" (McFarlane 22). An example of such an alteration would be Potter's choice in her *Orlando* not to return Knole to Orlando. Although this alteration may be part of the film's own, and distinct, feminist project, it also is anchored in the fact that Potter is not bound by Woolf's desire to end her *Orlando* as a fairy-tale replenishment of Vita Sackville-West's actual historical lack.

Finally, industrial issues, specifically those of audience, directors and stars, are compelling aspects of each of these adaptations, although the significant issues they raise vary from film to film. For example, two of the films were produced within the context of what remains of the Hollywood production system, and both were aimed at a mass-
market audience, while the other two were conceived of and distributed primarily as art
house films. In addition, three of the four directors, Potter, Campion, and Gorris, brought
to the films both quite particular reputations as feminist directors and pre-existing bodies
of work that lead to questions about both, as McFarlane phrases it, the extent of “the
directorial signature [that] inscribe[s] itself with varying degrees of forcefulness on
adapted material” (35), and the intertextualities that may exist with those earlier bodies of
work. Similarly, as McFarlane also notes, “the star system . . . is a matter worth
considering in relation to many/most adaptations” (34-5), and the star presence of Nicole
Kidman, John Malkovich, Helena Bonham Carter, and Vanessa Redgrave has specific
impacts on each of the films in which they appear.

Before turning to the sources and adaptations themselves, however, Chapter 2
articulates the frames of melodrama and modernism/modernist as they are used here,
since both terms are themselves used with a high degree of variability from one critic to
another.
CHAPTER 2

MELODRAMA, THE MODERN, AND FILM

This chapter provides the larger contexts for each of the succeeding chapter’s close readings of a source and its adaptation. In focusing here on melodrama and the modern, and secondarily on film, my goal is not to imply that these contextual frames are the only significant ones for this group of works, much less for each of them individually. Rather, these are frames that strike me as a few among many that are central to an encompassing view of both the group of works and each individually. However, the current complexity (if not ambiguity, and, in certain instances, apparent contradictions) of the frames “melodrama” and “the modern” demands both a larger historical/critical frame and a specification of not only how these terms will be used, but how they interact in these, and, I suspect, other works.

Melodrama is discussed first because it is a more locally, if not universally, stable term. Critical commentary about melodrama in all its forms has quite literally exploded since the mid-1960s. Although some notable histories and theories of theatrical melodrama pre-dated the mid-1960s, such as T. H. Dickinson’s 1917 *The Contemporary Drama of England*, serious historical and theoretical work on melodrama was infrequent, despite the popularity of melodrama. However, several important studies suddenly appeared in the mid-1960s, including Eric Bentley’s *The Life of the Drama* (1964),
Michael Booth’s *English Melodrama* (1965), Frank Cahill’s *The World of Melodrama* (1967), David Grimsted’s *Melodrama Unveiled: American Theater and Culture, 1800-1850* (1968), and Robert Heilman’s *Tragedy and Melodrama: Versions of Experience* (1968). While these works by no means universally re-valued melodrama as a serious theatrical art form, they at the least acknowledged its on-going popular appeal and, in their attempt to historically document melodrama’s development, perhaps encouraged a climate in which melodrama was granted some modicum of respect as a subject worthy of such documentation. These projects stand in sharp contrast to the widely-held and generally-known conception of melodrama as either a degenerate form of drama or a proletarian form unworthy of real study, or both, a conception recently outlined in more detail by Ben Singer (2001, 146-148). Indeed, as recently as 1986, *A Handbook to Literature* considered melodrama’s strategies to be “deplorable characteristics” (295).

This interest in documenting the history of melodrama is frequently linked to the interest of the postmodern movement in the popular arts. However, the legitimization of the study of literary melodrama was given a very different boost by Peter Brooks’s 1976 *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, and the Mode of Excess*. Brooks’s work was then and remains still the single most important one in the study of melodrama; while it provides a more encapsulated history of theatrical melodrama in France and England than the scholarship of the previous decade, it extends the discussion of melodrama’s influence in at least two important ways. First, it analyzes the operation of significant melodramatic components in the work of two high art novelists, without concluding that their use of such components in any way results in degenerate or proletarian texts. Second, Brooks suggests a reason for the historical emergence of
melodrama, specifically that the growing secularism since the dawn of the nineteenth century is countered, in melodrama, by the presence of a spectral, secular, cosmic right and wrong. In a God-less world, melodrama still manages to punish the villain and reward the virtuous, or, at the very least, make its audience aware of the locus of villainy and virtue.

While these developments in the study of theatrical and literary melodrama were going on, the same period witnessed a birth of interest in the narrower field of the classic Hollywood melodrama, which by now was a much more circumscribed field of works (about which more will be said later). Generally, the women's films/weepies such as King Vidor's 1937 *Stella Dallas* and Douglas Sirk's 1956 *All That Heaven Allows*, 1957 *Written on the Wind*, and 1959 *Imitation of Life* were popular but critically neglected works both in their eras and immediately thereafter. However, the interest in these works/directors on the part of the New Wave critics as indicative of a subversive counter-trend productive of easily available mis/alterior readings made its way into Anglo-American film criticism, first in Thomas Elsaesser's 1972 "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Romance," then in Geoffrey Nowell-Smith's 1977 "Minnelli and Melodrama." Virtually simultaneous with these explorations, Laura Mulvey's 1975 "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" asserted that the conventional gaze of Hollywood film was male; by 1977, her essay "Notes on Sirk and Melodrama" was written in response to suggestions that the women's films of the 1930s through 1950s might have provided a legible space for the woman viewer. Suffice to say that, since
then, consideration/re-consideration of the role and significance of women’s films in Hollywood film has been one of the most visible on-going projects of contemporary film theory, history and criticism.

While the birth of critical interest in melodrama since the mid-1960s is relatively straight-forward to trace, clarifying exactly what characterizes melodrama, versus other narratives, is a more challenging project. The key element for the framing here is that the meaning of the designation melodrama for the entire nineteenth century and the early twentieth, in both theater, and, later, film, included not just pathos and sentimentality, but also sensation. Melodrama in this form consisted of an unfairly put-upon victim, most often a woman, who was subjected to a series of near-death situations demanding, in one way or another, spectacular in-the-nick-of-time rescues, culminating in a denouement that either placed the victim in a secure position or, at the least, revealed to the audience her essential rightness/innocence/goodness.

As Singer (2001) and others have demonstrated, this historically classic definition of melodrama has continued to be used by film archivists such as those at the AFI. However, in film criticism and theory in particular, the term melodrama became, in the 1970s and 1980s, associated almost exclusively with women’s films represented by archetypal works such as the already noted *Stella Dallas* and Sirk’s late-1950s trio. While this conception of melodrama retained its pathos and sentimentality, as well as its frequently female victim, the ‘blood and thunder’ aspect of classical melodrama, its series of rescues from momentarily impending doom, were almost entirely elided. In addition, in this form of melodrama the woman victim was almost invariably the film’s protagonist, and the setting and conflicts were either entirely or substantially domestic in character.
In practice, as Singer notes, audiences would have easily understood that the silent film era’s series *The Perils of Pauline* was clearly in its time a melodrama, while DeMille’s *The Cheat* was only retrospectively identified as such based on the more recent use of the term by film theorists and critics.

The purpose of this brief outline of two different definitions of melodrama as the term is commonly applied is not to move forward to some resolution as to which is the better, much less correct or right one, but rather to understand both how these disparate usages came about, and, ultimately, what approach to melodrama the later discussions of James’s and Woolf’s fictions and their adaptations will take. The definitional problem introduced by using the term melodrama was accurately outlined as recently as 1996 by Thomas Postlewait:

> Not only do we have trouble distinguishing melodrama from realistic drama (as genres, types, modes, methods, attitudes, or practices), we also have difficulty dividing them historically from one another, the one genre or practice supposedly located in the nineteenth century, the other in the twentieth . . . Nonetheless, we cannot avoid using these terms, in part because they are established in our scholarly communities. (40)

Entirely unraveling the definitional morass that Postlewait suggests is beyond the scope of this discussion, but we can at least clarify some of the murkiness. First, there are two approaches to constructing a definition of melodrama, the first focusing on defining melodrama as a narrative mode, the second focusing on melodrama as a more generic-like category. Mode approaches generally identify what might be called a central element, the presence of which makes a narrative more or less melodramatic, but without which it is definitively not melodramatic. An early example of such an approach is evident in Heilman’s 1968 *Tragedy and Melodrama*, in which he proposes that the
crucial difference between the protagonists of tragedy and melodrama is that the tragic character’s conflict is within herself, while the melodramatic character’s conflict is external, that is, with the world. Thus, as William Sharp notes, “Melodramatic heroes are not bothered by their conscience but by outside forces” (269). Sharp points out that Heilman’s distinction, however useful, has in practice been taken to an extreme in the depiction of “... the snarling villains and unconquerable heroes in Batman or Superman cartoons, descended as they are from such nineteenth-century plays as The Drunkard or The Gambler” (271), and that it is unrealistic depictions such as these that led to “... critics’ refusal to take the world that melodrama presents seriously” (269). One might also note that, in practice, a protagonist’s primary conflict may not be so easy to place. Hamlet, which is invariably described as a tragedy, features a protagonist who is in a state of self-doubt, yet that situation was brought about by the outside world, in the shape of Claudius murdering Hamlet’s father. And, whatever hesitations Hamlet engages in before dispatching Claudius, Claudius himself continues to be a villain whose goal is Hamlet’s banishment or death.

Another mode approach is suggested by Brooks’s subtitle; one of the most common central elements identified for melodrama is its emotional excess, an excess displayed not only by the characters in the narrative, but also expected to spill over onto the reader/spectator; as Singer notes, “... melodrama thrives on stimulating the sensation of agitation...[and is] designed to create a nervous charge in the spectator, a kind of sensory excess” (40). In this approach, whether the agitation and excess results in the spectator’s tears as Stella Dallas walks away from her daughter’s wedding, or in the
physiological fear or tension responses aroused by the cliff-hanger rescue, the narrative is essentially melodramatic, or at the least has a significantly melodramatic component.

The implications for film of defining melodrama as the mode of emotional excess were apparent as early as 1985, when Naomi Greene called Coppola’s *Godfather* series and *Apocalypse Now*, as well as Cimino’s *The Deerhunter* and *Heaven’s Gate*, “... a new kind of cinematic melodrama ...” (388). More recently, Linda Williams has argued that such films are not new at all, but that melodrama is in fact “... the foundation of the classical Hollywood movie” (42), in stark contrast to what film studies had established as “... a bourgeois, classical realist, acritical ‘norm’” (44). In opposition to that classical realist mode, Williams argues, “If emotional and moral registers are sounded, if a work invites us to feel sympathy for the virtues of beset victims, if the narrative trajectory is ultimately more concerned with a retrieval and staging of innocence than with the psychological causes of motives and actions, then the operative mode is melodrama” (42).

Certainly Williams’s argument is appealing, and not only because it represents an important challenge to the formalist and neo-formalist approaches so prevalent in film theory. Deployed as a mode, this use of the term melodrama allows us to relate films that are apparently as disparate as *Stella Dallas* and Eastwood’s 1992 *Unforgiven*, or, as Williams herself does, Cosmatos’s 1985 *Rambo: First Blood Part II* and Spielberg’s 1993 *Schindler’s List*. Indeed, even the deeper appeal of many narratives that are considered comedies—most of Chaplin’s and Keaton’s works, as well as contemporary works such as Zemeckis’s 1994 *Forrest Gump*—can be explained using this mode approach to melodrama.
However, appealing as Williams's argument is, it may suffer from the same
difficulty that E. Ann Kaplan ascribes to both ideological and formalist approaches to
film, a "... somewhat mechanical theory in which ... [there is] a 'dominant' to which all
other elements are subordinated" (276). The vast majority of films, and indeed narratives
in general, whether classified as tragic, comic, realist, or melodramatic, sound both
emotional and moral registers in some ways; similarly, many narratives include beset
victims. And, despite literary narrative’s supposed capacity for psychological depth
compared to film narratives, that depth frequently does not explain the causes of motives
and action in any satisfying way, as the narratives to be considered later amply
demonstrate, although they may indeed be concerned with such psychological causes.

Stated in a different way, the difficulty with Williams’s approach, although it may
be a very useful paradigm shift in approaching mainstream film, is that its essentialist
quality ends up doing away with many of the differences among the commonly accepted
narrative modes. Thus, on the one hand, Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet moves from
tragedy to melodrama: The play surely sounds emotional and moral registers, we are
invited to feel sympathy for Romeo and Juliet, and the play’s narrative trajectory desires
to stage innocence—fulfilled love—between the two. On the other hand, a classic
crueball comedy, such as It Happened One Night, is likewise transformed into
melodrama: Both emotional and moral registers are again sounded, spectators are
encouraged to feel sympathy for the virtues of the victims Ellie and Peter, and the staging
of an innocent, true love is again the narrative goal.

Of course, it is quite possible to imagine a narrative, literary or otherwise, that is
not melodramatic in the mode Williams suggests, and there certainly have been in both
fiction and film. By and large, however, modern narratives that lack these qualities are restricted to certain genres or even considered avant-garde by the standards of the times. Hard-boiled fiction and its film extension, film noir, rarely present the virtues of the beset victim; purely parodic narratives such as Dunleavy’s *The Ginger Man* or Brooks’s series of genre parodies beginning with *Blazing Saddles* share little of the effect of melodrama, although they frequently use its conventions as objects of parody; anti-narratives such as Robbe-Grillet’s *Jealousy* or Resnais’s *Last Year at Marienbad* have a cachet in the critical world, but little reception elsewhere.

A final mode approach to defining melodrama is put forth in Lea Jacobs’s 1993 essay “The Woman’s Picture and the Poetics of Melodrama.” Here, Jacobs argues that it is the presence of narrative situations of a particular type that is the essential feature of melodrama. By situation, she means particularly thrilling or dramatic moments, often the result of sudden discoveries, revelations, or reversals of fortune, that momentarily stop the narrative action until they are resolved. Thus, for Jacobs, melodrama is a work characterized by “…the art of mystery, suspense, and unexpected peripeties delivered at the swiftest possible pace” (127), and a melodramatic narrative is characterized by frequent “…striking impasses or confrontations between characters…” (129). Jacobs, then, like Singer and Steve Neale in his 1993 “Melo Talk: On the Meaning and Use of the Term ‘Melodrama’ in the American Trade Press,” would seem to be seeking to re-establish the significance of the blood and thunder aspect of melodrama that was lost in film theory and criticism’s increasingly narrow focus on the classic women’s films.

However, this position may also raise difficulties. If the essential quality of melodrama is ‘unexpected peripeties delivered at the swiftest possible pace,’ then a host
of relatively straightforward action films, from the Bond films to Indiana Jones's escapades, may suddenly be revealed to be in the melodramatic mode, while it is clear that their protagonists, good fellows or not, are not at all in the mold of the melodramatic protagonist, who is, according to almost everyone, more or less a beset victim of the world. In addition, as Singer points out, "... in general the situations in Hollywood melodramas do not quite match the definition of a situation as an intense, climactic plight that is crystallized in a flash and, after a moment of suspense, broken to allow another thrill to develop" (43). In other words, it is not immediately clear how a film such as Stella Dallas could be characterized as filled with peripities that come at the swiftest possible pace.

Despite these critiques, however, Jacobs's characterization of melodrama has substantial merit. Although a character facing what seems to be certain death from an approaching locomotive, or, in Bond's case, a laser, is surely one type of thrill, a climactic plight might also describe, as Jacobs notes, Rosa's discovering that her lover is going to marry someone else, as she does in King Vidor's 1949 Beyond the Forest. Perhaps if one substitutes the term 'sensation' for thrill, as Singer himself does, some of this difficulty disappears. Similarly, swiftest possible pace should not be judged solely by reference to an MTV-style tempo. Descriptions of the early period of melodrama indicate that one sensation scene per act was typical; by the early 1900s, that pace had doubled, a rate that was taken over by the film serials of the 1910s, in which chapters generally lasted between fourteen and eighteen minutes. In comparison, Beyond the Forest has up to a dozen moments that could be considered sensation moments, about the same as the rate used in the serials.
Jacobs's argument is also useful because she suggests some important distinctions between narratives which help her avoid the universalizing quality that characterizes Williams's approach. For Jacobs, melodrama relies more heavily "upon coincidence to produce situations in which the protagonist suffers" (138). Of course, the use of coincidence to move plots along has in itself been seen by many critics as a degenerate quality of melodrama; more recently, however, the use of coincidence in both classic and realist narratives has been demonstrated to be quite frequent, and, indeed, the significance of coincidence in everyday life itself has been widely acknowledged. Still, it is important to note that by coincidence, Jacobs is not referring to some of the more egregious coincidences of melodrama, but rather those such as Ed Munn's drunken interruption of Stella, Stephen and Laurel's potential rapprochement in *Stella Dallas*. The narrative has already established that Ed is a frequent visitor; a more egregious use, and not atypical for nineteenth-century melodrama, would have been that Ed had been thought dead for ten years before he suddenly re-appeared at this particular moment.

Jacobs also suggests that in melodrama, "Characters are unable to resolve [by their own actions] the situations in which they find themselves enmeshed" (139). By this she does not simply mean, as has been often asserted of the Hollywood melodrama, that a female victim or protagonist is merely passive, although this may be the case. Rather, she may be quite active, as Jacobs demonstrates using Rosa from *Beyond the Forest*, but her actions do not extricate her from the situation she faces. This is a particularly significant move because it allows Jacobs to distinguish a film such as *Beyond the Forest* from one such as Hitchcock's 1959 *North by Northwest*, which, using Williams's approach, would apparently be considered a melodrama; using the same standard, Jacobs
would not agree with Williams that the *Rambo* or *Die Hard* films are fundamentally melodramatic. Still, this characteristic may also pose problems in a mode approach; Lear, Hamlet, and Romeo and Juliet, like Rosa, act, but ultimately are unable, on their own, to resolve their situations.

Thus, while each of these three mode approaches has merits, none seems quite capable of describing melodrama in an adequate way. In Heilman’s case, the essential issue of the unconflicted/undivided protagonist seems too narrow an approach; Williams’s approach has the opposite problem of seeming to gather too many narratives under its umbrella (although she clearly intends it to in the case of film); Jacobs’s approach, which seems to me the most valuable of the three, still lacks precision in terms of the level and number of sensations, and poses problems for certain narratives that are widely accepted as tragic versus melodramatic.

In contrast to those who use a mode approach to define melodrama, many theorists have approached the problem from a different direction, one that is more consistent with a genre approach rather than a mode approach. Instead of one or a few essential qualities, this approach is more apt to list several, even many, characteristics associated with melodrama; an individual work, to the extent that it has more or less of these characteristics, is more or less dominated by melodrama. The terminology for such an approach varies; Singer, for example, uses the term cluster. The term I prefer for a genre-based approach to defining melodrama is a “traits” approach, which I use very much because of its connections with the concept of personality in psychology.

Appropriating psychology to look at narratives, filmic or otherwise, is hardly a new concept; however, the appropriation has generally involved using any of several
Freudian approaches to psychology. In his seminal article on film melodrama, for example, Nowell-Smith uses a Freudian framework to suggest that “The undischarged emotion [of melodrama] which cannot be accommodated within the action, subordinated as it is to the demands of family/lineage/inheritance, is traditionally expressed in the music, and, in the case of film, in certain elements of the mise-en-scene” (193). It does no injustice to Nowell-Smith to say that his point is that the visible narrative/ego, faced with elements too great to incorporate into ‘reality,’ ends up expressing those elements in the music and mise en scene/unconscious. Typical of such readings is the standard one of Sirk’s 1955 *All that Heaven Allows*, in which Cary’s red dress becomes the symbol of a passion that her narrowly circumscribed middle-class life cannot allow her to express.

Here, however, my use of the term traits approach is not at all Freudian; rather, it relates to the more general approach to the analysis of personality in mainstream psychology. Indeed, although film and literary studies have surely gained in appropriating Freudian paradigms, as has psychology itself, we do well to recall that Freud’s work was constructed on the basis of his analysis of the abnormal personality, not the normal personality.

The traits approach to personality is now widely accepted in psychology, although a variety of traits models exist; I use it here not in terms of the specific traits that psychology uses to describe personality, but rather appropriate its approach to describing personality. The model that is a particularly apt one is that suggested by Hans Eysenck, who argues that there are three personality types; we can think of these types as occupying a position similar to the narrative types, or modes, of tragedy, melodrama, and comedy. To describe a type, a variety of traits are used. Traits are defined as “...
summary terms that describe tendencies to respond in particular ways that account for differences among people” (Davis and Paladino 498). In psychology, then, a trait would be a descriptive term such as outgoing, assertive, apprehensive, and the like. Rewritten for my purposes here, traits become summary terms that describe tendencies in an individual narrative to display certain qualities that account for differences among narratives. Crucial to an understanding of a traits approach is that traits are conceived of as existing on a continuum; in Raymond Cattell’s paradigm, for example, traits are shown on a one through ten scale, with one essentially being never displayed, ten being always displayed (Cattell, Eber, and Tatsuoka). Similarly, a narrative trait such as tone, for example, might be described with the terms at each end being serious and comic, and a particular narrative could be unremittingly serious, unremittingly comic, or, far more likely, somewhere in between those absolute poles. To take one of Williams’s traits of melodrama, the beset victim, we might rank Die Hard’s John McClane rather lower on this particular trait’s scale than, say, Anna in Griffith’s 1920 Way Down East. Of course I do not propose, as psychology does, that such measurements can be anything like precise; rather that it is quite frequently possible to recognize in a narrative, or between them, degrees of difference in given traits.

In addition, two other important features of this model are attractive for my purposes. First, a given personality may, despite acting similarly, be perceived quite differently under different circumstances. In psychology, an assertion of difference, such as “I disagree with you,” may be perceived when among friends as well within the range of acceptable, unthreatening non-conformity; by contrast, the same assertion by the same person at her or his parents’ dinner table might be construed as indicative of outright
rebellion. Second, personality is likewise in this view subject to the vagaries of time. Thus, the same expression of personality in one time period may be viewed quite differently in another; a woman saying “I disagree with you” to her husband in 1895 might be construed quite differently than a woman saying the same thing to her husband in 1995.

Normal narratives, I am suggesting then, like normal personalities, have traits that exist on a display range, traits which will be interpreted differently depending on context and time, and which will be viewed by others in ways specific to the particular lenses that those others bring to the narrative reception situation. The advantage of the traits paradigm is that it allows for much more flexibility in describing both the individual traits of a narrative and, ultimately, a narrative as a whole. The display range of the trait beset victim using this paradigm is no longer yes or no, but closer to more beset or less beset, and ranges in between; likewise our understanding of what a beset victim is may be influenced by the historical specificity of the narrative and our own individual experience.

In terms of a genre approach to defining melodrama, then, it is crucial to understand a narrative’s characteristics specifically as traits, as I have outlined the term here, rather than as more general terms such as aspects, qualities, or characteristics. However, disagreements exist in psychology about what specific traits are included in personality; many psychologists endorse a so-called “Big Five” (Davis and Palladino 500); Cattell, on the other hand, argues for sixteen personality traits; Gordon Allport’s study of trait words in the English language suggested that as many as 4,500 traits might exist. A similar, if not quite so extreme, variation exists in attempts to identify the
important traits in melodrama. Singer has recently argued for five traits; theater historians such as Cahill typically represent the high end of the range, suggesting, in his particular case, ten significant traits.

Among all the potential traits that have been suggested as important or defining for melodrama, my preference is to identify seven key melodramatic traits, which are described and defended, in more or less detail as needed, in the following. First, melodrama involves a strong appeal to pathos through the presentation of one or more central characters who arouse, or whose presentation is designed to arouse, pity. This trait, as Singer notes, is "...a common element of melodrama..." (44), but is worth some further commentary. Virtually all surveys of the historical emergence of melodrama in the very late eighteenth century and the early decades of the nineteenth century feature an extremely beset victim who in most cases is a woman. This fact immediately suggests that melodrama has a personality which makes the exploration of gender one of its central focuses. In addition, whether the beset victim is a woman or a man, it is almost invariably the case, as Brooks and many others note, that the victim’s literal body is ultimately at stake, whether because of the imperilment of death or imprisonment, or the potential of the lack of self-governance. These particularities of the pathos that melodrama generally induces often serve as a platform to examine the beset female’s, or more rarely male’s, position not only as a specifically gendered subject/object, but also as a commodity. Also, although it is true that the majority of the classic melodramas ended happily, these frequently happy resolutions should not obscure the point that the vast majority of the narrative time arouses pity, even when a more or less miraculous last act ends up saving the day, as it does, say, in Way Down East.
Attempting to explain this pity, as Eric Bentley does, through a process in which “We are identified with those who are threatened; the pity we feel for them is pity for ourselves” (198), does not, however, seem especially necessary, except as it may be useful in explaining any response of pity on the most basic human level. Thus, even if viewers cannot imagine themselves as in anything like the situation that the beset victim is in, they can still recognize that, in the context of a particular narrative, this is a beset victim and that pity is being appealed to.

Among the beset victims whose situations arouse pathos in the narratives to be discussed in later chapters, we can count, among others, Isabel Archer, who is deceived into making a barren, love-less marriage; Milly Theale, felled at the threshold of the bloom of life by disease or treachery, however one interprets the narrative; Septimus Warren Smith, a victim of shell-shock and a paternalist medical community; and Orlando, whose arbitrary change from man to woman threatens to make her an orphan. It is immediately apparent, however, that the literary versions of these characters do not arouse the level of pathos characterized by that associated with Way Down East’s Anna, for example. Indeed, modernist literature on the whole complicates at the least, and at times undermines the extremes of pathos characteristic of classic melodrama. Even when a character can truly be considered, by circumstance, a beset victim, as in the case of Septimus, Woolf, as we shall see, undercuts his appeal to pathos by gifting him with humorous, surrealist visions. Modernist literature has, judged by these works at least, a much lower capacity for pathos. The negotiation of this particular trait in the adaptations is of particular interest, especially if one agrees with Williams’s argument that
mainstream film is squarely in the melodramatic mode; one might expect that the adaptations would seek to heighten the quality of pathos as it attaches to these and other characters.

If pathos is lowered in these literary narratives, however, gender issues are by contrast even more foregrounded than in classic melodrama, and here again, the greater complexity of gender issues seems to be a characteristic of a modernist use of melodrama. Like classic melodrama, it is often the case in these narratives that the very survival of the body is an issue, as with Ralph Touchett, Milly, and Septimus; likewise, the imprisonment of the body is quite forcefully present in a case such as Pansy Osmond's and Septimus again. However, as noted in Chapter 1, both James and Woolf explore more fully the concept of gender roles themselves as sites of negotiation, Orlando's transformation from man to woman being only the most obvious case. How the adaptations negotiate this particular sub-trait is also of particular interest in several ways, among them the effect of contemporary audiences and the status of three of the directors as feminist auteurs in their own rights.

Extreme emotion is another almost universally accepted aspect of melodrama; however, my use of this trait would limit its display to the world of the narrative, rather than extend it to the world of the spectator's response, and also require diegetic realism. As Singer rightly notes, this trait need not be automatically linked to emotions associated with pity, but can be expressed as "... anger/frustration/resentment/disappointment ..." (45), and presumably other emotions as well. Nor does it seem necessary that the viewer needs to participate in the emotion, even though one might well do so in the stereotypical good cry that certain melodramas result in for most viewers. I have included as well the
requirement of a diegetically realistic presentation of such an emotion not, as some might think, as a response to some of the more outrageous coincidences characteristic of some melodramatic narratives, but rather to indicate that the extreme emotion needs to be in proportion to its cause. Thus, the sudden appearance of a father long thought to be dead who proceeds to save the day might be an incredibly heavy-handed narrative strategy, but a flood of tears in response from his daughter would surely be diegetically realistic.

The narratives here use this trait in particularly interesting ways, and, much like pathos, it seems to be the case that melodrama in a modernist’s hands is not so highly emotional as in the hands of a classic melodramatist. James ends *Portrait* with a series of set-piece emotion-packed situations, yet Isabel’s existence throughout the novel as a highly reflective character seems to undermine the very emotionalism of the novel’s ending episodes; in *Wings*, by contrast, the most emotionally wrenching scenes are purposefully elided from the narrative. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, the extreme emotions of characters other than Septimus and Rezia seem undercut by the quotidian circumstances that arouse them; and in *Orlando*, the biographer’s voice more often than not mocks Orlando’s emotional extremes. Central to each of the literary works is a separate narrative voice that functions to distance the effect or even presence of extreme emotion; film, by contrast, is generally thought to have difficulty with representing such a voice.

Moral clarity is another central trait of melodrama, although the name I have chosen for this term is a less forceful one than others have used. Brooks, for example, argues that in melodrama, “The world is subsumed by an underlying manichaeism . . . every gesture, however frivolous or insignificant it may seem, is charged with the conflict between light and darkness, salvation and damnation . . .” (4-5); Singer uses the term
“moral polarization” for this trait. Of course, polarization may indeed be the case in a given melodrama, because polarization is a most extreme clarity; and it is also true that historical accounts of the nineteenth century melodrama in almost all its forms do indeed indicate that morality was most frequently presented in entirely unambiguous and exaggerated ways. However, retaining such an absolute view of melodrama’s presentation of morality poses significant problems in at least two ways. First, much of what is considered by almost everyone to be film melodrama does not present such a stark view of morality. Williams, for example, accurately describes *Way Down East*’s Sanderson, the character who seduces and then abandons Anna, as “a stereotypical cad” (65), rather than as the devil incarnate that an extreme manichaeistic approach to morality would seem to require. Even more problematic in such an either/or approach is *Stella Dallas*, a film in which none of the major characters could be remotely described as evil. Moral clarity does prevail, however, in the sense that we are likely to view Stephen Dallas as both weak and guided by a superficial set of values, the results of which make Stella a social embarrassment to him. But he is an equally long distance from the villains of nineteenth-century theatrical melodrama as he is from Battling Burrows in Griffith’s 1919 *Broken Blossoms*.

Lessening the requirement for moral polarization does not mean, however, that I disagree with Brooks’s central claim for melodrama, that it “... becomes the principal mode for uncovering, demonstrating, and making operative the essential moral universe in a post-sacred era” (15). Rather, I would simply assert that, as we have moved even farther from that sacred era, the absolute polarity God-Satan continues to recede at least in terms of the everyday activities of life. This should not be taken as an endorsement of
complete moral relativism; moral differences continue to exist, and continue to make a difference. They do not, however, exist as such starkly polar opposites either in the world, or as in an earlier generation of melodrama more frequently portrayed them.

All these narratives share the quality of avoiding manichaeism, while simultaneously making the relative goods and evils quite clear. Gilbert Osmond and Madame Merle, Lord Mark, Doctor Bradshaw, and Victorian mores are all on the wrong side of right as they are presented in their respective narratives; none, however, rises to the level of the moustache-twirling villain of classic melodrama, a transformation that has less to do with modernist literary practices than with changed concepts of right and wrong in the modern world. The challenges for the adaptations include, among other things, translating this trait to a contemporary audience and responding to mainstream film’s pressure to present a more manichaeistic view of good and evil as represented through character.

Those familiar with Singer’s most recent work, which is also the most recently published study of melodrama, will note that the first three traits I have suggested as characterizing a narrative with a melodramatic personality are quite similar to the first three that he mentions, although I have altered what we both call pathos and what he terms “moral polarization” (45) in certain significant particulars. At this point, however, we part company in terms of our crucial traits, and I want to partially appropriate Heilman’s notion of the locus of conflict in the melodramatic narrative’s personality: In melodrama, the victim is beset by a significant external conflict that is within the realm of traditional realistic narratives, with an opponent who has initiated the conflict. Although I would not go so far as Heilman in suggesting that a narrative’s conflict can be so easily
reduced to either a divided self, on the one hand, or a purely external one, it is quite uncharacteristic of melodrama, through all of its historical and generic manifestations, to present a conflict as centering primarily on the divided self. At the same time, melodrama’s widely acknowledged focus on either a current or historically existent material social world, rather than on conflicts with other-worldly opponents, is an important component both of its birth in an emerging bourgeoisie society and in its development in film in the twentieth century. Finally, as Williams among many others notes, the melodrama is characterized by a beset victim, whose own actions, unlike, say, Lear’s or Brutus’s, did not set the conflict in motion.

All these narratives focus on external or uncontrollable sources of primary conflict. Isabel Archer is orphaned, then gifted with an unexpected legacy, and then, because of that legacy, becomes the object of the fortune-hunter Osmond. Kate Croy is weighted down by a wastrel father, a restrictive society, and a lazy lover; similarly in Mrs. Dalloway and Orlando, it is the restrictive society that functions as the external source of conflict. In this case, if the adaptations’ choices as films are generally faithful, they would seem to be congruent not only with the narratives, but mainstream film as well.

Next, as Nowell-Smith notes, the meanings in melodrama are significantly conveyed by the symbolic significance of visual and aural elements. Initially, as has been frequently described, melodrama relied on music, pantomime, and set effects to convey its meanings, because in both London and Paris only a few theaters were permitted to present dialogue-based plays such as those by Shakespeare, the Greek playwrights, and others. From its beginnings, then, melodrama was forced to rely on non-dialogic
elements to create meanings, and, even when presentation restrictions were lifted, the works that continued to appeal in the melodramatic category continued to incorporate non-dialogic devices in significant ways. The moth-eaten, filthy rags characteristic of the costume of the beset melodramatic heroine came to symbolize, for example, not only her supposed fall from grace from the standards of an uncaring society, but also her pitiable condition in comparison to her social oppressors. However, here I want to expand Nowell-Smith’s analysis of mise en scene in melodrama beyond its Freudian base in the representation of an excess of conventionally unexpressed meaning through mechanisms associated with the unconscious. Although Cary’s red dress in *All that Heaven Allows* may indeed be analyzed from a Freudian framework, *Stella Dallas*’s use of costume is equally significant but far less representative of the Freudian unconscious. There, Stella is quite consciously aware that her dress will be interpreted by Stephen as conveying an attitude, and so she purposely sets about altering it to conform with his expectations; similarly, Stella is fully aware of the impact that her costume at the resort will make, and she also consciously chooses to make clothes for Laurel for her to take to Mrs. Morrison’s that will be appropriate for the society to which she is giving Laurel up. If the unconscious does at times erupt in the mise en scene to create meanings unknown to the narrative’s characters, as Nowell-Smith rightly argues, it is used equally as much in melodrama in more pedestrian but equally symbolic ways. It is, however, used, and used with a vengeance compared to a non-melodramatic work.

For this trait, it is quite clear that the adaptations have the potential to use visual and aural elements in far more significant ways than the literary texts, although whether each does so, and how well, will be a matter examined in the context of the close
readings. As for the narratives, I will note here only briefly that both James and Woolf, despite the interiority of their styles, also use visual focal points as extremely significant elements. Indeed, in both James's works here, the very titles allude to visual representation; while Woolf's titles do not, as we shall see the works themselves are suffused with references to visuality that not only convey but construct meaning, as in the cases for example of Miss Kilman's physical description and Orlando's costume.

A sixth significant trait of melodrama is that the conflict ultimately has important repercussions in the specifically domestic life of the main character(s). This trait can be expressed in many ways; as Williams argues, the first two Die Hard films rely not only on a significant disruption to public life, as expressed by the stakes of saving a large metropolitan skyscraper and a large metropolitan airport, but also inevitably extend to the domestic life of the protagonist in both. It is not only the skyscraper and airport that are at stake, but also McClane's estranged and later reconciled, respectively, wife. This trait is an historically significant one, as it is present in almost all nineteenth-century melodramas, and a more current one, as it is shared with the more narrowly circumscribed group of women's films. At the same time, its presence mitigates against certain types of action-oriented films, such as the Bond or Indiana Jones series, being contemplated as melodramas, while not eliminating films such as Die Hard and Terminator 2: Judgment Day.

In terms of this trait, all the source narratives to be considered here have not only important, but indeed primarily domestic impacts. As in the traits of pathos and extreme emotion, but in the opposite direction, in these works and in modernist works in general, the focus is both quotidian and primarily domestic, to the extent that the reading of them
is often inhibited because they may appear to have no larger impacts than the domestic. The American girl as James presents her in Isabel and Milly, the privileged Clarissa Dalloway, and the trans-historical and multi-gendered Orlando can well seem to exist in a narrative world so limited that it is nothing but domestic. In this case, the adaptations might be challenged to make these characters and situations convey meanings beyond their own limited circumstances.

Finally, acknowledging both Brooks and Jacobs, another key melodramatic trait is a plot that is more than usually characterized by sudden, unexpected revelations or events that serve the purpose of temporarily reversing the dynamic of conflict of the narrative. The melodramatic narrative trajectory is not a generally smooth one towards an ultimate resolution, but is rather a succession of hairpin turns and 180-degree shifts; at the end of the first movement, the heroine appears certainly doomed; at the end of the next, her triumph seems assured; by the end of the third movement, doom again seems certain, and so on through however many movements the narrative encompasses. To use a classic film whose plot is, in this sense, non-melodramatic, consider Zinnemann’s 1952 High Noon. After the initial unexpected news of Miller’s release from prison and the high probability of a gunfight looming in a few hours, Kane faces an almost unmitigated series of unexpected rejections, from his wife, the judge, his deputy, the men at the saloon, Sam Fuller, the people at the church, the former Marshall, and his former lover. While many of these rejections are indeed unexpected, they all tend in the same downward direction. They are interrupted by only one offer of help from an able-bodied fighter, which happens after three rejections, and, later, offers of help from a one-eyed man and a
fourteen-year-old boy, and none of those offers of help would serve to equalize the conflict, much less portend that Kane’s forces would likely be victorious.

The melodramatic narrative, by contrast, is well illustrated in the plot of Beyond the Forest, in which Rosa goes through at least eight reversals of fortune: Rosa, in an unhappy marriage, leaves her husband for her lover, who is willing to marry her, in reversal one. She finds that her lover plans to marry someone else, for reversal two. She returns to her husband and is reconciled, for reversal three; her lover decides not to marry someone else and again proposes marriage for reversal four. Unfortunately, she is pregnant by her husband, and one of his friend’s threatens to tell this to her lover, for reversal five. She kills her husband’s friend, for reversal six, but is found innocent, for reversal seven. Her lover then decides to put off their marriage until the brouhaha from the trial has subsided, for reversal eight. Finally, her husband, who had earlier consented to a divorce, demands that she have the child which her lover knows nothing about before they divorce, which operates here not as a melodramatic reversal, but the final nail in the coffin for Rosa. Thus, until the final movement, this work’s narrative structure revolves not around consistent, if slightly impeded, progress towards a resolution, but rather precipitous changes in fortune that from one change to the next make both Rosa and the spectator much more or much less certain of her triumph. To the extent that sensation, understood as encompassing both the thrill caused by a death-defying rescue or the tears caused by the victim’s sacrifice, is found in melodrama, it is in this series of reversals that it exists.

A series of relatively quick reversals and suddenly-appearing factors is clearly a focus of the narratives considered here as well, which the close readings will reveal in
more detail. To illustrate with reference only to James's *Portrait* as a model, Isabel is in the pre-narrative under the protection of her father; as the narrative opens, she has just been orphaned; she is taken up by a fairy godmother, Mrs. Touchett; she receives marriage proposals from a wealthy English lord and a wealthy American businessman, but spurns them both; she inherits a fortune, and is pursued and won by a fortune-hunter. This is just the first half of the narrative; she begins the second half by realizing (albeit a few years later, although just a few chapters later in narrative progression) that her marriage is a failure; takes up the role of protector of her step-daughter; realizes that her husband is an uncaring beast; discovers that her husband and a friend were lovers, and that the product of their affair was her step-daughter; disobeys her husband's wishes and travels to her dying cousin's side; and, after his death, is re-confronted with the wealthy American businessman, who is still as in love with her as ever. Perhaps it is no wonder that James leaves Isabel hanging—or rather, hanging fire, as he might put it—at the end of his narrative; after such a series of ups and downs, anything would be anti-climactic. Mainstream film, on the one hand, would seem to favor reversals such as these; on the other, however, it drives for resolution, at least as described by the neo-formalists, a tension which again will be a site of negotiation in the adaptation.

The use of a model such as this is particularly appropriate in the study of adaptation. First, it recognizes that how a source is read in terms of a given trait will vary from reader to reader, from one historical context to another, and from one text to another. In the case of the latter, for example, we can examine three protagonists from works of *Portrait*'s period, Isabel Archer, Tess Durbeyfield and Dr. Jekyll, and acknowledge that their statuses as beset victims is not a simple yes or no, but rather exists
on a range, each partaking of the trait to a greater or lesser degree, with Tess at the high end, Jekyll at the lower end, and Isabel somewhere in between. In adapting a source, and creating another intertextual link, a variety of other factors become operative, including among others the intertextual links that exist between films themselves, in this case their relations to heritage cinema, or the choice of actors to play certain roles. Regardless of anything else about the films, Spencer Tracy may be a more pathos-inducing Jekyll than Jack Palance, yet the casting choice is only one of many elements that will have an impact on the trait, and likewise others as well. Thus, this approach allows on the one hand some flexibility in reading the intertextualities presented in adaptation, yet does not simply free the adaptation entirely from its source.

Melodrama plays a significant role in all four sources' narratives, and their adaptations will necessarily negotiate those melodramatic traits. However, they will also necessarily negotiate the source works’ aspects of modernism, a frame immediately suggested because of the clearly acknowledged status of Woolf and her works of the 1920s as modernist, and the increasingly accepted status of James and his works as, at the very least, important precursors to the modernist movement in literature. Indeed, as Jonathan Freedman has recently argued, James’s work “... foretells not only the moment of modernism but that of its recessive, self-parodic, fiction whose main action seems to be the undoing of the process of fabulation itself. In short, James helps invent the postmodern” (16). An immediate problem is raised, however, in terminology; so far, my own words in this paragraph have already used the terms modernism and modernist, and Freedman has added, by implication, modern to the mix. The first task, then, is to outline more specifically what these terms denote.
Although these three terms are frequently used interchangeably, it is preferable to separate them for reasons that will become clear in the following discussion. The modern (often referred to as modernity) refers to the general state of the Western, industrialized world, and is used in contrast to a term such as, say, the Middle Ages. Cultural historians differ, of course, both about when the world became modern, and what the defining features of the modern are. Some, for example, argue that it is the emergence of the nation state that defines or leads to the modern, in which case one might date it as far back as the late Renaissance. Others associate the modern world with the industrialized world, and therefore date it to the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, or the full flowering of that Revolution in the second half of the nineteenth century. Almost everyone, however, does agree that by the mid-nineteenth century or shortly thereafter, the modern world was upon us, which is sufficient for our purposes here.

But of course, to say that James and Woolf were writers who wrote in the modern world, and that their works, by and large, were set in the modern world, is not to go much beyond saying that we would expect to see the concerns of that modern world reflected in their works. Or is it? The answer depends very much on what counts as how one defines the modern world. For Brooks, for example, both melodrama as a form and James's work specifically are "...vital to the modern imagination" (xi) precisely because the modern world yearns for the moral clarity associated with the pre-modern world. So, far beyond simply noting the looming presence of World War I in Mrs. Dalloway as an historical event that has effected in a variety of ways different characters in the narrative, Brooks's approach to the modern imagination would encourage readers to ask whether Mrs. Dalloway presents characters who long for a return to a pre-lapsarian world or at the
least, in Williams's words, "... a space of innocence" (65). Seen in this light, identifying
James and Woolf as modern writers, then, goes well beyond the surface of their texts into
their much deeper sub- or meta-surfaces.

If modern is a term denoting an historical point or range of time, what of
modernism, the term that the Freedman quote introduced? Rather than a general
historical frame, modernism most often is used to refer to a cultural movement that has
manifested itself, and continues to do so, in a variety of contexts. Representative of such
a view is Norman Cantor's definition of modernism as "... a cultural movement
flourishing in the first four decades of this century ... that ... emphasized ahistorical,
nonnarrative, or 'synchronic' ways of thinking; the microcosmic dimension; self-
referentiality; and moral relativism" (7). Of course, the specifics of such a use, for
example whether the first decade of the century should properly be included, or the
particulars of the characteristics of modernism, vary somewhat depending on the
commentator. However, it is crucial to note that modernism is an ideological movement
in a very particular way; as Irving Howe notes, modernism's "... main enemy is ... the
culture of the past, even though it bears within itself a marvelously full evidence of that
culture" (22). Thus, modernism embraces much more than just artistic products; one can
rightly say that Nietzsche, Freud, Bergson, and Einstein were all engaged in the project of
modernism in that they sought to topple the paradigms of the past. At the same time, we
can also recognize that a cultural or other project made in the modern world is not
necessarily an example of modernism, such as, for example, Mitchell's Gone with the
Wind.
Understanding modernism as an ideological project meant to undermine past practices, dogmas, and so on, is not without problems, however. Suzi Gablik, for example, notes that “The engagement of modernism, even in its most ‘alienated’ manifestations of art for art’s sake or anti-art, always involved a negative attitude toward bourgeois society: refusal of easy success, dissatisfaction with the values of the marketplace, and that permanent revolution waged against the tempting habit of conformity” (74). For many, the notion of rebellion against a bourgeois society dominated by marketplace values and materiality seems to indicate that modernism was rebelling not against the past, but rather against the present. Thus, Kafka’s unfortunate Gregor would seem not to be a grim statement about the Victorian era, but rather the bureaucratized world of the early twentieth century. Such a view, however, fails to properly locate the roots of bourgeois society and marketplace values as having taken hold in the early decades of the nineteenth century. It is quite easy to forget that Marx and Engels’s *Communist Manifesto* was published in 1848; Dickens’s Bob Cratchit and Melville’s Bartelby, early versions of Gregor, made their appearances in 1843 and 1856 respectively.

To what extent were James and Woolf engaged in work that can be considered part of the project of modernism in this sense? In the case of Woolf, there is almost universal agreement that her work, especially in the 1920s, was very much a product of, or in tune with, modernism’s project, and that agreement spans a fairly wide spectrum of specific definitions of just what the significant components of modernism include. In the case of James’s work, although much of it pre-dates the beginning of the twentieth century, there is increasing agreement, as the Freedman quote above indicates, that it
represents at the least an important transitional move towards modernism, and perhaps, as some have argued, is in fact the seminal work of literary modernism.

Finally, the term modernist is distinguished from both the modern and modernism in that it refers to a far narrower world, specifically the use of certain aesthetic practices in the arts that more or less clearly demarcate modernist artistic productions from pre-modernist ones, although in this case pre-modernist refers, much as modernism, to the historical precedents of the nineteenth century. In the world of literature, such practices include, for example, the unreliable narrator, stream-of-consciousness, unresolved endings, and what Leland Monk refers to as “a sense of nothingness at the core of the literary text” (395), among others. Central to any concept of modernist aesthetic practice is that, because it is defined as a reaction against earlier practices, its meaning varies considerably from one art to the next. In painting, for example, a mere sixty-year shift saw a movement from the conventions of realism, to the conventions of impressionism, which focused on mood but generally retained holistic, recognizable natural figures, to cubism, which literally took apart its natural subjects and placed their components in various parts of the canvas, to the pure design abstractions of artists such as Mondrian. In literature, by contrast, such a radical change in modernist practice was far less evident even in the works of acknowledged modernists such as Eliot, Joyce and Woolf, which are inevitably about something real, although we are not quite sure just what to make of them. In Woolf’s The Waves, perhaps her most modernist work, then, representation has turned inward, but has not entirely divorced itself from reality.

Much like James’s and Woolf’s relations to modernism, there is little question that Woolf’s works of the 1920s participate in a modernist aesthetic practice in
significant ways. James, however, is only beginning to be seen as engaged in that aesthetic, although I have no doubt that in the foreseeable future his work will be seen as much more modernist than has been previously thought, a connection obscured perhaps because of James's at times almost baroque style, a style which seems to ally his works with his non-modernist contemporaries such as Hardy, while obscuring his use of other important modernist techniques, such as his frequently unstable narrative resolutions.

Clarifying my use of these three sometimes conflated terms and relating the source works and authors to important aspects of each, however, is only the first step in anchoring the analysis to follow. More significantly, it is the relation of the melodramatic to the modern, modernism, and modernist that is a crucial point in my analysis of the works under study here. Although my points and questions here can only be suggestive—as if anything can be definitive in our age—they strike me as particularly interesting given the sources and adaptations the analysis relies on. First, melodrama, as has been widely noted, arises as a significant mode only within the modern world. Although Victor Castellani, among others, has made a very strong case that a large number of plays attributed to Euripides should properly be considered as melodrama, that case has yet to be extended to other significant dramatists or writers of the pre-nineteenth-century period. This of course does not imply that melodrama has no pre-history, any more than to say that Dali's surrealist works have no pre-history in a painter such as Hieronymus Bosch. It does, however, acknowledge that melodrama, by all historical accounts of it, became a very popular, oft-practiced mode in the decades immediately after 1800, an historical era that is frequently cited as the beginning of the modern world.
While Brooks suggests a cosmic explanation for the simultaneous emergence of both the modern imagination and melodrama, other, more modest explanations are available which associate the modern with melodrama, and each of the melodramatic traits earlier noted can be associated with the emergence of the modern. The connections between a variety of melodramatic traits and the emergence of the modern world have been most recently outlined in detail by Singer, and I will not review them here, but rather note that he rightly sums up the connections by saying that

Melodrama emerged ‘from below’ to express, and to redress through myth, the common person’s material vulnerability and ‘ideological shelterlessness’ in modern capitalism (to use Kracauer’s variation on Lukacs). It dramatized the social atomization of capitalist gesellschaft, and remained a reflection of the cultural divisions of a stratified society. (148).

Not surprisingly, all of the source texts examined here, as well as their adaptations, do indeed raise issues of material vulnerability, ideological shelterlessness, and the cultural divisions within stratified societies.

While the central traits of melodrama can all be significantly connected to characteristics of the modern world, relating melodrama to modernism and a modernist aesthetic practice reveals little more than the most general of connections. Both were new, of course, but in quite different ways; both have been seen by some as carrying, as Suzi Gablik notes of modernism, “... a sense of fraudulence [that] has, from the start, hung around its neck like an albatross” (13); both welcome a wider range of characters than earlier literary forms; both yearn for a truth, but in the case of melodrama, that truth is a larger moral truth, while in the case of modernism and the modernist aesthetic, that truth is related to subjective experience.
Indeed, rather than any over-riding sense of significant similarities, melodrama would seem to be part of the very past which modernism and modernist aesthetic practices are distancing themselves from. And yet, in all these source texts and adaptations, melodramatic elements are present in a dynamic balance with more modernist practices, a dynamic which is crucial in making them the unique works that they are, tumbling neither over to a more purely melodramatic mode, but neither to a more purely modernist one. One might say, then, that examining these sources will reveal how much melodrama modernist source texts can contain, and also how the adaptations, given their status as contemporary films, negotiate that already tense dynamic. As noted earlier, all four source texts do indeed share several central melodramatic traits earlier noted. To a greater or lesser extent, though, each is lower than the ‘melodrama average’ in two of those melodramatic traits, pathos and extreme emotion. This is an issue, however, that does not center purely around melodrama; rather it is inextricably linked with modernist aesthetics. Thus, while it is true, as Cantor notes, that the modernist narrative gives us “... a close perception of someone’s consciousness, and/or glimpses into their unconscious ...” (54), this opening up of access to consciousness does not lead, as it might in other author’s hands, to the higher levels of sympathy for a character that melodrama encourages. Modernist practice almost always involves distancing devices of different kinds which mitigate against pathos and sympathy; sometimes, as in the case of Woolf’s *Orlando* or Ford’s *The Good Soldier*, the infusion of comedy and humor suffuse a work with a tone that is not conducive to developing sympathy. In other cases, such as Joyce’s works, the style of the narrative itself, dense with allusion, encourages one to see the writer hard at work creating the
narrative, not the characters hard at work living their fictional lives. In yet others, as in much of James’s works, including the two to be discussed here, the authorial voice is forcefully present as a dispassionate rather than sympathetic on-looker. In the hands of a modernist, then, or at least these two, extremes of pathos are not encouraged.

Neither, as also noted earlier, is extreme emotion, at least in the sense in which I have earlier defined it. Or rather, when extreme emotion is present in these texts, which it in fact is, it too is somehow undercut by a variety of techniques as well. Orlando does indeed rage when Sasha deserts him, but his words are tossed back by the water to him as “... a broken pot and a little straw” (64); surely Isabel Archer must have felt extreme emotions at the death of her child, but James passes that off with “She had lost her child; that was a sorrow, but it was a sorrow she scarcely spoke of; there was more to say about it than she could say to Ralph. It belonged to the past, moreover...” (330). And while we might think that Densher and Milly both experienced some extreme emotions on the occasion of their last meeting, James chooses neither to dramatize that meeting, nor to allow us access to their memories of it. It is tempting to suggest, then, that in negotiating its own position with respect to a realist aesthetic, the modernist practice freely borrows from melodrama, but refuses the extreme pathos and emotional extremes of both melodrama and naturalism.

I want to close this chapter by briefly examining the relationship between the modern/modernism/modernist and film. For those who view the modern as not fully emerging until the turn of the twentieth century, the simultaneous emergence of film is almost inevitably a matter of some importance, although for quite a variety of reasons. Anne Friedberg, for example, argues that “The emergence of the cinema was... a
‘proto-postmodern’ cultural symptom” (6) that happened “... at the beginnings of the break into the ‘modern’” (6). For Friedberg, an essential distinction between the modern and the postmodern worlds is that what she refers to as “... the mobilized and virtual gaze” (4) is extended from a primarily public space, where it resided in the modern era, into a private space as well. In this reading, film is a part of the modern to the extent that a hallmark feature of the modern is an increasingly visual, increasingly commodified world on the public level. The break into the post-modern, as others have also argued, is a logical extension of the modern, rather than any rebellion against it.

Others, such as Benjamin and Baudrillard, in somewhat different ways, have focused on the virtuality of the modern era. Although painting, theater and photography were already, in their own ways, virtual, film, like modern lithography, took virtuality to new heights in adding virtual motion and virtual sound. For Benjamin, then, the infinite reproducibility of film and other arts meant that, “Instead of [art] being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice—politics” (576). For Baudrillard, film among other elements has led to the destruction of the boundary between the real and the illusory, so that, writing in 1983, he argued that “Of the same order as the impossibility of rediscovering an absolute level of the real is the impossibility of staging an illusion. Illusion is no longer possible because the real is no longer possible” (266). Thus, although the terms are different, ritual versus political for Benjamin, real versus illusion for Baudrillard, film and other aspects of the modern world disrupt, even do away with, what in a pre-modern world had been more stable categories of practice and being.

The approaches of Friedberg, Benjamin, and Baudrillard focus on film as a mechanical medium, not on its particular content. Others, however, have connected
film's content to any of a variety of social and cultural conditions associated with the modern. For Singer, the perils of modern industrialized urban life, perils such as streetcars, automobiles, heavy machinery, construction sites, and so on, find virtual form in the frenetic pace and danger-rescue-danger-rescue formula characteristic of blood and thunder melodrama, action films, and the like. Similarly, but focusing on a quite different aspect of the modern, Kathleen Rowe argues that the screwball comedies of the 1930s and 1940s "... worked in historically specific ways reflecting the era's social turmoil regarding both gender and class" (125). Similar arguments have been made about almost all genres of films that their heights of popularity are reflections of contemporary social and cultural issues.

Having outlined some of these relations between film and the modern, I want to suggest in what particular ways they will inform the readings to follow. First, on the level of the visual/virtual, film's activation of the gaze, in the sense that Friedberg uses it, rather than, say, Laura Mulvey, will be an important consideration. Here the term will be taken to mean the much more general "... mobilized and virtual visibility" (13) that Friedberg defines the gaze as. Although novels and films are both in certain ways virtual, there can be no question that film, in the plastic sense, is much less virtual than written narratives. Second, on the level of film content as a reflection of its contemporary world, modern or otherwise, some major questions will arise. To the extent that the source works are infused with the concerns of the modern spirit, as Brooks argues that The Wings of the Dove is, to what extent, and how, do the films re-create that spirit? What effects, if any, does the fact that the adaptations were all produced in the 1990s (whether
we call this period modern, post-modern, or anything else) have on the adaptations, that is, are they responding themselves to the historically specific aspects of their own time?

When we move to the relation between film and the cultural movement of modernism, it is immediately apparent that we run into some serious problems. Having defined modernism as a cultural project with an ideology that challenges the values of a bourgeois, materialist world, it might seem that mainstream film is not at all a modernist undertaking, since it frequently seems to celebrate such a world. There are, of course, alternative film practices, including German expressionism, French impressionism, and surrealist-influenced films; more recently, the works of New Wave and associated filmmakers, in particular Truffaut and Rohmer, can be cited as strongly influenced by the project of modernism. Not surprisingly, of the fifteen films that Cantor lists as illustrative of modernism, only six are original screenplays, and only two, *Jules and Jim* and *Raging Bull*, have found both a significant critical and popular following.

However, I am not willing to give up quite so quickly on finding aspects of modernism in mainstream films. As Jean-Louis Comolli and Jean Narboni note, it may well be true that “The majority of films . . . are the unconscious instruments of the ideology which produces them” (25), and the ideology that produces mainstream film is clearly bourgeois and materialist. However, as they also note, there are “. . . films which seem at first sight to belong firmly within the ideology and to be completely under its sway, but which turn out to be so only in an ambiguous manner” (27). These are films in which “An internal criticism is taking place which cracks the film apart at the seams” (27). Indeed, as they go on to argue, “This is the case in many Hollywood films for example, which while being completely integrated in the system and the ideology end up
by partially dismantling the system from within” (27). One question, then, for the upcoming analyses will be to what extent the adaptations successfully translate the modernism of the sources, and in what ways, if any, they add additional qualities of modernism as well.

Finally, the relationship of film to a modernist aesthetic practice also raises very difficult questions. Film as we know it did not come into being until the very late nineteenth century, and modernist aesthetic practices, by definition, exist in opposition to some given set of previous practices, that, in a very literal sense, did not exist in the case of film. Of course, it is possible to argue that any one or more of several possible pre-existing practices might be suitable as a model, including, among others, painting and photography, narrative fiction, and theater. However, film remains an art form that, while sharing certain significant qualities with each of those other arts, is at the same time quite distinct from each as well. A more useful approach would appear to be taking the aesthetic practices of the conventional narrative film, given their earliest full exposition by Griffith, such as continuity and classical editing, and use those as the model by which we would measure departures from an established aesthetic practice. Indeed, as was noted much earlier in the case of Williams, it is possible to describe that practice, as she does, as “... a bourgeois, classical realist, acritical ‘norm’” (44). It seems clear here that Williams is referring primarily to the neo-formalist description of the conventional structure and style of narrative film. While it may be fair to say that the neo-formalist description of the narrative structure is both bourgeois and realist, it is much less clear that classical style is either. Thus, it is true on the one hand that continuity editing tends to orient the spectator in a logical way, in that a character is seen entering an elevator in
one shot, then seen exiting the elevator in the next. Realistically, however, the technique in fact annihilates both time and space. Similarly, classical editing’s cut to an extreme close up of some emotionally or narratively significant object is perhaps realistic in the sense of conveying meaning, but is again quite unrealistic in any visual sense.

Despite these difficulties, which must be more fully worked out elsewhere, it does seem to me that we can approach the question of modernist techniques in film in two useful ways. In terms of the narrative, or story, the modernist novel stands in relation to the conventions of the realist novel, and this can serve as the model to which a modernist film narrative can be set in opposition. Thus, the realist novel strives for narrative closure, whether the characters live happily ever after, as in Austen, or are quite dead, as frequently in Hardy; similarly, narrative events are typically clearly and logically motivated. When we turn from the narrative to techniques, we can use a standard that takes the conventional pattern to be the use of logical, motivated, and relatively invisible practices that serve to make the fictional world depicted a hermetically sealed one. At the same time, in applying this rule of thumb, we can recognize that what is conventional can vary from genre to genre, so that a pattern such as establishing shot, full shot, medium shot, while conventional in, say, musicals, may not be conventional in mystery or horror films, where establishing shots are frequently withheld. Once again, then, in approaching these adaptations, we will be looking for ways in which they retain or not the modernist narrative aspects of their sources, and the ways in they use modernist techniques to tell those stories.

With these frames in place, I want to note here how the chapters both in general and internally will proceed. The chapters themselves are arranged in the order of the
appearance of the film adaptation. Privileging the films in this manner reflects the potential that each adaptation, in its own way and perhaps ultimately building on each other, influenced both production and reception factors of the later adaptations, especially because the films appeared in a relatively short five-year span. Each chapter opens with a summary of the novel, followed by an analysis of its significant melodramatic traits (it is taken for granted that their display of modern/modernism/modernist issues has been thoroughly documented by a mountain of previous critical work). One of my goals is to further expose James’s use of melodramatic traits, a project that, although begun by Brooks more than a quarter century ago, has not been widely followed up on. In the case of Woolf, no one has yet noted, at least in a published forum, that she too uses many melodramatic traits. The chapters then turn to the production history of the films, followed by the bulk of each chapter, close readings of the films vis-a-vis their sources, with particular emphasis on how each film deals with the melodramatic and modern/modernism/modernist aspects both as they existed in the sources and on their own. Finally, each film’s relation to heritage cinema is discussed; here I argue that none fit comfortably within that tradition as it is represented by works such as A Room with a View, but constitute rather what some have termed post-heritage cinema, a useful term at least until a more precise one is suggested. We turn, then, first to Orlando.
CHAPTER 3

WOOLF’S *ORLANDO* AND POTTER’S *ORLANDO*: MELODRAMA AS POSTMODERN AND POST-HERITAGE

To begin this quartet of close readings with *Orlando* is surely risky business. It is so unlike Woolf’s other long fiction that several comprehensive studies of that body of work (including those by Marder, Leaska, Kelley, and Ruotolo) either leave *Orlando* out entirely or barely touch on it. Even among those critics who see the book as within the boundaries of the Woolf canon, it is generally ranked below *The Waves*, *To the Lighthouse*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, and *Jacob’s Room*. Beyond the issue of its place of prominence in Woolf’s writing, *Orlando* poses very significant problems on its own terms. As the title of J. J. Wilson’s 1981 article, “Why Is *Orlando* So Difficult?,” indicates, the critic who attempts to approach *Orlando* in the spirit of serious inquiry faces problems at every turn of the page, to the extent that Pamela Caughie in 1989 asserted, quite rightly, that “… anything you can say about *Orlando* can be used against you. For *Orlando* defies conclusions” (42).

Indeed, what definitive conclusions can be reached about a book whose main character not only ages a mere twenty years in a span of 350 years on the calendar, but who also changes sex about a third of the calendar span through? About a book that is
subtitled *A Biography*, proceeds to disrupt most of the rules of conventional biography, yet captures its subject so thoroughly that Vita Sackville-West’s husband could write to her that *Orlando* is “A book in which you and Knole are identified forever, a book which will perpetuate that identity into years when both you and I are dead. This is an intimate secret which one book holds probably for you & me alone” (*TCL* 353)? About a book that Woolf herself said she started “. . . as a joke, & went on with it seriously” (*D3* 185)?

Even a brief summary of *Orlando*’s plot and the details of its production foregrounds its peculiarities. As the book opens, Orlando is a sixteen-year-old nobleman in the late sixteenth century, and his gender is immediately questioned by the book’s first line: “He—for there could be no doubt of his sex . . .” (13). Queen Elizabeth visits on the book’s first evening, and is so taken with Orlando that she makes over the estate house, which is hers, to Orlando’s father. Two years pass, during which Orlando writes “. . . no more perhaps than twenty tragedies and a dozen histories” (24), and Orlando is called to Elizabeth’s court. He quickly becomes a favorite of the Queen (“For the old woman loved him” (26)), but she is enraged when she sees Orlando kissing a girl.

Time melts into the reign of James I, and Orlando, although by now engaged to a certain Lady Margaret, falls head over heels in love with Sasha, a Russian princess, who, like him, is confusingly gender-marked: “Legs, hands, carriage, were a boy’s, but no boy ever had a mouth like that . . .” (38). Despite the scandal his attentions to Sasha cause, Orlando plans to escape with her to Russia. Alas, she does not keep her appointment to fly with him, and, as the Great Frost breaks, the Russian ambassador’s ship, presumably with Sasha on it, sails into the open sea.
Exiled from the court, Orlando returns to his great house, and that summer falls into a sleep that lasts seven days. When he awakens, "... he appeared to have an imperfect recollection of his past life" (66). He passes his time in solitude, then turns to reading as his solace. Rediscovering his love of literature, he summons a poet, Nick Greene, to instruct him in the ways of poetry; but Greene, although entertaining, is dismissive of Orlando's play and writes "... a very spirited satire..." (95) of Orlando. Now thirty, Orlando burns all of his nearly sixty literary efforts, saving only a poem, "The Oak Tree," and turns to his dogs and nature for solace.

Time glides by, past the Parliament days and into the reign of Charles II (1660-1685). Orlando continues to speculate about poetry, then turns to refurbishing the great house. He remains thirty, although the reader can count the passing of at least seventy-five years since his birth. Love, in the form of the Archduchess Harriet, comes calling again. The Archduchess, despite being Orlando's "... elder by many years, with a face a yard long and staring eyes, dressed somewhat ridiculously too..." (116), rouses a passion in Orlando, from which he runs by asking Charles to send him as ambassador to Constantinople.

Orlando performs his duties admirably, and his personal charms are recognized as well: "He became the adored of many women and some men" (125). Charles confers a Dukedom upon Orlando; during the celebration, a disorder among the Turks occurs, which is quelled by the sound of English bugles. Orlando retires, and embarks on another seven-day sleep. His advisors discover, on the first morning of the sleep, a signed deed of marriage between Orlando and a dancer, Rosita Pepita, rumored to be a...
gypsy. On the seventh day, "The Turks rose against the Sultan," put foreigners to death, but spare Orlando in his sleep because he was "... to all appearance dead" (133).

As the dawn of the next morning approaches, the Ladies of Purity, Chastity, and Modesty enter Orlando’s chambers and speak to his sleeping form. They are driven off by the trumpets of Truth, and, at their last "... one terrific blast..." (137) Orlando awakens and "... had become a woman—there is no denying it. But in every other respect, Orlando remained precisely as he had been" (138). After a stay with the gypsies, Orlando returns to England during the reign of Queen Anne (1702-1714).

The eighteenth century passes in a chapter: Orlando becomes acquainted with the English literati, faces an uncertain legal status and grapples with her new gender, and "... enjoyed the love of both sexes equally" (221). But, as the nineteenth century begins, "All was dark; all was doubt; all was confusion" (226). For Orlando, the major hurdles are the era’s inflexibility and the spirit of the era’s demand that she marry. No longer will the age allow her to "... wear kneebreeches or skirts as the fancy took one" (231), and she realizes one day that "... she was wearing black breeches. She never ceased blushing till she had reached her country house" (233). When Orlando discovers that she is pregnant, the urge to marry takes on a physical dimension; just after she desperately declares that "I am nature’s bride" (248), Shelmerdine, an equally gender-fluid adventurer, discovers her, lying in the fields with a broken ankle, and they are engaged within a few minutes. The courts declare that Orlando is a woman and that she can keep the great house, she and Shelmerdine marry, and he sets sail for Cape Horn.

The dizzying final sixty pages move Orlando from her marriage through the rest of the Victorian era and up to 1928, a time during which she publishes "The Oak Tree,"
gives birth to a son, reads the whole of Victorian literature, and observes the birth of the modern world. At novel’s end, now thirty-six, she drives back to the great house, changes, without embarrassment, from a skirt to “... a pair of whipcord breeches” (315), tours her house, and returns to her beloved oak tree, where, at midnight, Shel leaps out of his airplane.

As this summary suggests, there are major peculiarities here, especially those surrounding the book’s treatment of time, history, gender, biography, and tone. If one then adds that Woolf based Orlando on her long-time friend and occasional lover, Vita Sackville-West; that, in the words of Mark Hussey, “Woolf plundered Vita’s life and works for Orlando ...” (202); that Radclyffe Hall’s The Well of Loneliness was published three months before Orlando, immediately and viciously attacked, and banned in England a month after Orlando was published, one begins to see that there are peculiarities beyond just the pages of the book themselves.

What these complications suggest, and what critics are beginning to recognize, is that Orlando, whatever else it is, is at heart a postmodern text, which begins to explain both its status in the larger body of Woolf’s work and the problems it poses on its own. If, as Brian Richardson claims, citing Brian McHale, a work is postmodern if it contains the central quality of “... ontological instability ... as well [as] the emphases on parody, reflexivity, textuality, artifice, transgression, hybridization, and a conflation of history and fiction ...” (295), no better description of Orlando could be found. But, as Richardson persuasively argues, the conventional history of twentieth-century literature tends to create a narrative that features “... a series of causally connected events in a linear sequence, a teleological progression culminating in the present, the absence of
unconnected or distracting subplots . . .” (292). Likewise on the level of individual authors, I suggest: Works that do not fit neatly into the progression of their author’s body of works tend to be devalued and even ignored. The conventional story of Woolf is that her two early long works are minor examples of the transitional stage between realism and modernism; her works of the 1920s, excepting Orlando, move to the level of high modernism; and her later work represents either a dotage or a reversion. Fitting neither with the high modernism of To the Lighthouse or The Waves, which bracketed it, nor with the seemingly more Victorian/Edwardian (if not merely inferior, some might suggest) early and late works, Orlando became a parenthetical work.

An equally powerful problem in approaching the book on its own terms is the one that Richardson directly addresses: Postmodernism, in the conventional story of literature, did not exist in 1928 when the book was published. But this is a problem only because that conventional history tends to ignore texts that do not fit neatly into the overall paradigm as well. However, in point of fact, as Richardson notes, “. . . the kind of literature now called postmodern was appearing simultaneously with or even preceding the major texts of modernism” (294). This problem of glossing over aspects of texts that do not fit quietly into pre-conceived notions of them has been recently explored as it relates to Orlando in particular by Nancy Cervetti. Noting that “. . . critics usually read the novel as biography or view it as a love letter” (165), Cervetti insists, rightly, that “. . . lifting Orlando out of the particulars of Woolf’s life . . . allows other aspects of this versatile and contraband text to materialize, revealing Orlando’s revolutionary view of gender, identity, and the body and the way in which critical response has tended to quell
the rebellion” (165). Lifting the book from the ‘particulars of Woolf’s life’ also means lifting it from the particulars of the conventional histories of both Woolf’s work and twentieth century literature in general.

Yet Orlando’s reception history would be incomplete without commenting on a third factor. Although comparatively marginalized in Woolf studies for some fifty years after its publication, the book enjoyed a resurgence, beginning in the 1980s, because of its gender-bending/switching/transgressing nature. In the same 1989 article in which Caughie pointed out that Orlando defies conclusions, she also noted that “… Orlando would seem to be the quintessential feminist text” (41). Indeed, the book in the 1980s was resurrected from the heap of Woolf’s minor works, and, because of the gender barriers it seemingly crosses, elevated to the status of a gender-crossing ur-text. Both on the surface of the text and in conjunction with Woolf’s non-fiction writings around the time of Orlando’s composition and publication, the message seemed clear: Woolf is telling us that men can be(come) women—or at least experience as they do; women can be(come) men, or at least experience as they do; and artists must forget their sexuality as a primary, essential quality in order to become great artists. Just one problem, though, according to Caughie: “In promoting Virginia Woolf’s Orlando as a feminist work, feminist critics have picked the right text, but for the wrong reasons. Orlando works as a feminist text not because of what it says about identity but because of what it manages not to say…” (41).

Caughie has not had the last word about Orlando, of course. Whatever interest the book sparked among academics has been doubled in the 1990s, a decade in which more than half of the scholarly articles published on the book have appeared. The themes
of those articles have included, among many other things, the conflict/contradictions between Orlando's text and its photographs; its Orientalism; the performance versus essence issues it raises; its status as a female pastoral; and, most recently, its existence and potential as a camp text. Like many postmodern texts, Orlando's refusal to conclude and its multi-dimensionality make it an attractive source/subject/object of inquiry.

One of those dimensions that has received little attention, however, is Orlando's overt and frequent use of melodrama in a characteristically postmodern manner. Orlando takes numerous conventions of literary melodrama and parodies them, all the way through indeed to its fairy-tale ending. Space does not permit a close reading of the novel, but an enumeration of the major episodes will make clear how much the significant events rely on the parody of melodramatic conventions. Conventional melodrama frequently opens with a sudden negative reversal of fortune, while Elizabeth's bequest of the estate is a sudden positive reversal of fortune; more conventional is Orlando's shortly thereafter (in narrative time) falling just as suddenly out of the Queen's favor because he kisses a girl. In both instances, as is typical in melodrama, the motivations for the Queen's reversals are based on her frustrated desire for Orlando. Orlando's relationship with Sasha is far from convincing as a romance (indeed, it is so superficial that it might be termed a cinematic presentation), but is replete with melodramatic declarations ("'All ends in death,' Orlando would say, sitting upright, his face clouded with gloom" (46)), and even ends, in the breaking of the Great Frost, with the kind of set-piece spectacular characteristic of classic theatrical melodrama.

Orlando's response (burning all but one of his three-score literary efforts) to Nick Greene's satire of his literary works is perfectly in keeping with the exaggerated
melodramatic gesture, as is his rushing headlong not just from the sight of Archduchess Harriett, but indeed entirely out of the country—heavens, entirely out of Europe, for that matter. The ‘reversal’ from man to woman occurs in the spectacular context of the Turkish revolt, and the clash between the Ladies of Purity, Chastity and Modesty and the trumpets of Truth amounts to a parodic distillation of the spiritual versus secular at the heart of the melodramatic mode. As a woman, Orlando finds that English law’s endorsement of primogeniture threatens not only to deprive her of her estate, but even to declare her dead, a particularly sophisticated metaphorical play on melodrama’s theme of literal imprisonment. By the Victorian Age, Orlando is not only imprisoned by the “. . . twenty yards or more of black bombazine” (235) and several layers of crinoline required of her skirts, but also by the implacable spirit of the Age that a woman must marry to exist at all.

Typical again of melodrama, just when things seem bleakest, Orlando finds herself lying on the ground in a field, when “Towering dark against the yellow-slashed sky of dawn, with the plovers rising and falling about him, she saw a man on horseback” (250), to whom she is, a few minutes later, engaged. The scene might be directly out of Wuthering Heights; but the parody is that Orlando and Shelmerdine, the man on horseback, have a perfectly happy, if unconventional, union. And, in another conventional melodramatic move, the publication of Orlando’s poem reveals that her literary talent was not absent, but rather unrecognized.

This series of abrupt reversals of fortune, exaggerated responses, spectacular scenes, and discoveries of societal restrictions, does not, of course, make of Orlando what is typically thought of as a melodrama, either classically or in the narrower province
of film criticism. Indeed, *Orlando* has far more in common with romantic comedy than with melodrama. However, as Kathleen Rowe persuasively and correctly observes, melodrama and romantic comedy are intimately related:

Melodrama depends on a belief in the possibility of romantic comedy’s happy ending, a belief that heightens the pathos of its loss. Similarly, romantic comedy depends on the melodramatic threat that the lovers will not get together and that the heroine will suffer... Both forms are set squarely in the province of women—the private, the domestic, the home or the heart. Both narrate the stories of ‘excessive women’ who assert their own desire... Both depend to varying degrees on the structure of gender inversion. (49-50).

Understanding these connections between melodrama and romantic comedy is, of course, crucial to answering the question that Wilson proposed; *Orlando* is difficult precisely to the extent that critics attempt to separate its melodrama from its romantic comedy, a separation that cannot be accomplished. Indeed, Woolf herself said that while the tone of the novel “...has to be half-laughing, half-serious...” (*AWD* 118), she also was striving “...to keep unity of tone” (*AWD* 117), meaning that each and every aspect of the book was to be simultaneously half-laughing and half-serious.

That film as a medium has the capacity to present such a simultaneously laughing and serious tone is thoroughly demonstrated both by the works of the great silent comics Chaplin and Keaton, as well as by more recent works such as *Moonstruck* (Jewison 1987), which is the focus of Rowe’s analysis, and *Forrest Gump* (Zemeckis 1993). However, film is equally adept at presenting both melodrama and romantic comedy in their less intertwined forms, and how a particular adaptation chooses to negotiate with its source work will be influenced by a variety of factors. At about the same time that Caughie was declaring that Woolf’s *Orlando* defies conclusions, Sally Potter was beginning to work seriously on her version of *Orlando*. The specifics of Potter’s film
career have been thoroughly discussed elsewhere (see MacDonald); suffice to say here that she was a highly regarded experimental/avant-garde/feminist film-maker who had achieved a triumph with her 1979 Thriller and had directed three successful BBS productions between 1986 and 1988.

While the novel was becoming during the 1980s 'the quintessential feminist text,' Potter says that her interest in it began much earlier: "When I first read Orlando as a teenager [during the 1960s], I remember watching it as a film" (Donohue 10); in another interview, she notes that on that first reading "I remember the book burning its way visually into my mind" (Dowell 16). She "... started thinking about Orlando immediately after finishing The Gold Diggers" (McDonald 416). When she actually began the script (apparently in 1988), "It was a process of reading, re-reading, and reading again, writing, re-writing and writing again . . . I also went back to research Woolf's sources . . . finally, I put the book away entirely for at least the last year of writing and treated the script as something in its own right, as if the book had never existed" (Donohue 10).

Exactly how aware Potter was of the conventional thinking that deemed Woolf's novels impossible to film successfully is unclear. Potter has said that "I didn't care if people told me it couldn't be done" (Stone 42), but exactly why they were telling her that is left to speculation. For herself, "The book has a live, visual quality to it which was affirmed in Woolf's diaries, where she said that what she was attempting with Orlando, unlike her other books, was an 'exteriorisation of consciousness.' She was finding images for a stream of consciousness, instead of using a literary monologue" (Donohue 10). And in this, Potter seems quite right, at least to the letter of Woolf's feelings about
Orlando; she did indeed write that “I like... the externality of it for a change” (AWD 116) as she was writing the book. Once it was published, she reflected on its good qualities that “They came of writing exteriorly... And what is my own position towards the inner and the outer? I think a kind of ease and dash are good;--yes: I think even externality is good; some combination of them [externality and, presumably, internality/tunneling] ought to be possible” (AWD 136).

Fortuitous coincidence, sensitive insight, or both, Potter’s decision to make Orlando the first theatrical film adaptation of Woolf’s fictions (the BBC produced and broadcast an adaptation of To the Lighthouse in 1979) begins to look risky only from the lens of conventional literary wisdom. The book’s status as a maverick in the Woolf stable (for both Woolf and the critics) results from several qualities that actually make it attractive from the cinematic perspective. Its fairy-tale handling of time, mortality, and gender place it not only squarely outside of the realist mode, but also inside the particular abilities of film to handle such fantastic alterations. It relies, as Woolf herself well knew, far more on the presentation of the external than on the internal; indeed, Caughie argues that “It is not that Orlando’s playful surface has no point to it; its point is its playful surface” (49), and film is also unique in its ability to capture the surface. Its tone, as has already been noted, is possible for film to capture.

In addition to these attractions, the book offers others as well. Both its explorations of gender and performativity were much more publically topical at the time of Potter’s film than in the time of the book itself. Its series of set pieces—the Great Frost, the gender transformation scene, the drawing room conversation with the great men of literature, the meeting with and marriage to Shelmerdine, among others—might...
conceivably be brought to the screen with comparative ease. The book’s sketches of a series of times in English literature and history—Woolf noted that in *Orlando* “I want (and this was serious) to give things their caricature value” (*AWD* 134)—rather than the exhaustive, realistic exploration of just a few such times, lends itself easily to film’s ability to sketch in its own broad strokes the outline of the moment. And, finally, the book’s exaggerated emphasis on costume in particular and the visual more generally would seem ideally suited to film’s ability to communicate and signify through the visual.

These qualities, however, all exist only as potentialities inherent in the source text. It is time now to turn to how they were (or were not) transformed in Potter’s *Orlando*. As noted in the Introduction, the close reading will focus through four lenses or frames: First, the film negotiates, much as its source did, the melodramatic (in this case, melodramatic and romantic comedy) aspects of its source by steering a path that delicately balances the two, delivering melodramatic situations while simultaneously undercutting melodramatic responses. Second, it makes repeated use of non-realist film practices in its visual techniques, reflecting its non-realist narrative. Third, its presentation of gender roles/types/complications in some ways builds on/complicates its source and in others pulls back from it. Fourth, the most significant alterations from text to film emphasize both more current feminist views and attitudes and a clearly post-colonialist attitude. Rather than separate the reading into four separate ones, each dealing with one topic, the reading progresses as the film does, since these lenses, although perhaps critically separate, are in fact constantly interactive and synthetic in producing
meaning in an on-going narrative. However, as noted in Chapter 2, the film’s relationship, purely on its own terms, to heritage cinema will be discussed in a unified final section.

The film’s short opening scene is worth commenting on at length, because it sets up three dynamic tensions that continue to pervade the film, dynamics that are similar in kind to those that the book uses to de-stabilize itself as a realist text. A long shot frames a character in the costume of an Elizabethan male, walking alternately left to right, right to left, in front of a large tree, reading a book aloud, although too indistinctly for the viewer to hear. What turns out to be a repeated, and is, filmically, a relatively unusual pan is immediately apparent: When the figure moves right, the camera pans left, and when the figure moves left, the camera pans right. Such fluid oppositional pans are associated primarily with film-makers of the New Wave and, because they pointedly draw attention to the presence of the camera, one of the central effects is to immediately announce the artifice of what we see, quite unlike realist films whose cameras are relatively unobtrusive.

While the scene makes no attempt to re-create the first scene of the book, the camera’s immediate declaration of itself is similar to Woolf’s immediate announcement of herself as biographer: “He—for there could be no doubt of his sex, though the fashion of the time did something to disguise it . . .” (13) are the book’s opening words, and they are the only words until the middle of the second page that clearly announce the biographer as a separate, observing consciousness. Just as the biographer in conventional biography is/was invisible, so too is the film-maker in conventional fiction films. But the particular use of this fluid pan serves other purposes as well. Camerawork can draw
attention to itself in many ways; this particular use, however, visually puts the camera at odds with its object, suggesting themes of appearance versus reality and cross-purposes, both of which abound in both versions.

A voice-over reading the above-quoted lines (as well as others not in the text) then begins; the character sits down under the tree. To this point, the camera has remained in a long shot, and only those viewers already familiar with Tilda Swinton would be likely to know that the character is a woman dressed in the clothes of an Elizabethan man. But a cut to a close-up reveals Swinton, who is first looking screen right. However, just as the voice-over announces, “But when he . . . ,” Swinton turns directly to the camera/viewer and interrupts, saying, “That is, I.” This direct address is the first of at least fifteen times in the film that Orlando/Swinton turns directly to the audience, although not all the direct visual addresses are accompanied by dialogue.

Whether or not the frequent use of direct address amounts to the ‘golden thread’ that Potter characterizes it as, it is indisputable that direct address is sparingly, indeed almost never, used in conventional realist films other than comedies. Even more so than the opposing pan, direct address breaks down the invisibility that is a hallmark of conventional film-making. As Annette Kuhn, among many others, has noted, direct address disrupts the “… passive receptivity . . . ” (161) characteristic of conventional film narrative by suddenly making the object of the view a subject in her own right. Crucial to such a transformation from object to subject in this film, however, is the number of times and the variety of ways in which the technique is repeated. The fifteen direct addresses are quite enough to establish what Maggie Humm calls “… an active-looking subject woman rather than the object of traditional historians or film directors; Orlando’s
constant looks at the camera reject any object status” (173). But it is also true that these looks are *not* so constant, which seems to me equally important. Were they too constant, happening, for example, in every scene Orlando is in, or every minute or so, the film would run the risk of foregrounding Orlando as a subject and disrupting the traditional narrative that is being simultaneously presented. As it is, the direct addresses are spaced out unevenly; three, for example, occur in the Nick Greene episode, appropriately because it is centered on poetry, the creation of which makes of the poet a subject.

Also notable is the fact that the direct addresses are invariably brief, some consisting of merely a two or three second direct gaze at the camera, others of a gaze with a few words, the longest a gaze and a few sentences. The result is that the conventional narrative is never halted for more than a few moments, unlike the narrative interruptions and stoppages in forms such as the musical, where narrative is often sacrificed to the demands of other cinematic pleasures. The result, then, of the uneven spacing and brief length of the direct addresses, is a continuing dynamic tension between the conventional presentation of Orlando as object and her transformation into a subject, rather than the creation of an *entirely* ‘active-looking subject woman.’ Such a dynamic tension is characteristic of a postmodern work, and typical of its refusal to be entirely one thing or another, but rather to exist at a point suspended between two or more other positions. The book achieves a similar dynamic tension in a different way, specifically the tension between the on-going traditional biography of Orlando and the direct intervention of the biographer.

When Orlando interrupts the voice over, turns to the camera, and says, “That is, I,” he does indeed seem to be asserting an independence apart from the film-maker. The
technique, however, is not just non-conventional, but is particularly disruptive to
conventional notions of the gaze and the gendered gaze in particular. If examples of
direct address are mostly limited to comedy, they are also typically reserved for the male
comedian or actor, such as Groucho Marx, Bob Hope, or, more recently, Ted Striker
(Robert Hays) in *Airplane!* (Abrahams, Zucker, Zucker 1980). Here, for viewers who
recognize her, it is Tilda Swinton who is gazing at us as we gaze at her, and our
recognition that our gaze is being returned by a specifically her, rather than a he, that it is
being returned so early in the film, and that the film has yet to establish its mode as
comic, undermine not only the realistic aesthetic practice, but gender and genre practices
as well. Finally, for those viewers who are aware of the book’s production, Orlando’s
direct gaze and dialogic address is an example of typical modernist/postmodernist
double-coding; Sackville-West, in a letter to Woolf about the novel, wrote, “I won’t be
fictitious” (*TCL* 354), herself refusing to be confined by the fiction, much as Swinton’s
direct address asserts her independence from the film’s fiction.

Finally, the fact that it is Tilda Swinton who looks at us and says, “That is, I”
activates a number of issues relating to both gender and industrial connections as well.
Swinton’s casting as Orlando resulted in considerable controversy both among press
reviewers and Woolf scholars, much of which, for example John Simon’s and Jane
Marcus’s deriding Swinton’s looks per se, is simply irrelevant. However, it is perhaps a
fair question to ask, given the source’s gender-bending leanings and the film’s general
fidelity to that part of the source’s plot, just what sort of face is it? A male face, or a
female face, or an androgynous face? Woolf critics who have written about the film are
preoccupied by the question. Leslie Hankins notes that “... Potter chose Tilda Swinton,
played very femme" (172); Eileen Barrett argues that “Although Tilda Swinton as the Elizabethan Orlando may not, as many reviewers complained, be a convincing man, she is most convincing as a young gay man” (198); Roberta Garrett says of Swinton, “. . . in no sense does she look remotely male” (94); and Susan Watkins writes that “. . . when I discussed this casting decision with students studying the novel and the film, there was a general sense that Swinton was indisputably female throughout” (52), and goes on to argue that a more effective casting choice would have been “. . . to cast someone who the audience did not ‘know was a woman playing a man’” (52).

This concern over whether Swinton is convincingly masculine is difficult to fathom, given the story the film (and the novel) tells. As Christina Degli-Esposti rightly notes, “Orlando is a fantastic piece of literature. Its story exceeds the limits set by the rules and modes of aesthetic representations of the real” (81). Viewers of the film who are aware of the novel must certainly already realize that it is a fantasy, and that issues of realistic representation, whether of gender or otherwise, are simply non-issues. Viewers unfamiliar with the novel are already on notice that the film is breaking away from the conventions of a realist aesthetic practice through the use of the direct visual and dialogic address.

More disturbing than the issue of aesthetic practice is that readings of Swinton as female suffer from, as Brenda Silver rightly points out, “. . . the assumption . . . that [the viewers] know what a man and a woman are” (75), and this assumption is just what the film (and the novel) is attempting to undermine. Gender, as it is observed, is equatable with performance, and not with biological sexuality; and if one codes Swinton’s performance as indisputably female, one is left with the vexing question of how, indeed
even whether, performance acts are coded as female or male in any more than an
arbitrary way. Orlando performs crying when he and Sasha view the great house (as does
the book’s Orlando at a slightly different point in the relationship); are we to take crying
as a performance indication of female gendered-ness? Not surprisingly, none of the
critics who read Swinton’s performance as indisputably female point out any single
aspect of that performance as why they label it as female, much less indisputably female.
Indeed, to do so would amount to reverting to essentialist notions of gender as
place. The need for some viewers to fix Orlando’s identity by reading Swinton’s
performance as coded male or female is unfortunate, not just because of the film’s mode,
but because, as Silver points out, it “... tells us more about the values and politics of the
historical moment of the performance than about an authentic Shakespeare or Woolf”
(72).

Of course, it might have been possible to cast a performer whose biological sex
was unknown to the audience, and perhaps the absence of that knowledge might have
encouraged a different reading of Orlando’s gender. However, Potter’s choice to cast
Swinton raises interesting gender issues on its own. Potter’s choices of leading actors in
both Thriller and The Gold Diggers (1984) were made with a consciousness of industrial
issues, and that is the case with Swinton as well. Since the mid-1980s, Swinton had
appeared almost exclusively in Derek Jarman films, and her presence here, for those who
know that background, serves immediately to place the film in the tradition of
English/European art-house cinema, rather than mainstream film. Even more
particularly, Jarman was widely known, among those who knew his films, as a film-
maker whose works openly and seriously explored gay and lesbian issues, and he himself
was openly gay. Although Swinton had played quite a variety of roles in Jarman’s films, for the knowledgeable viewer she has iconic value as an actor whose career had, up until that time, been largely associated with gay and lesbian cinema. As is frequently the case in film in general, then, the presence of the actor (although Swinton could not have been called a film star at this point in her career) is doubly-coded, read as a performance, and read as well in light of the actor’s previous performance history.

This first scene ends with Orlando having fallen asleep under the tree, to be awakened by a high voice singing in the distance, then trumpets; the voice, singing the word “Eliza,” serves as a sound bridge to tell both Orlando and us that the Queen is arriving. As Orlando rushes to the house and the servants rush to prepare for the Queen, the song continues, and the high-pitched voice is revealed to be a man’s (Jimmy Somerville), the second in what will turn in to an on-going series of upsetting of conventional gender notions; for Somerville is clearly not the youthful male soprano some might have foreseen. Indeed, coming on the heels of Swinton’s ambiguous presence and her direct address, the film’s first three minutes have already announced that nothing here will be quite as it seems to be. This is confirmed a few moments later, when we have our first view of Elizabeth, played, if one happens to know this, by a gay man, Quentin Crisp, the third upsetting of conventional gender notions.

On the casting of a gay man as the Queen, Barrett has said, “But while I too enjoyed the casting of Quentin Crisp as Elizabeth, I ask you: what does it mean when one of the most powerful women of all time is played by a man?” (198). This is a fair question, and my answer would be to point out that Crisp is not just a man, but a gay man, and surely something is being de-stabilized as a result. However, the casting choice
also illustrates three central postmodern qualities of the film. First, for those viewers who know that Elizabeth is played by a man, and a gay man, the casting adds a level of double-coding to the film that is typical of many postmodern works, which often are embedded with ironies that only the ‘initiated’ will pick up on. The situation is similar in terms of the book, whose thinly-disguised use of real people would have been intelligible to those familiar with Woolf and her crowd, but not to others. More importantly, however, casting Crisp puts Barrett, and perhaps others, in an uncomfortable position, a position highly uncharacteristic of conventional film strategies. On the one hand, Barrett admits to enjoying the casting choice; on the other, she is clearly disturbed by its meaning. Putting spectators in such a position is a transgressive strategy, denying—or rather, allowing—both easy pleasure and moral/intellectual uncertainty, and once again is a typical aspect of a postmodern work. Finally, as Suzanne Ferriss and Kathleen Waites perceptively note, when Orlando ends the episode with the direct address “Very interesting person,” a series of ironies come into play:

... for Orlando’s comment refers not simply to Elizabeth but to Quentin Crisp, a flamboyant homosexual and cross dresser, who is most definitely ‘a very interesting person’ outside the bounds of the film itself. The scene highlights both the construction of narrative and of sexuality ... [and] not only breaks the illusion of narrative wholeness but forces us to recognize that the film itself is an illusion (11)

One can add that issues of stardom, or perhaps more accurately notoriety, are raised as well in the sense that Swinton, Somerville and Crisp were widely known within certain communities; however, as the film ended up reaching wider audiences, their iconic values may have been less recognized.

In terms of the on-going structure of the film, this scene sets in motion what will be a series of seven episodes stretching from 1600 to the present. Despite the movement
from Elizabethan times to the present, two continuities are ever-present: Orlando, and the
great house itself, which we first see in this scene, and which is either the entire locale of
the episodes or their starting or ending places. It is in the great house that Orlando
encounters Elizabeth; to which he takes Sasha on the sleighride and returns to after her
rejection; in which he entertains Nick Green; to which she returns after the
transformation; in which she loves Shelmerdine; and to which she returns as a visitor at
film’s end.

That the book pays much more attention to the house is quite true: One of the
book’s goals was to restore, imaginatively, Knole to Sackville-West. That Potter is under
no obligation to do the same, the principals being long dead, seems obvious. But the
film’s use of the house serves purposes of its own. As Julianne Pidduck argues, relying
on Teresa de Lauretis’ association of mobility/immobility with male/female roles,
“Orlando becomes, almost in spite of her/himself, mobile, as she/he moves through
different historical circumstances” (181). But the film achieves this mobility in what is
once again a very ambiguous way; in fact, Orlando is both mobile and immobile. As a
male, he is mobile in his movement first to the court, where he woos Sasha; then
immobile when he returns to the great house after losing her and throughout the Poetry
episode; and mobile again when he goes to Constantinople. Transformed into a woman,
Orlando immediately sets off to return to the house, and stays there, immobile except for
the scene where she visits Lady R.’s salon, until the film’s final episode, where she is
mobile again, stumbling, pregnant, through battlefields, visiting the publisher and
returning to the great house which is no longer hers.
The effect of these alternations in space and mobility is yet another way that the film emphasizes its 'neither one nor the other,' or rather, its 'both-and' theme. On the one hand, it refuses to be set entirely or even predominantly in the house; of the seven episodes, four are set almost entirely in the house, three almost entirely out of it, and even the four set in it frequently occur on the grounds, not in the house. As Pidduck notes, this structure follows what Bakhtin describes as "... the framework of the adventure novel of everyday life" (174), a structure which chooses to be both the male adventure story and the female domestic story. Indeed, in lessening the amount of time Orlando spends in the house (both as male and as female) from the book, the film not only is more open visually, but also achieves a more even balance of the adventure-domestic. Potter's choice to refrain from giving the house to Orlando, as the novel does, frees her at film's end to move more fully to the side of Orlando the adventurer; but this potential freedom itself is balanced by the presence of Orlando's child in the film's final scene (the child is only announced, but not present, in the novel). In this sense, the film ends at what Pidduck describes as "... a kind of rest station, stuck in what Margaret Morse describes as a 'paradoxical feeling of stasis and motion'" (185). And such a stopping point makes perfect sense for the film, continuing as it does the balance between two polarities, in this case leaving Orlando suspended between the adventurer and the domestic, the one pole the site of the male-dominated action film, the other the site of the female-dominated melodrama.

Early on in the episode another non-realistic technique is used: Just after Elizabeth has dipped her hands in the bowl of rosewater Orlando has offered her, and the camera has shown brief close-ups of first Elizabeth's face and then Orlando's, two intertitles
appear, “1600” and “Death,” in large white type on a black background. They are the first of seven intertitles, one set for each episode, all but the last having both date and ‘theme.’ The intertitles achieve three important effects. As Pidduck notes, “The two elements (dates and events) within the titles signal the doubled spatial—temporal articulation of the adventure novel of everyday life” (175). One might add, clearly signal. And in this sense, although film purists might find the technique distracting, the intertitles serve effectively as chapter headings. Also, using intertitles continues to announce the artifice that has already been established, and thus serves to further remove the film from the conventions of realism it seeks to resist. In addition, the thematic headings serve in a certain way as the biographer’s voice in the novel does, a voice that is clearly not just presenting Orlando’s life as it progresses, but interpreting it as well, and, like the novel, ironically sometimes not very accurately.

Finally, this episode contains the first of two significant motivational changes that Potter adds to the film. As Elizabeth gives Orlando the deed to the great house, she commands him, “On one condition. Do not fade, do not wither, do not grow old.” In the book, of course, Orlando’s not aging after he is thirty is unexplained—nor need it be, given the fantastic mode of the tale. However, this addition is entirely in keeping with the fantastic mode as well, because in such tales a powerful person or being frequently charges/bestows upon a mere mortal either a gift, a quest, or both. But the charge Elizabeth gives Orlando represents far more in the film. Ultimately, Orlando lives up to Elizabeth’s charge, yet she still loses the great house. That is, she fulfills the condition, but the benefit of fulfilling it ultimately is taken from her. In England under the rules of inheritance, based as they were on a narrowly constructed primogeniture, that Orlando
could fulfill Elizabeth's charge and still lose the house serves as an ironic commentary. For all of Elizabeth's power as Queen, she was still a woman, and the directives she set down, including this one to Orlando, were carried out in the context of a highly patriarchal system. An even greater irony results when it is during the reign of Victoria in which Orlando is disinherited of the house unless she bears a male heir. Victoria is no more able to change the rules of primogeniture than Elizabeth, despite their both being extraordinarily powerful monarchs who could order executions, arouse nations to war, and mobilize great armies. In this way, the inability of both Queens, despite their immense power, to ensure Orlando's inheritance is a further critique of a male-dominated social system in which even extraordinarily powerful women are circumscribed in their actions.

Episode two, "Love," Orlando's courtship of and rejection by Sasha in the time of the Great Frost, opens with one of the most interesting tableaus in the film: Orlando stands, back to us, gazing at a large, full-length portrait of his parents. A young woman, previously seen in the funeral procession, dressed in an elaborate black Elizabethan dress, approaches Orlando from screen right, gently puts her hand on his arm, and herself gazes at the portrait. The two look at each other, then turn towards each other and pivot to face the audience. She puts her arm comfortably through his and they form the classic formal portrait of man and wife. The camera holds them for a few moments, and the inter-titles appear. This tableau, both set in the domestic space of the house and emphasizing Orlando and Lady Margaret as a couple, and yet not actually progressing anywhere, perfectly visualizes the dynamic possibility of either melodrama or romance as narrative developments.
The dominance in the frame of the portrait of Orlando’s parents is another striking reminder that we ourselves are watching an artist’s vision, not reality, but reality represented. And, just as the filmically ‘live’ Orlando and Lady Margaret view the painting, which is a representation of mute objects, we view all four in what ends up being a doubled portrait. Yet what would seem to be an almost perfect image of an image is disrupted by the lack of parallelism between the portraits. In the painting, Orlando’s mother is dressed in a black gown with white accents, while his father’s clothing is predominantly brown; only the black is picked up in the portrait that Orlando and Lady Margaret form, likewise with white accents. In the painted portrait, Orlando’s mother is on the left, his father on the right, while in the film portrait, Orlando is on the left, Lady Margaret on the right. And in the painted portrait, Orlando’s mother’s arm is not linked with his father’s; indeed she stands slightly in front of him. The overall result is that while the film draws attention to its status as an image through the doubled images, it subtly sends the message that something is off-kilter here, and that something is clearly related to gender: Orlando’s father’s colors are erased in the film portrait, his mother’s are dominant, and his father’s position has been taken by Lady Margaret.

After the intertitles, the emphasis on image is immediately and loudly repeated as a group of men peer directly down at the camera, chuckling, as if they have suddenly broken through the film and are laughing at the audience. But the film cuts to show us what they are indeed seeing, the book’s famous apple-selling lady, frozen in the ice of the Thames. In this beautifully eerie shot, the apples float, suspended in the ice above and around the apple-seller, who is, ironically, as frozen and mute as the figures in the painting, but, in terms of the fictive narrative, actually embodied, not merely represented.
Once again the film’s use of the image is doubly-coded: Narratively the apple-seller is not a representation, but an embodiment, but the film, qua film, truly gives us only her representation.

Sasha’s introduction continues this emphasis on the power of the image, as she forms a sharp visual contrast to Lady Margaret, who is still wearing the same elaborate gown she wore in the tableau, while skating, somewhat awkwardly, with Orlando. Sasha, unlike Lady Margaret, is dressed in a form-fitting (or as form-fitting as winter clothing can be) trouser outfit, and she skates gracefully and smoothly. Orlando, his interest in Sasha immediately piqued, leaves Lady Margaret and asks his friend Murray who Sasha is, a conversation that introduces the film’s first overt presentation and discussion of another kind of otherness than gender, cultural otherness. Murray describes Sasha as “Rather delightful, if that’s to your taste,” then proceeds to disparage the habits of the Muscovites. Orlando rises to the defense of the cultural other by pointing out to Murray that his information is at best third hand.

That this is not the Orlando of the book, at least at this stage of it, is quite apparent. The Orlando of the book is as mis-informed about the habits of the Muscovites as Murray is, although like the film’s Orlando chooses to court Sasha anyway. The film’s Orlando is at this point a much more aware Orlando, aware that information is frequently mis-information; in other words, he is continuing to perform in the dual role of Orlando-object, and biographer-subject. But the values that this Orlando represents are not the values that Woolf necessarily represented (and we will see a similarly different
Orlando in the Constantinople episode); indeed, Woolf and the novel have been criticized for their treatment of the exotic other as they are represented by both the Muscovites and the Turks.

This is a crucial difference between source and adaptation, and illustrates that successive interpretations of a source are produced in their own cultural moments. In choosing to name her protagonist Orlando, to begin the book in the late Elizabethan age, and to describe Orlando as slicing at the head of a Moor in the first few pages, Woolf is quite deliberately invoking the Orlandos of both Boiardo and Ariosto. Like Woolf's Orlando, Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* features an unhappy love affair and the conflict between Christians and Muslims; however, Woolf's use of these sources (as well as *As You Like It*'s Orlando, who also loses his inheritance) is clearly a free adaptation.

Potter's use of Woolf's *Orlando* is an interpretive adaptation, not only necessarily so because of the length of the book, but also consciously positioned as such. Unlike some recent adaptations, the film's title is *Orlando*, not *Virginia Woolf's Orlando*; its credits use the neutral terminology "Based on the book by Virginia Woolf," and nowhere in her interviews about the film has Potter claimed faithfulness to anything more than the general spirit of the book. In fact, quite the opposite: In the press packet for the film, she says, "I tried to restore *Orlando* on film to a view more consistently detached and bitingly ironic in its view of the English class system and the colonialist attitudes arising from it" (qtd. in Hankins 170). Critics who fail to give credence to such clear statements by filmmakers that they are consciously creating interpretive adaptations that are purposely
altering aspects of the source to serve their own purposes, and then proceed to criticize the resulting film for its lack of fidelity to the original, are simply defining the value of an interpretive adaptation out of existence.

And, in terms of Orlando and his interaction with otherness, the book certainly includes this much: Orlando is progressively more accepting of cultural difference, even if, in the book’s Sasha episode, he is not quite a defender of the other culture. After the transformation, which he/she reacts calmly to, Orlando must do more than just accept difference: She now embodies difference. In altering Orlando’s role to that of defender of difference, Potter is updating her source’s focus primarily on the overcoming of gender difference to reflect a more modern feminist concern with overcoming difference in general. Whether Woolf would have become that particular sort of feminist is certainly arguable; that there are feminists who occupy such a position today is not.

A final significant point about this episode involves the lesbian narrative, which I want to explore here in some detail because of its implications for the reception of adaptations in general. As noted earlier, for Hankins and Barrett one of the problems of the film was its erasure of the lesbian narrative. It is, first, not quite so self-evident that Woolf’s Orlando has a lesbian narrative. As Sherron Knopp remarks, “But what is the ‘sexual theme’? Orlando is obviously not about the sapphic love of Vita and Virginia, even in a disguised way” (196). Madeline Moore, in a direct response to Hankins, argues that “Those who criticize Sally Potter for filling her film with images of homosexuals rather than lesbians should take another look at the book. In Orlando, the androgynous male faces . . . capture those shifting prisms of self-referential sexuality which Woolf was seeking” (185-6), referring to the several photographs of androgynous-looking men that
appear in the book. What is clearly at stake in all of these readings is a particular view of
the book that is highly inflected by the politics of the individual reader. To try to
untangle this somewhat, let us step back a few paces and look just at the book’s narrative.
Until he meets Sasha, the somewhat ambiguous male Orlando enjoys the company of
unambiguously female consorts. With the introduction of Sasha, both Orlando and his
partner are ambiguously gendered; the closest thing to a description of a sexual encounter
in the entire book occurs in the Sasha relationship (45). After Sasha rejects him, no
further mention of Orlando’s relationships is made until Archduchess Harriet woos
Orlando, and Orlando is unwillingly moved by this six-foot hare, who turns out to be a
man, and whom Orlando as a woman later rejects as a man. In Constantinople, Orlando
apparently marries Rosita, although no description of her nor any scene between them is
in the text. Now a woman, Orlando returns to England, and “... enjoyed the love of both
sexes equally” (221), but to say, as Barrett does, that “Potter omits the lesbian scenes
between Orlando and Nell...” (198) is to make of the previous quote a scene that is not
in the book in any normal meaning of the term scene, since all that is described are
Orlando and Nell’s conversations. Finally, already pregnant, Orlando marries the
ambiguously male Shelmerdine, and they may or may not have sexual encounters:

“Are you positive you aren’t a man?” he would ask anxiously, and she
would echo,
“Can it be possible you’re not a woman?” and then they must put it to the
proof without more ado. (258)

What is one to make of the words “put it to the proof”? Are they necessarily indicative of
a physical encounter? Clearly not, but they are also open to such an interpretation,
although the book refuses to describe that encounter. What seems quite clear is that
Woolf ended up creating just what she wanted: “Sapphism is to be suggested” (D3 131),
she wrote as she was conceiving the book. Surely Woolf was a talented enough writer that, had she wanted to write a book that included, rather than suggested, lesbian scenes and a lesbian narrative, she could have done so, just as Radclyffe Hall was indeed doing.

That it is possible for respected Woolf critics to fault the film for omitting lesbian scenes that exist at most in a shadow form in the book is an issue of reception. Recent scholarship, including Silver’s as already noted, recognizes the role of the reader/spectator in creating the meaning of a text. What is at stake, as Debra Moddelmog has recently noted regarding Hemingway, is “. . . that ‘the real Hemingway’ can never be recovered even though many critics and biographers proceed as if he can and are especially interested in retaining Hemingway’s ‘real’ identity as purely heterosexual” (35). Likewise with Woolf: The ‘real’ Woolf can never be recovered, even though many critics are especially interested in retaining Woolf’s ‘real’ identity as a lesbian (or as a bisexual, or as androgynous). Moving in a different direction than Silver, Moddelmog argues that “. . . critics develop authorial constructions partly out of their relation to their own sexual desire, a relation that is invested in a particular sexual system . . .” (36). It may be, then, that sexual constructions of Woolf may vary from critic to critic.

Yet it is equally true that heterosexuality is a shadow and not a substance in the book as well. As Caughie argues, “. . . Orlando works as a feminist text not because of what it says about sexual identity but because of what it manages not to say . . .” (41). Such a view of the book coincides with Moore’s version of the ‘real’ Woolf: “Throughout her life Virginia Woolf loathed all codification and stereotyping. She feared stasis and the establishment of prescriptive norms which would naturalize her gender, essentialize her sexual preferences, categorize her psychological complexities or
rigidify her experimentations in language and genre” (184). Indeed, quite unlike modernists such as Joyce, much less Lawrence, in Orlando and other works Woolf seems, like James, Forster and Ford, to at best ‘suggest sexuality.’ The desire to pin down sexual identity in her texts as lesbian, heterosexual, bi-sexual or anything else is at every turn resisted by those texts. Woolf chose to be suggestive rather than definite not only because of her own historical moment, but also, as Moore notes, because of her own ambiguous desire and sexuality and her recognition that both were ambiguous. Put a different way, Woolf’s texts present sexual identities “... the lines between [which] are flexible and porous rather than solid and impermeable. As desiring subjects, we are formed out of a radical interconnectedness of many kinds of desires...” (Moddelmog 47).

What then, does the film leave us with? It reduces Orlando’s romances to two, with Sasha and with Shelmerdine. In terms of the romance with Sasha in this episode, we are left with a strange irony: If Swinton is clearly a woman, as Sasha is, then the film is depicting a romance between two women. And if one of the two romances left in the film depicts a romance between two women, even if it does not show the two women doing more than kissing, Sapphism would seem, as Woolf wished it, to have been suggested.

The film’s third episode, “Poetry,” corresponds generally to the book’s Chapter Two, but with significant differences that continue to re-fashion on more melodramatic and comic terms the narrative motivations of the source. In moving directly from the night the Great Frost breaks and Orlando’s ironic direct address, “The treachery of women,” to Orlando in the first of his seven-day sleeps, the film clearly identifies the
sleep as being the result of Sasha’s rejection. That motivation is fully anchored beyond simply sequential association when, upon waking, Orlando immediately and again ironically says, “I can find only three words to describe the female sex, none of which are worth expressing.” The effect of this alteration from the book is significant. What is excised is, first, the point that after the Sasha episode, Orlando “. . . was exiled from the court; in deep disgrace with the most powerful nobles of the time . . .” (65), and, second, that several months pass before Orlando goes into his sleep, although they do indeed pass in only a few sentences in the book. The effect of the book, then, is to motivate Orlando’s sleep as much with the scandal of his relationship with Sasha as with his loss of her. That effect is continued later in the chapter, after Orlando wakes, with the words, “His disgrace at Court and the violence of his grief were partly the reason of it [choosing solitude] . . .” (68), a more exact statement that, on the one hand, acknowledges Sasha’s loss as part of the motivation, but privileges the disgrace by placing it first. Thus, although the film’s previous episode has introduced Orlando as a defender of the cultural other, this episode softens the book’s criticism of English nobility. At the same time, however, by discarding that criticism, it omits Orlando’s own awareness of disgrace, continuing to cast Orlando in the roles of both narrative object and biographer subject.

Indeed, the primary ironic effect of the statements Orlando makes immediately before and after the sleep privilege gender as the continuing focus of the film. These ironies exist only if one does indeed perceive Orlando as female, and it is no accident that as Orlando wakes and sits up, Swinton’s beyond-shoulder-length hair is fully displayed for the first time in the film. In order for the irony to function, the audience must indeed
be aware that the actress is female, and thus is making a statement about both herself and her director. But this irony, as we shall shortly see, is not the film’s last word about treachery.

Immediately after the intertitles, Orlando is seen perching on a ladder, and he reads aloud the first three lines of Shakespeare’s Sonnet 29, “When in disgrace with fortune and men’s eyes / I all alone beweep my outcast state / And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,” an extremely apt choice for those who know the book. The failure of Orlando’s personal pursuit of Sasha is reflected in ‘disgrace with fortune,’ his public disgrace reflected with ‘and men’s eyes,’ and his unhappy isolation in ‘all alone beweep my outcast state.’ For viewers not aware of the book, the lines serve as a general summing up of Orlando’s emotional state, and his discovery that poetry offers, among other things, a way of connecting with others. That the film chooses to offer language, and the language of Shakespeare, to render that emotional state, rather than visual representation, is another fine irony.

Yet the real theme of the episode is less poetry than the treachery not only of the poet but also of the romantic vision of the poet. Nick Greene, the poet whom Orlando summons to instruct him in the art of poetry, is a crude lout whose concern is with his own creature comforts, and who insists on the point that making poetry would be much easier should he have a stipend. Indeed, the film’s Nick Greene is worse than the book’s, for that Nick Greene is at least an amusing conversationalist, entertaining Orlando with humorous stories of the great writers he has known. The purpose of both, however, is much the same: Neither fits Orlando’s romantic idea of the poet, and both betray Orlando’s hospitality by lampooning him in their own verses. The message clearly stated
by the film, but now without words: "Treachery, thy name is man. Treachery, thy name is the poet." Orlando, meanwhile, standing in front of a blazing bonfire (which could more clearly have been presented as his own literary efforts, as they are in the book, or at least just clearly books), faithful to his word, instructs his servant to continue to pay Greene's stipend quarterly. The treachery of the woman, Sasha, has now been balanced by the treachery of the man, Nick Greene, and the viewer understands, as does Orlando, that treachery, like anything else, has no gender associations.

Greene's treachery leads in the film directly to Orlando's request to Charles II to be sent as ambassador to Constantinople, and again the departure from the source is noteworthy. The film references literature several times: in Orlando's reading at the beginning, throughout this episode, later when Orlando meets Swift and Pope; again at the end in the publisher's office. There is no question, however, that the film's Orlando spends far less time wrestling with literature than the book's. In attributing Orlando's desire to escape England to Greene's treachery and the failure of poetry, the film restores in its narrative motivation at least some measure of the importance literature has in the book. However, in choosing to omit the book's motivation for Orlando's escape, his unwanted desire for Archduchess Harriet, it loses a chance both for high comedy and for further gender confusions.

Beginning with the film's fourth episode, "Politics," Potter's Orlando begins to articulate new themes, some re-cast from the book, some relatively faithful. Both this episode and the book's Chapter Three function as narrative fulcrums on which the stories turn, since in both Orlando's transformation occurs. However, before discussing the transformation, which occurs late in the episode, at least two other important aspects of
the episode are worthy of extended discussion: First, its focus on costume as a marker, and second, its emphasis on, as Potter notes, exposing colonialist attitudes.

Costume as a marker is not new to the film at this point; Orlando has been dressed as a man, although he is played by a woman; Queen Elizabeth dresses as a woman but is played by a man; Lady Margaret and Sasha are both women played by women, but their costumes are used to stress their differences. But in this episode, costume becomes a powerful and on-going marker of a variety of differences. First, as Orlando requests Charles II to send him to Constantinople, both are garbed in the flowing wigs and elaborate hats characteristic (or so films tell us) of the public appearances of aristocrats in the period. Far from high-lighting that Orlando is being played by a woman, the wig and hat actually further obscure that point. As Pidduck rightly notes, “The excess of the costumes and ridiculousness of the infinite ritual and pomp offer a kind of ongoing visual satire of the historical conventions of bourgeois English manners, gender comportment, and, less rigorously, empire” (175). Ironically, the elaborate wig and hat, which in the modern world would clearly be coded as feminine, serve to obscure Swinton’s biological sex by putting further layers of coverings between the ‘real’ her and the constructed one, while at the same time reminding us that what is considered appropriate feminine or masculine costume is as unstable as gender itself.

As Orlando rides on his camel through the streets of Constantinople, his costume, still the same as in the Charles II scene, is used to visually indicate cultural difference as well. Although layered in clothing themselves, the Arabs’ costumes are markedly undecorative compared to Orlando’s, whose gigantic hat seems always in danger of falling off. The Arabs’ clothing is also free of obvious gender-markings, a contrast which will
become quite pointed in the episode following this when Orlando returns to England as a woman. Once again, just as in the “Love” episode with Sasha’s costume, the message is that costume as a gender marker is not only historically unstable within one culture, but at any given moment historically unstable across cultures.

In both these scenes, Orlando’s costume is white and his wig black. When we next see him, being guided through the streets to what ends up being his first meeting with the Khan, the design of the costume and wig are much the same, but the costume is red/maroon and the wig blonde, and they remain so throughout the episode when Orlando is in English costume. The change to red clearly is a reference to the well-known image of the ‘red-coat’ associated with British colonialism and the moment of the change highlights the point that costume is related not only to gender and culture, but also to role. In his official capacity as ambassador, Orlando’s costume color must conform to yet another convention.

Later in the episode, Orlando’s removing his wig becomes a marker that he has begun to embrace the local culture. Reclining near a campfire in the desert, listening to a woman singing a native song, Orlando reaches up and removes his wig, then raises his face to the sky, as if to say, “I’m free.” The scene then shifts with a match cut to Orlando, in exactly the same pose, now garbed entirely in Arab clothing but inside his own chambers. This much more complete change of costume signifies, as will become clear in the next discussion, Orlando’s rejection of the conventional British colonialist attitude. When Archduke Harry, dressed in similar garb to that Orlando was previously in, enters, the significance of their contrasting costumes is so shocking that Harry is temporarily taken aback, and his shocked, silent double-take as he looks at Orlando
clearly serves as a pause to allow the audience to consider the implications. To further emphasize the shock, Harry’s first words are a question, “Lord Orlando?” Costume is thus used here not to confuse gender identity, but to confuse identities revolving around nationality and function.

As the scene changes to Orlando and Harry walking in the streets of Constantinople, Orlando is again dressed in Arab clothing, although it is decorative, ceremonial clothing that reflects the Khan’s costume we have seen earlier. This change also is significant, although in somewhat different ways. The setting of the street introduces a private-public dimension to the issue of costume; in his own chambers, Orlando dresses in relaxed Arab garb, while in public, he reverts to the ceremonial, decorative garb considered appropriate to his status as ambassador. It remains highly significant, however, that Orlando now is appearing in public not in his British ambassadorial costume, but in a native costume denoting his position. Thus, both cultures use costume to reflect issues involving status and position; to the viewer, Harry’s confusion is revealed to be a shock not at how different cultures use costume to signify in similar ways, but at the unfamiliarity of the costume itself of the other culture. In the episode’s final point about costume before Orlando’s transformation, Orlando, back in his red-coat garb before the celebration of his elevation to the highest rank of the peerage, picks up his blonde wig and contemplates it, almost with disgust, for a moment.

It is perfectly accurate to say, of course, that the Orlando of the book also is comfortable in both British and native costume. However, what the film here emphasizes is his seemingly greater comfort with the native costume by the stronger symbolic emphasis on throwing off the British costume and his reluctance to return to it, and,
through Harry’s response to the native costume, Orlando’s much greater willingness to cast aside convention versus Harry’s. But what must be added that gives this particular presentation of costume weight in the film is that it occurs in the context of all the narratives in both film and literature that we’ve seen and read in which the British are depicted in the colonial setting. Almost invariably, the refusal of the British to adjust their own costume to the native costume is a central feature of these narratives. And, in most of those, that refusal is played as a positive element, indicative of the superiority of the British versus their colonial subjects. But in some, such as Lean’s *Lawrence of Arabia* and here, the donning of native costume is part of a much more sympathetic view of a character whose Britishness is not his chief quality.

The particular use of costuming in this episode corresponds very strongly with the film’s narrative, which radically alters Orlando’s relationship with the Turks, and specifically with the Khan, a character not present in the book. Orlando meets with the Khan three times in the episode, first early on when they are introduced, later when they meet in the desert and bond in a brotherly manner, and last when the city is being attacked by enemies of the Khan. It is certainly worth noting first that in its very embodiment of the Khan the film gives voice to the cultural other in a significant way that the book does not. That the Khan is played as an elegant figure by Lothaire Bluteau, who speaks English with a mellifluous accent, reinforces the attractiveness of the other in a way that both disrupts and reinforces the Orientalism the book has been accused of. When they meet, it is Orlando who bows, silently, to the Khan, after which the Khan greets him by saying, “My dear sir, please, accept my hospitality, feel, that my home is your home, and call upon me as a brother for any of your needs.” These are not only the
words of a most gracious host, but also, coming as they do so quickly after the treachery of Nick Greene, establish the Khan as a far more positive character than the loutish British poet.

But the film does retain a certain amount of the British colonialist attitude when Orlando replies, “You really are too kind. And I must say I’m most impressed by your command of the English language. I hadn’t expected . . . I mean, I wasn’t led to believe . . .” Having taken Murray to task earlier for believing third-hand accounts of the Muscovites, Orlando now shows his own ignorance. The Khan acknowledges the insult by cutting immediately to the chase and asking, “Why are you here?” Orlando’s non-committal response, “I am here as the representative of his majesty’s government,” is parried by the Khan’s remark, “It has been said to me that the English are fond of collecting . . . countries.” When Orlando assures the Khan that the English have no designs on his sovereignty, the Khan asks, “You would assist us in defense against mutual enemies?” The scene ends by showing Orlando but giving him no words in response.

Taking advantage, then, of its own historical moment, as well as the agendas of its creators, the film’s presentation of the Khan is surely critical of the colonial attitude. The Khan is a sophisticated, elegant, well-spoken and English-speaking man, who immediately draws attention to the English propensity for colonialism and whose last unanswered question to Orlando succinctly summarizes a central issue of colonialism. At the same time, Orlando is complicated as a character in that, while earlier he had quickly risen to the defense of Sasha’s cultural other-ness, he is much less sure of himself here, betraying not only his own ignorance in his remark about the Khan’s speaking English,
but also left without a response to the Khan’s mutual defense question. The succeeding close-up shot of Orlando’s face in profile as he lies in bed, with the Khan’s question still hanging unanswered in the air, reminds the viewer that it is now Orlando who finds himself in a difficult position. Having asked Charles II to be dispatched as ambassador to escape the personal humiliation Nick Greene inflicted upon him, and then having been charged by Charles II with bringing a new tulip cultivar to Constantinople, Orlando suddenly finds himself in the midst of an international political situation he had been far too naive to foresee. Reflecting this lack of self-awareness, it is just at this stretch of the film that the direct addresses have ceased; the last came when Orlando stood in front of the bonfire at the end of the “Poetry” episode, now six scenes in the past and soon to grow to eight scenes past before the next.

In one of the film’s most fluid and interesting transitions, the close-up of Orlando in profile cuts to a full shot of his bed, then back to a close-up of Orlando but in mirror image to the earlier close-up. In the first, the close-up is of Orlando’s right profile, his eyes screen left, nose middle, lips and chin screen right. In the second, and looser, shot, Orlando is seen from the opposite side, eyes screen right, and nose, lips and chin pointing screen left. In a duration of three shots and some thirteen seconds from the first moment of the first to the first moment of the third, the camera has traversed a 180-degree range, visually indicating that Orlando’s response to the Khan’s question may have likewise undergone a reversal. The fluid transitions continue when in the second closer shot of Orlando lying in bed the light sounds of bells occur. Orlando turns away from us, and the Khan’s voice is heard, saying “So Orlando, I salute your country.” Then the frame suddenly shows the Khan in the desert, lifting a goblet, “To England, a green and
pleasant land.” The ensuing scene is thus set up as interpretable either as dream or reality, or both, continuing what is clearly by now a post-modern mixing of messages.

Whether in Orlando’s mind or in the fictive/narrative reality, the scene in the desert with the Khan is revealing. After toasting the merits of each other’s countries, the Khan moves the conversation to women, and is astute enough to realize that Orlando has come to this far outpost to escape a romantic problem. That recognition leads to a bonding between the two, solidified by the Khan’s sharing his own falconer facility with Orlando, ending with the scene around the campfire noted earlier. The toasting segment features the fluid panning of the film’s first scene, which, by extending the distance between the two characters, highlights their joining at the scene’s end. In addition, their joining is occasioned by the Khan’s reference to a personal issue, Orlando’s romantic life, further emphasizing his privileged position regarding not only colonial goals but private issues as well, setting him off as the film’s most acute character. Whether Orlando is dreaming or not can never be clear, as the sequence is both filmically possible given the first presentation of the Khan, and ‘objectively’ possible given that presentation as well.

The already noted bridge from Orlando’s taking off his wig to his donning it leads to the episode’s final consideration of non-gender otherness. The Arab guests have not arrived at the celebration of Orlando’s peerage, and Harry is growing restless, a not-so-subtle jab at European culture’s worship of the clock. Just as Harry is about to bestow the Order of the Bath on Orlando, Orlando is stolen away by shadowy figures who rush him to the courtyard, where the Khan greets him, apologizing for the disruption to the celebrations, but saying “Our enemies are at the city walls. Will you help?” Orlando’s
personal loyalty to the Khan is being tested, and, over the objection of Harry, Orlando orders that the British soldiers’ arms be distributed to support the Khan. Once again the film reinforces the values of personal relations over the values of more general political relations, privileging Orlando’s brotherly camaraderie with the Khan, which Harry knows nothing about. The message, trendy as it has been accused of being or not, is clearly that the brotherly bond established between the Kahn and Orlando takes precedence over the governmental/organizational/corporate message that colonialism peddled. Whether Woolf, herself on the cusp of the Fascist revolution and some distance away from the period of intense scrutiny of British and other colonialist relations, might have handled her material differently today is surely arguable; that Potter has turned the material into such a scrutiny is certainly true.

We arrive now at the beginning of the part of the episode that ends with Orlando’s transformation from man to woman. Orlando, after having embraced the Khan and ordered the British troops to support him, plunges off into the streets, led by the Khan and followed by Harry. The Khan mysteriously disappears, and Harry takes the opportunity to hand Orlando a revolver, which he grasps with both hands. As Orlando is checking the revolver, Harry shoots an attacker who has reached the top of the city walls; the man falls to the street. Orlando kneels by his side, and Harry says, “Leave him. Leave him.” Orlando replies, “This is a dying man,” to which Harry responds, “He’s not a man, he’s the enemy.” Orlando looks back down at the man as Harry walks off, and the camera cuts to a close-up of Orlando in profile, who turns to us in the episode’s first direct address. Then the film cuts to Orlando walking, somewhat dazedly, in the streets, still filled with people rushing around, but now without the sounds of gunshots and
explosions, and, as the scene ends, Orlando in long shot is clearly walking away from those in the street. In the next scene, Orlando is seen lying in bed, and, when he awakens, he will discover the transformation.

What the film shows us, then, is Orlando leaving the battle after Harry’s words, “He’s not a man, he’s the enemy,” and Orlando’s sudden awareness and rejection of the idea that, in Harry’s colonialist world-view, one cannot be both a man and an enemy. No thorough-going review of the series of Geneva Conventions, which began in 1864, is necessary to establish the point that Orlando is rejecting the convention of treating the enemy as inhuman, of making of the enemy a monster unworthy of humane treatment. In bonding in brotherhood with the Khan, and ordering the British troops to support him, Orlando has already gone a great distance towards overcoming the colonialist view of the other as in- or less-than-human. For Orlando, if the Khan himself is human, and therefore a worthy brother and worthy of sacrificing British lives to protect, then so are other Arabs, even if they are the Khan’s enemies. Here the film’s post-colonialist attitudes, which go well beyond their source’s to respond to a contemporary audience’s expectations, are very clearly shown.

The film’s transformation scene, while lacking the mythic/ironic tones of the book’s scene, is visually interesting in and of itself. After waking, Orlando pulls off his wig (purposely reminding us of his earlier transformation from English costume to Arab), dips his hands into the water of a golden bowl, then rinses his face. A close-up of Swinton’s face in profile shows it turning more towards us, looking at something. The camera slides briefly down and to the right, then cuts to a shot of a mirror in which a
nude figure stands in profile; the figure turns and is ‘revealed’ to be a woman. The camera set-up is an off- and slightly-lower-than-the-shoulder shot.

The conventional dynamics of film encourage us to read this as Orlando/Swinton looking at him/herself in a mirror, revealing Orlando/Swinton as biologically a woman. A number of factors complicate such an easy reading of the scene, however. First, entirely consistent with its post-modern aesthetic, the film gives us only an image of an image, even further mediated by the suggestion of a point of view shot. Potter’s use of the mirror to present the image of the image is a masterful touch that emphasizes film’s primary illusory capacity; what we are seeing is already constructed, and therefore potentially illusory, and the mirror highlights our awareness of that constructed illusion. To say this in a different way, we are already aware that the image we see before us in film must always be questioned; indeed, in the world of the post-modern film, our awareness that the image may reveal itself as image, or be revealed as the image of something else entirely, yet always another image, constantly threatens conventional expectations of the realist mode. The image of the body we see may very well not be the image of the character or actor we associate it with, and in inserting the mirror as yet another level of image Potter undermines the already tenuous notion of there existing any supposed unmediated, and therefore ‘real,’ image.

Second, the frame of the mirror is quite clearly in the shape of an old-fashioned keyhole, introducing several other ironies consistent with the post-modernist aesthetic. On the most obvious level, the design picks up on the post-modern biographical issues that the book raises; as the biographer of the book frequently tells us, biography is forever incomplete (at best) because it rarely has direct access to its subject’s most intimate
thoughts and actions. Even when it does have that access, it is through a keyhole, which both distorts and limits vision, framing it in a narrower, incomplete vision of the larger context in which it occurs. Indeed, the use of the keyhole image suggests that we have been watching the entire film—and any other—through a particular lens, in an infinitely regressive progression beginning with the image of an image. An historical person, Virginia Woolf, whom we can know only through what is left of written and visual images, writes a book about another historical person, Vita Sackville-West, who is imaged now through three lenses; Potter brings a fourth lens to bear, and each spectator brings a fifth. But the effect is not an arithmetic progression, each lens merely one level greater; rather, it is exponential, each lens squaring its previous, and then to be squared again itself. The image of Orlando/Swinton in the mirror—if it is indeed the image of either—thus becomes fractured beyond repair. The spectator can be sure of nothing.

Third, the use of the keyhole to frame the image suggests an ironic, parodic notion of the idea of any 'key' to an essentialized self. Orlando has just rejected the notion that enemy/ally is a defining binary associated with human/in-human; her words as she regards the image, “Same person, no difference at all. Just a different sex,” refuse the association male/female with human/in-human as well. As Degli-Esposti notes, “The film simply postulates a utopian possibility played along the coordinates of set notions of being . . . There is only a profound recognition of the human condition and its ways of being” (89). The human condition is no more successfully defined by the binary enemy/ally than it is by the binary male/female, and the very closeness of these rejections in the film’s narrative can leave little doubt as to what its message strives to be. The enclosing of the image in the keyhole thus operates as a visual commentary, highlighting
the tension between the drive to find the 'key' to the essential person and the impossibility of ever doing so, in particular through the image.

Finally, the keyhole image inevitably suggests all that relates to the theory of cinema as voyeuristic pleasure. A crucial difference is present in Orlando, however. As Judith Mayne has noted, ‘. . . when we imagine a ‘woman’ and a ‘keyhole,’ it is usually a woman on the other side of the keyhole, as the proverbial object of the look, that comes to mind’ (9). Indeed, the image in the keyhole is presumably Tilda Swinton; yet, as Nikola Shaughnessy notes, ‘Quite clearly and emphatically, it is the female subject who has ownership of the gaze at this crucial moment . . . It is this [Swinton’s/Orlando’s] calm, confident act of looking that re-appropriates the image from the domain of male sexual fantasy and offers the possibility of an empowering, pleasurable and non-masochistic identification for the female spectator’ (53-4). Shaughnessy’s analysis of this scene is one answer to a topic that Mayne explores more fully, specifically ‘. . . what happens when women are situated on both sides of the keyhole’ (9). But the film’s treatment of this scene is more complicated, perhaps, than Shaughnessy’s analysis suggests. While Swinton/Orlando is indeed the gazing subject in conventional terms, Swinton/Orlando is also the object of the gaze, or, more accurately because of the mirror, the image of the object. The scene radically disrupts, then, not only the conventional separation of subject and object, but also the very notion of the object existing on its own terms, becoming, as it does here, entirely an image.

Indeed, much of the remainder of the film is pre-occupied with the difficulties Orlando faces in adjusting to the appropriate image of the woman, as the film’s next episode, “Society” makes clear, in particular through costume and custom. Orlando’s
return to England is the occasion of her being shown tightly laced into a corset and then negotiating walking, in an impossibly large dress, through a room in her home. Watkins rightly argues that the scene “. . . does initially seem to suggest the artifice, display and the performativity of femininity” (51). As I have argued in discussing the previous episode, the film has already used costume in significant ways to suggest the performativity not just of gender, but also culture/race and position as well. But while those costume transformations served to open up the world for Orlando, these serve to close it; as Pidduck argues, “. . . the sheer crippling unmanageability of Orlando’s bourgeois female attire speaks volumes to the ‘structure of feeling’ of upper-class British womanhood—the limits on physical and social mobility” (176).

While her costumes in the “Society” episode initially signal the limits on Orlando’s physical mobility, they quickly become associated with limits on her social mobility as well. Her butler informs Orlando that she cannot possibly go alone to the literary salon, because it includes “wits and poets.” When she does so anyhow, in a dress that Pidduck describes as making her look like an “. . . elaborate, frosted cake . . .” (176), she finds that, according to Swift, “Women have no desires, only affectations,” and, according to Pope, “Most women have no characters at all.” Indeed, this worthy announces that “The intellect is a solitary place, and therefore quite unsuitable a terrain for females, who must discover their natures through the guidance of a father or husband.” The film could not make clearer that, even among the upper intellectual classes of society, men are granted desires and intellects, women only affectations and natures. Upon returning home, Orlando is informed by two solicitors that she is either legally dead, or a female, “Which amounts to the same thing.”
But the film’s Orlando here starts off on a somewhat different journey than the book’s. Turning down the ever-colonialist Harry’s marriage proposal, which he offers as Orlando’s “Last chance of respectability,” Orlando, unable to breathe, rushes into a garden maze, undergoes another costume change into Victorian garb, finds her way out of the maze and into an open but foggy field, and runs through the field as best she can in her voluminous skirts, finally stumbling to the ground and whispering, “Nature, nature, I am your bride.” In vastly shortening this episode from the novel’s treatment of it, and focusing almost entirely on the difficulties that being a woman poses for Orlando in the social sense, Potter draws the spectators’ attention primarily to the limitations imposed on women by society, limitations which have nothing to do with the essential person, for Orlando is the “same person,” but with both gender as a performance image and gender as a socially and legally constructed status now weighing upon her. Orlando is unable to breathe both because of her corsets, required for the performance of woman, and because of the social and legal construction of woman as non-existent. For the poets, woman exists as all object; for the law, woman exists as all image. In either case, woman is signified entirely by elaborate costume, costume which of course can neither think nor inherit. And the maze Orlando rushes through signifies both the maze of social and legal conventions she must now, as a woman, negotiate, as well as the continuing physical constrictions, as the hedges narrowly confine her.

While this episode ends up where the novel does, with Shelmerdine’s entrance, Potter’s transformation of much of the material from the novel between the transformation scene and this point is substantial; the effect is a much sharper and more focused critique of a colonialist society’s construction of woman and the limitations that
construction imposes. By contrast, the novel’s Orlando not only “. . . began to look forward to Mr. Pope’s visit, to Mr. Addison’s, to Mr. Swift’s . . . ” (208), but also “. . . she found it convenient at this time to change frequently from one set of clothes to another” and “. . . enjoyed the love of both sexes equally” (220, 221). While Woolf presents an eighteenth century Orlando able to negotiate, quite happily, boundaries of all kinds, including those of gender, Potter’s Orlando is unable to do so.

This different presentation is of a piece with, as Barrett puts it, “. . . Potter’s changes [that] update Orlando’s feminist points: Orlando does not inherit Knole; she does not marry Shelmerdine; she gives birth to a daughter rather than a son. This is all to the good” (198). To this I would add that Woolf’s eighteenth-century Orlando is almost idyllic in her ability to fluidly cross barriers; it is the coming of the nineteenth century, with its attendant Victorian morality as well as the burgeoning Industrial Revolution, that causes Orlando’s unhappiness. In depicting a less colonialist English society in which Orlando could happily exist in her ambiguous condition, Woolf holds out the possibility that such a society could once again be possible. Potter, by contrast, presents no such hopes; her Orlando’s transformation to the feminine is met by societal barriers at every turn.

The film’s penultimate episode, “1850/Sex,” continues to move the narrative away from Woolf’s in important ways that relate to the film’s stronger feminist stance. As the Barrett quote has already indicated, in this episode Orlando neither marries Shelmerdine nor inherits Knole, significant alterations that lead to the film’s Orlando ending the narrative as a single mother living outside of the privileged class. Potter, of course, did not have to create Orlando with Sackville-West, who was married, as a basis,
nor did she need to present Knole to her as a fictional fulfillment of her desires. Yet Potter’s film does not present Orlando as the fully independent feminist it might have; her second statement to Shelmerdine, a few moments after he appears, is “Will you marry me?” Coming so closely after Orlando’s rejection of Harry’s proposal, however, the dynamics of the proposals invites comment both in comparison to the book and on its own terms.

Woolf’s Orlando receives, as the narrator reports it, marriage proposals on a regular basis in the eighteenth century chapter, but feels no need to marry until the nineteenth century, when the spirit of the times so oppresses her that “... she could feel herself poisoned through and through, and was forced at length to consider the most desperate of remedies, which was to yield completely and submissively to the spirit of the age, and take a husband” (243). While the lawsuits questioning Orlando’s status are mentioned early in the chapter, near the end of it they are described as “... being no nearer consummation than they had been a hundred years ago ...” (221), so that Orlando’s desire for a husband does not seem to relate to the possibility of her losing her estate. As already noted, Woolf’s presentation of the nineteenth century in the book singles it out as a century in which virtually everything changed; in a very real sense, the villain of Woolf’s Orlando is the nineteenth century. To this villain of the times, the book adds the point that, before she encounters Shelmerdine, Orlando is pregnant. And, finally, the book concludes the lawsuits by settling them during Orlando’s engagement to Shelmerdine; in signing the documents, she “... entered from that moment into the undisturbed possession of her titles, her house, and her estate ...” (255).
Potter's version proceeds quite differently. The lawsuits about Orlando's legal status are introduced only at the end of the "Society" episode, and are the spur for Harry's proposal, which Orlando rejects, then plunges into the shrubbery maze. As opposed to becoming, over a hundred-year span, used to her questionable legal status, that status is uppermost in Orlando's mind when she meets Shelmerdine in the film. Here again, then, the film highlights the construction of woman, in this case as legal entity, in ways that the book does not. Orlando is not pregnant in the film before she meets Shelmerdine. And the lawsuits, the conclusions of which occur near the end of this episode, make Orlando's retaining her possessions and property dependent on her bearing a male heir.

Once again, these alterations are significant in highlighting the film's presentation of woman as constantly at odds with a colonialist, patriarchal society. Woolf's Orlando seeks marriage because of the spirit of the age; Potter's Orlando seeks marriage because of the letter of the law. There is no doubt that the construction of woman in both lights is a significant issue; and the film highlights the struggle of women to achieve equal rights under the law, a struggle which continues even in the year 2000. To emphasize its focus on social laws, near the end of this episode Orlando points out to Shelmerdine, "As a man, one has choices," then asks him, "Would you like to have a child with me?" Her statement and question signify the stance of the film as regards one of its major points: Women have not had choices. But, when Shelmerdine responds, "So that you can keep your house?," Orlando replies, "No, not for the house, Shelmerdine. Perhaps for love?" Her response, and the entire sequence, thus brings out both the status of woman in the legal sense and the spirit of the age; Orlando here desires a child (not necessarily a son).
for love, not for legal or social obligation. Here again, then, Potter updates Woolf’s presentation of Orlando as motivated to seek a husband because of the spirit of the times, in which everyone is married, to a more modern motivation to find love.

Orlando’s growing independence, already on display in her asking Shelmerdine to marry her, is fore-grounded in this episode in other ways as well. As they ride back to the house on Shelmerdine’s horse, she is positioned in front, handling the reins of the horse; when they begin their love-making later, she is the woman on top. And, when Shelmerdine asks her to come with him in his battle for political freedom, she replies first that she can’t simply follow him around, then challenges him by asking when he expects this freedom he so loves to be achieved, to which he can only reply, “Touche.” Thus, Orlando not only rejects a life in which she does not have her own project, but also deflates Shelmerdine’s project as well.

The film’s presentation of Shelmerdine himself is also worth commenting on. Unlike the book’s Shelmerdine, who leaps off his horse to the ground where Orlando lies, the film’s Shelmerdine is thrown off his horse and ends up lying face down in the field next to Orlando, a clumsy, humorous end to the set-up of him riding gallantly to Orlando’s aid. Billy Zane’s shoulder-length hair and full lips can be read, as Potter herself did, as giving him a “. . . slightly androgynous look” (Ehrenstein 5). As Shaughnessy points out, the fluid panning technique that Potter uses in the conversation between the two, the same used in the conversation in the desert between Orlando and the Khan, rejects the shot-reverse shot in favor of a technique that emphasizes fluidity and continuity, thus rejecting on the formal level the more compartmentalized and binaried conventional editing; the space between Orlando and Shelmerdine is traversed, but not
chopped up into fragments. During the course of the conversation, Orlando asks Shelmerdine, “You have fought in battles, like a man?” to which he replies, “I have fought.” Given that a simple “Yes” would have sufficed, Shelmerdine’s answer can be read as a denial that there is such a concept as ‘fighting like a man,’ there is only fighting. Finally, in a scene reminiscent of the opening of *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, after they make love, the camera, as Shaughnessy notes, “... surveys a body, the identity of which is uncertain...” (52), continuing to confuse the physical difference between the two, and thereby increasing the fluid presentation of gender.

These formal and dialogue-related details of this episode serve not only to reinforce but also to foreshadow the position Orlando finds herself in at the end of the episode, a position in which she is alone, without child, and disinherited. This position stands in stark contrast to Orlando’s position at the end of the book’s Chapter Five, in which, as already noted, she is married, with child, and in possession of her properties. It is well to remember that *Orlando* was, in a way unlike Woolf’s other novels, not entirely her own, since Sackville-West was the acknowledged model for Orlando, and Sackville-West was married and had children. Potter’s Orlando is freed from her historical buoy; who is to say exactly what Woolf’s Orlando might have been had she also been free from that historical buoy? Barrett notes that these particular changes are “... all to the good” (198), which indicates both that feminists themselves will disagree in their readings of the film and, more importantly for my purposes, that reading these three changes as strengthening and modernizing the book’s feminist aspect is quite possible from the feminist perspective, and especially when that perspective is more than sixty years later than Woolf’s version. As Moore notes, “... Potter’s film glorifies the bravery of a
character who relinquishes money and the possibility of being part of a couple, and extols her relationship to her daughter. This is a feminism American and English women of the ‘90s certainly recognize” (196).

We left Orlando, standing alone in a drenching rainstorm, watching Shelmerdine ride off on his romantic quest to bring freedom to mankind. She closes her eyes. A transformation to some extent as important as her change of sex has occurred, and, like that one, the standard symbol of rebirth, water, marks it. This transformation moves Orlando from the woman who desires marriage and has the possibility of retaining her property to the unmarried woman without property. The screen fades to black, then opens up again to reveal Orlando, eyes still closed, shot from a slightly different angle. She opens her eyes, glances directly at us, somewhat quizzically, and almost simultaneously hears the sound of an airplane. Then a jump cut moves Orlando, now in twentieth century costume and clearly pregnant, running and stumbling through a World War I battlefield in the full swing of battle. This scene, as Michelle Milmitsch rightly argues, foregrounds “. . . the suffering of women and children in total war” (6). In the context of the film, it connects back to Orlando’s non-combatant stance in the revolt against the Khan, as well as to her conversation with Shelmerdine about men and war. In that conversation, Orlando says, “If I were a man . . . I might choose not to risk my life for an uncertain cause. I might think that freedom won by death is not worth having. In fact . . .” Shelmerdine interrupts, and says that, if he were a woman, “I might choose not to sacrifice my life caring for my children, or my children’s children, nor to drown anonymously in the milk of female kindness.” As Milmitsch notes, the conversation,
while it may be read as reinforcing Orlando’s ‘cowardice,’ can also be read as a "... critique of the gender roles of real women ... that [also] undermines the assumption that real men fight in battles" (5).

The intertitle “Birth” follows Orlando’s stumbling out of the battle (although the camera itself lingers on the battlefield, which is eerily empty of soldiers). Orlando is next shown in an ultra-modern office and is told that the manuscript she has submitted is very good and will sell. Heathcote Williams plays the fashionably-dressed publisher, which ties the scene back to “Poetry,” and also suggests, as does the book, that it is not only Orlando who transcends time. Swinton, dressed in tunic and trousers, hair pulled severely back, is at her most androgynous-looking, adding to the scene’s sense of transcending boundaries. And, when Williams says that her manuscript will sell if Orlando will rewrite to “... increase the love interest ... give it a happy ending,” the reference is clearly to conventional film as well as popular fiction. Shaughnessy provides a powerful reading of the literature/film/video connection in this episode, suggesting that its message is that “The film is born out of the novel and transcends it ... Film itself is surpassed by video” (46). My own inclination is to suggest that other readings are possible as well, and that one form is less transcended by the succeeding one, and more included in an increasingly larger range of narrative possibilities. Orlando does, after all, give the publisher a book, not a film, and the video camera is in the hands of her daughter, whose manipulation of it is far from artful.

Williams’s words, however, also have an ironic weight. In making Orlando, Potter increased neither the love interest of the book nor gave it a happier ending. A strong argument can be made that she actually decreased the love interest and ended the
film on an even more ambiguous note. The structural parallels in the final scenes are quite clear: Having had her manuscript accepted, Orlando returns to her home (although as a sight-seer in the film), then walks into the woods and finds the oak tree. In the book, she awaits the arrival of Shelmerdine, whose plane “. . . rushed out of the clouds and stood over her head. It hovered above her” (329), much like the angel hovers above her at the end of the film. But in the book, “. . . Shelmerdine, now grown a fine sea captain, hale, fresh-coloured, and alert, leapt to the ground . . .” (329), while in the film, the angel remains suspended between earth and heaven. Jimmy Somerville’s playing the angel functions similarly to Heathcote Williams playing the publisher in the transcendence of time, although his appearance as an angel, not a flesh-and-blood publisher, suggests also that the material body will be transcended. But, unlike Shelmerdine’s actual appearance, only the words of Somerville’s song of transcendence are there to support Orlando, and the film’s final shot is an extended close-up of Orlando’s face, deliberately emphasizing her physical aloneness, while leaving her fate entirely up in the air, quite unlike the book’s far more stable ending, where Orlando is left in possession of Knole and a husband.

Potter’s Orlando, then, walks a similar line between melodrama and comedy as its source; consistently uses non-realist film aesthetics; both complicates and simplifies its source’s gender issues; and updates its narrative to respond to more current feminist and post-colonialist attitudes. What of its relationship to that group of films termed heritage cinema? Certainly the film looks right in certain aspects, particularly the use of historically accurate costumes and setting; also, like heritage cinema, its narrative focuses on the individual, rather than on a great historical incident. However, in other respects it
is not at all of a part with heritage cinema. Although settings and costumes fit the
heritage tradition, Potter’s camerawork and the direct address do not, consistently calling
attention to the film as a constructed artifice in ways that Merchant-Ivory productions, to
take those as representative of heritage cinema, almost never do. Whether this is properly
called a modernist film aesthetic in terms of its relationship to a realist film aesthetic, or
whether it is more consistent with a postmodern aesthetic, is less important than
recognizing that it is clearly not the aesthetic associated with heritage films or costume
drama more generally.

Equally important in establishing the film as outside the heritage cinema tradition
is its overt lack of nostalgia for the past. At every turn, the film takes the opportunity to
criticize the English aristocracy and intelligentsia of earlier eras: King James’s idiotic
delight looking at the frozen apple-seller, Nick Greene’s unpleasant poet, the Khan’s
statement about English foreign policy, Harry’s colonialist attitudes both on the political
and personal level, the poets’ demeaning attitudes towards women, the court’s refusal to
acknowledge Orlando unless she is married and has a male child, and the horrors of a
World War I battlefield all clearly deflate any nostalgia for any of the periods through
which Orlando lives. Potter’s Orlando, then, reaches a comfortable stasis point in the
present despite the obstacles of the past, and without the benefit of either marriage or a
male child; rather, it is her own talent, as represented by her literary work, that allows her
to achieve that stasis. Yet even the present, represented by the publisher’s demand that
she spice up her work, is far from perfect. No era is, the film tells us.
CHAPTER 4

REVEALING PORTRAITS: MELODRAMATIC AND MODERNIST

Bridging the gap between the two Orlando and the two Portraits might seem a daunting task. The novels are separated by almost everything: a half-century of extraordinary turmoil in the Western world, tones which are poles apart, and genres which are apparently poles apart. Yet the first and last of those gulfs are not so wide as might be thought. While James could have had no way of envisioning World War I and the many other changes wrought by history after his Portrait, Woolf’s Orlando is dominated by its pre-twentieth century parts, and Orlando finds herself quite as restricted by the Victorian era’s expectations of women as, we shall see, Isabel Archer does. As to genre, while Orlando certainly is a fantastic tale, we have seen that it relies on melodramatic situations, although they are infused with comedy; Portrait is equally reliant on melodrama, although its treatment, especially in Volume II, eschews comedy.

A summary of Portrait makes clear both its differences from Orlando as well as its melodramatic similarities: Set in the 1870s, Portrait focuses on Isabel Archer, a young American woman whose father’s recent death has left her with few clear options other than moving in with her married sister or marrying a wealthy and ardent suitor, Caspar Goodwood. Isabel is rescued by the unexpected arrival of her aunt, Mrs. Touchett, wife of a wealthy American living in England. Isabel removes at Mrs. Touchett.
Touchett's invitation to England, where she meets the remainder of her extended family, the benevolent and infirm Mr. Touchett and her consumptive, sensitive cousin, Ralph.

Isabel is introduced into English country-home society by the Touchetts, and her beauty and charm are soon rewarded by a marriage proposal from Ralph's wealthy, soon-to-be politically influential friend, Lord Warburton. Fearing that she will become another version of Warburton's pleasant but vapid sisters, Isabel refuses the proposal. Goodwood arrives in England and renews his suit, which Isabel again rejects. Then, as Mr. Touchett nears death, Ralph, himself unwilling because of his own illness to consider marrying Isabel, convinces his father to leave Isabel a significant inheritance, which, Ralph reasons, will not only free her from any material necessity to marry, but also allow her to explore the world at her leisure.

During Mr. Touchett's final days, a family friend, Madame Merle (another American in Europe), arrives for a visit, and she and Isabel become quick friends; Isabel admires the middle-aged Merle's grace, charm, and sophistication. Mr. Touchett dies, Isabel's inheritance is transferred, and she removes to Italy to stay with Mrs. Touchett at the latter's Italian villa; Merle's home base also happens to be Italy, and she introduces Isabel to Gilbert Osmond, a widowed, poor, but refined and aesthetic American living in Italy and raising a teen-aged daughter, Pansy. Osmond courts Isabel, and declares his love for her. Isabel leaves for several months, ending with a tour of Arabia and the Orient, on which she is accompanied by Merle, then returns to Italy and is engaged to Osmond.

Isabel marries him, despite the objections of Ralph and Mrs. Touchett, and after rejecting yet another plea from Goodwood. A few years pass, and we find that the
marriage is, for Isabel, loveless and empty; Osmond’s aesthetic taste and refinement are his entire substance. Pansy has come to the marrying age, and is pursued by the sincere, poor, but aesthetic Ned Rozier, and by Lord Warburton. Isabel manipulates circumstances to prevent Warburton’s proposal to Pansy, and Osmond, without consulting Isabel, sends Pansy to a convent school. Ralph’s condition worsens, Isabel is called to England, and, against Osmond’s wishes, goes to be with her dying cousin. Before Isabel leaves, Osmond’s sister reveals to her that Pansy is Osmond’s and Merle’s daughter, and, visiting Pansy before she leaves, Isabel encounters Merle, who seems to confirm that brutal fact. Isabel journeys to England and comes very close to declaring her love for Ralph as he lies on his death-bed; after Ralph’s funeral, Goodwood again approaches her and offers her an escape from Osmond. Isabel refuses, and at novel’s end she is reported to be on her way back to Italy, although what her intentions are once she returns are left ambiguous.

Although the differences between Portrait and Orlando are certainly significant, there are important connections between the two works that can help us bridge the gulf between them. Both can accurately be described as bildungsromans, despite the fact that Orlando spans more than 300 years and Portrait not much more than six; indeed, it might be said that the two works explore two sides of the same coin, one expanding the bildungsroman to an exaggerated span of years, the other narrowing it to what, for the time, was an extremely small span, the actually dramatized span of Portrait being closer to two years. As is characteristic of the bildungsroman, both Orlando and Isabel aspire to and continue to believe in the possibility of personal happiness, despite the setbacks they encounter. Both encounter versions of fairy godmothers early on, Queen Elizabeth and
Mrs. Touchett respectively, who enable them to do previously unthinkable things. Both Orlando and Isabel undergo significant transformations that not only alter them, but alter their views of themselves, and these transformations both occur in exotic settings. While Orlando’s transformation directly enacts aspects of both sexual and gender identity, it is worth recalling that James’s works, as John Carlos Rowe notes, “... foregrounds questions of gender far more than technical or stylistic issues” (192). Even more specifically on this level, Kaja Silverman argues that, in the case of James, “... the author ‘inside’ his texts is never unequivocally male...” and frequently is associated with “... identifications which challenge the binarisms of sexual difference” (180). For Orlando and Isabel, the social pressures of the Victorian era towards marriage are powerful forces dictating to them that they must marry. On a similar level, but even beyond the confines of the Victorian era and women’s role in it, both Orlando and Isabel struggle to assert their identities as conscious subjects against a world that seeks to make of them objects, and, in Isabel’s case, a particularly commodified object. Finally, while Orlando documents a series of clashes of eras, Portrait documents a series of clashes of cultural values, represented primarily through Isabel’s three suitors.

But, while the attractions of Orlando for the film-maker are its fairy-tale handling of time, mortality and gender; its playful surface; its set pieces; its potential as a costume piece; and its forward-looking political themes focusing on gender and otherness, the attractions of Portrait, as the plot summary indicates, are to be found elsewhere. Specifically, these would seem to lie in its affinities with the family melodrama that film so brilliantly mined between the mid-1930s and mid-1950s, in classics ranging from Stella Dallas to Written on the Wind. Yet Portrait is family melodrama with a
difference, a difference that is particularly Jamesian and particularly modernist. As Jonathan Freedman notes, in James's work, "... both the figurative resources and the plot devices are frankly lifted from melodrama, Gothic fiction, and sentimental novels" (17). However, unlike its literary predecessors, works by the Brontes for example, Portrait minimizes the crashingly Gothic elements previously associated with melodrama; Isabel is no Jane Eyre, nor is Osmond a Heathcliff, and, while James invests both Isabel's father's house and her marriage home in Rome with a gloom appropriate to the gloom in Isabel's heart, neither locale reaches the level of a Thornfield Hall or a Wuthering Heights. Portrait, then, is melodrama without the towering passion that previously characterized the genre, both in its characters and its atmosphere. It also refuses the classic melodramatic resolution in which the suffering of the characters is ultimately rewarded by some ray of hope, even if only the hope that the next generation (Cathy and Hareton, for example, in Wuthering Heights) will overcome the sins of the previous one.

What James achieves in Portrait, then, to a much greater extent than he had in his previous novels, is a work which is structured as a melodrama and sets up melodramatic expectations, but then disrupts the genre by refusing to deliver on those expectations. Unlike Daisy Miller, Isabel is not so constricted by European society that she literally dies after encountering it; neither is she, like Clair de Cintre of The American, confined to a convent where her youth and beauty will wither and die. Yet neither again does the novel allow Isabel a last gesture of redemption or revenge: In its final presentation of her, she stands at a door of Gardencourt, her hand on the latch: "She had not known where to turn; but she knew now. There was a very straight path" (490). A few lines later, Miss Stackpole tells Goodwood, "'But this morning she started for Rome'" (490).
As Margaret Procter has noted, a central characteristic of modernist fiction is that “The novel is finished, but the discussion is not” (269), and that comment has a double meaning in *Portrait*: The discussion between Isabel and Osmond, and/or Isabel and Madame Merle, is not finished; nor is the discussion among readers about what Isabel’s ‘straight path’ might be. James himself was fully aware that his ending would displease readers, writing about the novel in his diary that “The obvious criticism of course will be that it is not finished . . . the whole of anything is never told” (qtd. in Matthiessen 594).

Although it is popular now to see the whole of James’s late works as the bridge from the traditional to the modern novel, *Portrait* is the foundation for that bridge; indeed, *Portrait* is more than a bridge, it is a modernist novel. Like modernist novels, it acknowledges traditional conventions, in this case the conventions of melodrama, but then disrupts those conventions. Although its characters are not necessarily ordinary, in terms at least of the wealth of some of them, only Goodwood has the edge of the grand emotion about him; only he would fit into the Gothic melodrama of the Brontes or, for that matter, the exalted egoism of a Conrad adventure. It is, not only in its ending but at other key points, a novel that in Roland Barthes’s terms is writerly, a signal characteristic of which is that individual readers will produce variant readings, such as this by Jonathan Freedman of the ending: “Isabel’s decision to return to Osmond at the end of *Portrait* . . .” (13), a reading which is neither confirmed nor denied by the novel’s own words. Finally, it is, as Woolf herself recognized about James in her essay “Phases of Fiction,” long before Leon Edel’s *The Modern Psychological Novel*, a novel not about events and the external, but a psychological novel, a novel about thought, feeling, the mind.
Film's ability to enact melodrama is well-established, but the difficulties of adapting James's four longest novels pose challenges on the melodramatic level because of the extent to which melodrama exists in dynamic tension with realist aesthetic practice.

*Portrait*, for example, consistently extends to the reader the classic melodramatic situation, but alternates unevenly in completing the melodramatic action, so that the reader is never on the sure footing of the pure melodrama, on the one hand, or the pure realist novel on the other. Many melodrama-laden moments are elided from the text, including Isabel's first encounter with Goodwood, at which he presumably asks her to marry him, and at which she presumably tells him she is leaving for England; the funeral of Mr. Touchett; Isabel's finding out about the unexpected inheritance; Osmond's proposal and her acceptance; their wedding; Isabel's pregnancy and the birth, and later death, of her child; and, as already noted, a climactic final scene of either hostile confrontation or resigned acceptance. And, in addition to eliding these scenes that are fraught with melodramatic overtones, the overall impact of the novel is frequently less emotional, in the melodramatic sense of excess, than it is thoughtful. Thus, there are passages of tremendous melodramatic appeal worthy of the best of romance novels:

His [Goodwood's] kiss was like white lightning, a flash that spread, and spread again, and stayed; and it was extraordinarily as if, while she took it, she felt each thing in his hard manhood that had least pleased her, each aggressive fact of his face, his figure, his presence, justified of its intense identity and made one with this act of possession. So had she heard of those wrecked and under water following a train of images before they sink. (489)

But these passages are rare; far more characteristic are those such as this during Isabel's long meditation in Chapter XLII:

She [Isabel] had a certain way of looking at life which he took as a personal offence. Heaven knew that now at least it was a very humble, accommodating way! The strange thing was that she should not have suspected from the first
that his own had been so different. She had thought it so large, so enlightened, so perfectly that of an honest man and a gentleman. Hadn't he assured her that he had no superstitions, no dull limitations, no prejudices that had lost their freshness? (359)

In Brooks's explanation of melodrama, such passages would be read as oppositional, the first grounded in the melodramatic tradition, the second in the realist tradition. The crucial aspect of such oppositions is that they exist within the same text, and therefore work to create a single work in a dynamic tension. As Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams have recently argued, there has been a tendency among critics to ignore the tensions between two sets of conventions within a text, in order to place the text firmly in either a "classical realist" or an "anti-realist, melodramatic" mode (Williams 44), and Portrait is a text that is a perfect example of one that defies easy classification.

The relatively small section of Portrait that actually dramatizes melodrama is not the only problem with adapting it to a mainstream film. As Williams notes,

Thus the basic vernacular of American moving pictures consists of a story that generates sympathy for a hero who is also a victim and that leads to a climax that permits the audience, and usually other characters, to recognize that character's moral value. This climax revealing the moral good of the victim can tend in one of two directions: either it can consist of a paroxysm of pathos (as in the woman's film or family melodrama variants) or it can take that paroxysm and channel it into the more virile and action-centered variants of rescue, chase, and fight (as in the western and all the action genres). (58)

Portrait clearly does not fit either paradigm easily, and would require major alterations to do so. The novel does little to make Isabel a particularly sympathetic character (note the title of literary critic Marc Bousquet's essay, "I Don't Like Isabel Archer"); while she is a victim of Osmond and Madame Merle's plot, she herself is responsible for choosing to marry Osmond over two other suitors and over the objections of both Ralph and Mrs.
Touchett; her moral goodness is dubious; and the novel’s ending dramatizes neither a ‘paroxysm of pathos’ nor a rescue, chase, or fight. Nor is the work permeated with a ‘general hysteria of the mise-en-scene,’ a quality characteristic of the Bronte melodramas in their choice of settings and other elements, and one that is fairly easy to render in film.

Seen in this light, then, the main attraction of *Portrait* as a work to be adapted to film, its potential for melodrama, is in many ways simultaneously defeated by the work itself. It offers, to be sure, like any novel of its type, strong possibilities for lush mise en scene in both setting and costuming; its range of characters, within the circumscribed Jamesian world, is comparatively wide; if viewers’ interest can be held until the final series of confrontations leading to the novel’s ending, a melodrama of pathos can conceivably be created, especially if Isabel is from the beginning made to be a more sympathetic character. Yet to do the latter would significantly alter James’s portrait of Isabel.

And, as it turns out, Jane Campion did not choose to make Isabel any more obviously sympathetic in the film; although she is, as I will argue later, much more human. In fact, Campion’s adaptation of *Portrait* very much refuses to push the film towards the paradigm of film melodrama that Williams outlines, and, in not doing so, creates a space (along with the other films under analysis here as well as a small group of others) for a new strain of film melodrama, a melodrama that exists in tension with realist practices, the result of which is a work that can appropriately be termed modernist. Thus, unlike Hardy’s works, which use melodramatic conventions and follow them through to
their conventional conclusions, such as in *Tess*, James uses melodramatic conventions, but, much like Woolf in *Orlando*, although using different methods, simultaneously undermines them.

In *Portrait*, then, James thoroughly relies on melodramatic traits: The work is replete with revelations and reversals; is set and has impacts entirely within the domestic sphere; features beset victims and near-literal imprisonment; is morally clear at least in terms of its villains; and depicts extreme emotion, particularly in its latter stages. Yet at the same time, those melodramatic traits exist in tension with realist ones, including a focus on the life of the mind, a less-than-sympathetic and blameless heroine, many elided melodramatic moments, and an ambiguous narrative ending. Given mainstream film’s pressure to conform to the narrative patterns that Williams outlines, it is perhaps a surprise to find that Campion’s adaptation retains and extends much of the novel’s central modernist aspects, including its ambiguity; extends and sharpens the novel’s melodramatic appeal, especially in its second half; makes of Isabel a far more human, if no more sympathetic, character; and uses film’s gift for mise en scene to reinforce all of those aspects.

Campion’s relation to the novel was in many ways quite similar to Potter’s relation to *Orlando*, if slightly delayed: “I don’t remember exactly when it [first reading the novel] happened, but it was surely when I was around 20, when I devoured that type of fiction” (Ciment 177), and perhaps it is not coincidental that both directors were about the same age as each book’s main character begins the book when they first read them. Like Potter, Campion “... had thought about making a film out of it for a long time” (Ciment 177). And, like Potter again, Campion’s insight into how *Portrait* varies from
the traditional nineteenth-century novel is acute; in contrast to the fairy-tales of Jane
Austen, she calls James "... very modern because he's already tearing apart the fairytale.
He's saying, 'Be real. Life is hard... No one's going to get the right person'" (Franke
206). And, perhaps more so than Potter, Campion claims she strongly identifies with
Isabel: "I felt so much like Isabel as a young woman, a sense of having extraordinary
potential without knowing what the hell to do with it" (Cantwell 162).

But while the two stood in similar relations to the material they were adapting,
they stood in different relations to the film industry. Three of Campion's early shorts,
*Peel, A Girl's Own Story,* and *Passionless Moments* won a variety of awards, including
for *Peel* the Palme d'Or at Cannes for Best Short Film. In 1984, Campion made her first
feature-length film, *After Hours,* while she worked for the Australian Women’s Film
Unit, but it was not released theatrically; it was followed by a successful television
feature, *Two Friends,* in 1986. These successes readied Campion for 1989's *Sweetie,* a
film that was heartily disliked at Cannes, but which won awards from the Los Angeles
Film Critics' Association and the Australian Film Critics Association, among others. In
1990, the television feature *An Angel at My Table* was so successful that it was then
released theatrically and won awards from several festivals and critics' groups.

On the basis of these successes, Campion’s next project, *The Piano,* was funded
by "... CiBy 2000, a French film financing entity ... giving her total freedom to make
the film as she wished" (Wexman x-xi). The extraordinary success of *The Piano* need
not be dwelled on here; made for a reported $7 million (Saccoccia 204), it grossed over
$40 million alone in American box office receipts (www.the-numbers.com), and won more
than two dozen prestigious awards. Campion’s status as she took on *Portrait* could

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hardly have been higher. The surprise success of *The Piano* moved Campion’s production of *Portrait* very much into mainstream film standards; the film reportedly cost $24 million (Saccoccia 204) and was bankrolled with “. . . large American dollars all the way . . .” (Cantwell 162). This budget, five times *Orlando*’s and largely American-financed, served to make of the film a project more on the scale of the Merchant-Ivory productions. The result, however, is a film that is decidedly un-Merchant-Ivory like, as the credit sequence immediately makes clear.

*Portrait*’s credits are superimposed over a group of young women in contemporary casual dress, the first of Campion’s modernist interventions. Because the remainder of the film after the credits is true to the novel’s time and settings, framing the film in this manner serves to emphasize what its director sees as its connection to contemporary reality; Campion has said that “The decision was taken very early on to have that introduction, which serves as a link to our era . . .” (Ciment 180). What Campion does not say is that the effect also highlights our awareness of the artificiality of the film construct, its knowledge of itself as a fiction, set in the past but being watched by audiences among whom will be some young women very much like those we see on the screen.

This technique serves, then, a similar purpose as Swinton’s direct addresses in *Orlando*, including the one at its concluding opening credit sequence. However, the effects are not more than generally similar: Once *Portrait*’s credits end, obvious reminders of the contemporary time frame or the presence of a watching audience disappear until the closing credits, while in *Orlando*, of course, Swinton’s direct addresses continue throughout. *Portrait*’s awareness of itself, then, is consciously framed
and limited, while Orlando’s amounts to a constant reminder of its artificiality. This is one difference between the two-films that makes of Portrait a more straightforwardly modernist extension of its source text while Orlando’s is a more postmodernist extension. Campion’s more restrained approach on this level is entirely in keeping not only with James’s tone in general, but also with this novel as source versus Orlando as source. Of all of Woolf’s novels, Orlando is by far the one that makes politics on all levels obviously central to its concerns; it is peopled from the start by nobility, including Orlando, engaged in all manner of colonialist behaviors. Portrait, by contrast, succeeds, as does most of James’s work, in disguising its political meanings in the guise of purely social relations. As Rowe points out, “But James’s point is that the most insidious exploitation works through the psychological and verbal practices that make a ‘musket, spear or battle-axe’ appear . . . anachronistic weapons with which to combat a subtler enemy” (25). Thus, while Potter’s style is more flamboyant with a more flamboyant source, Campion’s is more conservative with a more conservative one.

After this prologue, the film’s narrative opens with Lord Warburton’s first proposal to Isabel and her rejection, an episode which occurs in Chapter XII of the novel. Choosing to open the film with the novel’s first dramatized, potentially melodramatic action serves several purposes. First, and most obviously, it foregrounds the film’s obvious interest in the melodramatic potential of the novel, an interest that will continue and in several instances be advanced beyond its source. Second, beginning the narrative at this point highlights Isabel’s agency in her life, an agency not particularly apparent in the novel, except in Isabel’s thoughts, until this scene. Third, in beginning with the marriage proposal itself, the film makes clear that it will be, as the novel and much of
James’s work is, very much about marriage and the domestic: whom to marry, whom to not marry, what marriages are underneath their superficially costumed social and public personas. Indeed, opening the narrative of the film with Warburton’s proposal immediately foregrounds the question of how marriage happens to women in the times of their stories. At the same time, however, Isabel’s refusal sets her apart from the vast majority of women for whom it was only in fictions that they could well reject those proposals, and, ultimately, makes her complicit in her own downfall in ways that the straightforward melodramatic heroine usually is not.

The mise en scene of the scene is strongly suggestive of the obstacles Isabel perceives to the idea of marriage to Warburton, namely that she prefers her freedom. The first vision of Isabel is of her upper shoulders and face, and the camera moves in to a very tight close up of her eyes, slowly welling with tears until a few escape. A cut and a shift screen right reveal two trousered legs, the upper body obscured by vegetation, walking some way behind Isabel, herself now seen from mid-chest upwards, crossing the screen right to left. The figure pushes through the vegetation, but now the lower half of the body is obscured. The short conversation that ensues is a direct transcription of a small part of the book’s encounter, picking up just at the end, when Warburton assures Isabel that if she doesn’t like Lockleigh, they needn’t live there, then including a few of his lines early in the conversation. Until the scene’s final shot, neither Isabel nor Warburton is presented in a full shot; their bodies are fragmented and incomplete, largely unknown both to each other and the viewer. Likewise they are barely present together in any single shot; as Warburton enters the space, we see only him; as he begins to speak, a reverse shot shows part of his body from the back, with Isabel now screen right, and, as he

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speaks, the camera shifts right until again only Isabel is in the frame. When Warburton speaks the lines from the beginning of the novel's scene, he is shown now frontally screen left, while Isabel is absent. Only then does the camera cut to a long shot of the two together, Warburton with his back to us kneeling on the ground in front of the sitting Isabel. Thus the camera and the editing visually indicate that these characters are incomplete, fragmented, and partial; disclosure is refused and separation is emphasized.

The arbor itself, although nominally a pleasant wooded glen, represents both a level of mysteriousness in its generally shaded nature and a level of imprisonment. It serves initially as a shield for Isabel, obscuring her from Warburton's direct sight, but likewise obscuring him from her sight; he then must push the woodsy branches aside to enter. Isabel's departure from the glen, much more brisk and direct than his entry, is clearly a flight, an escape, from an emotional situation, indicated both by her tears and Warburton's first words: "There's one more thing..." Clearly he would not be returning to say this 'one more thing' had his proposal been accepted; indeed had he been accepted he surely would not have left just moments later to begin with.

The scene includes three other interesting aspects. First, and immediately, it grants Isabel tears, although only the most subtle of ones. This gesture serves to humanize Isabel by granting her an emotional dimension—or at least the appearance of such a dimension—in a way that the novel has not at this stage; and, of course, tears are invariably associated with melodrama. Second, no good-byes are spoken by either Warburton or Isabel, an indication of the open-endedness of the conversation, which in the novel is conveyed through further dialogue. Third, while the novel emphasizes Isabel's agency in concluding the episode by her saying, "'I think you had better go'"
(101), that agency is undercut because Warburton actually stays to deliver the speech that opens the film, and only then goes. The film, however, literally shows Isabel leaving the scene, immediately after Warburton says, “It’s for life,” while he remains on his knees in the woods. This is a subtle difference which is the first in a series of differences that result in a more active, but simultaneously more responsible, Isabel Archer. Choosing to have Isabel leave after these particular words is, for the contemporary viewer, heavily freighted with meaning; in the 1800s, marriage was indeed ‘for life,’ unlike today’s world where marriages are for many quite disposable. What the film is relying on, rightly so, is that contemporary viewers of this narrative will have far greater insight into why Isabel rejects both Warburton and Goodwood than readers of James’s time did.

The episode concludes with two interesting flourishes. Escaped from Warburton, Isabel, walking quickly, appears in the frame background in an opening between two walls of shrubbery; in the screen foreground at either side of the screen are, in close-up, the faces of two women looking out at us (although not in a direct address to the camera). Having escaped the entrapment of the natural glen, Isabel is still enclosed by the civilized shrubbery, and she is then doubly enclosed/framed by the faces of the two women. These faces, both clearly upper class by their costuming but somewhat plain-looking, are a significant reminder that the primary impact of marriage negotiations of the times fell on women, and that rejecting a proposal from a man whose home has a moat is a serious matter indeed; surely had either of these two women been proposed to by such a man, each would have quickly accepted.

The dialogue of the women indicates that they knew of Warburton’s proposal and are surprised by the sight of Isabel striding briskly towards the house: “Oh, no, she’s
going up to the house. Ah, so she is . . . but where's Lord Warburton?" Isabel walks, without speaking to anyone, past what is revealed to be a tea party on the lawn, including the two women, Ralph, and Mr. Touchett, and is followed by a little terrier who nips at her heels. In between showing the members of the party gaze at her, one of the women upsets her teacup, and the camera immediately reverts to Isabel, who picks up the dog, holds it over her head and shakes it, growls at it, then kisses it on its muzzle; she then tucks the dog under her arm and walks briskly on into the house. The upset teacup reinforces that what Isabel has done in rejecting Warburton is a disruption, although not an entire breaking, of the marriage conventions of the time. The interaction with the dog reveals Isabel's much greater naturalness and earthiness compared to either of these two women, whom we can be sure would pet dogs in a polite sort of way, but never growl at them or kiss them, just as no civilized Englishwoman of the time would have. At the same time, these touches are much more subtle than those Williams refers to as the hysterical mise en scene of American family melodrama, which is entirely appropriate to James. The teacup does not break, and the dog is a little terrier, not a hound of the Baskervilles; but they are telling signs.

In the next scene, Isabel tells Mr. Touchett that Warburton has proposed and she has declined. Visually the scene is significant in at least two ways: First, it occurs in a very dark room with the two characters shown only in head shots, emphasizing a continuing sense of confinement and mystery. Second, once the conversation begins, Isabel and Mr. Touchett are never seen together in the same frame. This technique picks up on the earlier treatment of the Isabel-Warburton conversation, but here is much exaggerated, especially when viewed in a wide-screen format, when the empty space
screen left or right, depending on which is speaking, looms very large. The effect creates an unbridgeable chasm between the two characters that neither can seem to cross, although not for lack of good will towards each other.

The conversation is also notable, departing in important ways from the novel’s by focusing on issues present in the novel, but not in that particular conversation. Mr. Touchett’s response begins by using the novel’s wording, “Well, I told you you’d be a success over here. Americans are highly appreciated” (103), but then he adds, “And you’re very beautiful, you know.” To the latter, Isabel responds with a clearly ironic, “Oh, yes, of course I’m lovely.” These lines are from a conversation the two had had earlier in the novel, which established that Isabel believes that it is her beauty that is the primary reason men propose to her, not, for example, her quality of mind; unfortunately, Mr. Touchett’s remark merely confirms this to her. This is the first time in the film that, in Virginia Wright Wexman’s words, it “… shifts the thrust of James’s story from an examination of the relationship between aesthetic and ethical values to a more contemporary feminist meditation on a woman’s body and its sexuality” (184). While Wexman is correct in noting that the film is a more contemporary feminist meditation, it is also true that the novel itself clearly foregrounds Isabel’s physical attractiveness, and thus her body and sexuality. For example, when Mrs. Touchett first meets Isabel, her sixth comment to her is, “Yes, the others [Isabel’s sisters] are Lilian and Edith. And are you the prettiest?” Isabel replies, “I haven’t the least idea,” to which Mrs. Touchett responds, “I think you must be” (34). Ralph’s first sight of Isabel is accompanied by the comment that she “… was a tall girl in a black dress, who at first sight looked pretty” (25). And Mr. Touchett, in his first conversation with Isabel, notes, “But you’re very
beautiful yourself” (28). The weight of these immediate responses of three different characters to Isabel’s physical attractiveness surely cannot be ignored; as Ellen Morgan rightly argues,

*The Portrait of a Lady*, like many of the portrayals of women which have traditionally been regarded as great literature, is a nonfeminist work. Typically, the author of the nonfeminist novel about a woman creates a heroine . . . whose attractiveness and charm determine the course of her existence. Her gestures are shaped and given their significance by the reactions of others to her as a sexual being. (17)

The difference between Wexman’s analysis of the novel and Morgan’s is crucial. Although it is clear that ‘the relationship between aesthetic and ethical values’ is an important theme in *Portrait*, to privilege that theme at the expense of the novel’s equally powerful ‘meditation on a woman’s body and its sexuality’ is to miss the fact that, while James’s work eschews the obvious appeals to sexuality that works such as *Tess* employ, they are invariably works in which control of a body, a theme central to melodrama, is crucial. Indeed, what unites all four of James’ long works on the plot level is that they hinge quite literally on physical, sexual unions or dis-unions, in this particular case the potential marriage unions that Isabel negotiates, as well as the union that created Pansy.

Isabel explains to Mr. Touchett that she cannot accept Warburton’s proposal because “I think I have to begin by getting a general impression of life,” a line that had been used earlier in the novel. To that explanation, Mr. Touchett responds, “He’s a very fine man. He’s got a hundred thousand a year, with half a dozen houses to live in, and a seat in Parliament as I have one at my own dinner table.” It is no wonder that as the camera returns to Isabel, a prominent tear is spilling from her left eye; not only has Mr.
Touchett not really heard her, but in associating Warburton’s being a fine man with his economic and political power, he continues to remind Isabel that it is only surfaces that matter.

The third scene occurs in Isabel’s room, and is a brief conversation between her and Mrs. Touchett, as the maid packs for Isabel’s visit to London. Visually it has two interesting touches; like the previous two, most of the conversation occurs while only one character is in the frame, continuing to emphasize that at least in these conversations there is no communication—or rather, in this case, adversarial communication—going on. Second, during the conversation, Isabel goes to a wardrobe and opens the door, to the inside of which she has attached slips of paper, which she pulls out of the door. Four of these, shown in a short close-up, read ‘Nihilism,’ ‘Probity,’ ‘Abnegate/Aberration,’ and ‘Admonish.’ Obviously the fact that Isabel has her ‘vocabulary words’ posted at all is an indication of her desire for intellectual growth. More importantly, perhaps, is that both the setting of all these scenes and Isabel’s desire to learn locate her in a very different space than a typical melodramatic heroine, such as Tess or Broken Blossoms’s Lucy, thus undercutting the melodramatic conventions of both the tears and the marriage proposal.

With the film about to shift locales and introduce other characters, what has so far been established on the purely visual level is worth noting, because several elements will become on-going in the film. First is the fragmented presentation of bodies, with characters rarely seen in full-shots that entirely disclose them, or alternatively blocked by foreground or background clutter. Only Isabel has been fully presented, and that for only a few moments at the end of the first scene. Second is an increasing sense of claustrophobic entrapment, characteristic of the imprisonment theme of melodrama,
relieved only by Isabel's brief walk across the lawn. Campion could have set the film against long-shot backdrops of lush European settings, such as Gardencourt, but so far has chosen, rightly, not to, because to do so would have created an increased sense of the potential for Isabel's freedom. Third, the effect of presenting scenes in which characters converse, but at what seem to be across vast distances of screen space, has been pronounced, indicating either the absence of real communication, or alternatively communication that is adversarial. Finally, to move away from the visual elements to the narrative that has been presented, in each scene Isabel has been more or less in conflict with her conversation partner, each of whom wants something different from what Isabel wants. The adversarial or oppositional quality of these conversations here represents the external conflict typical of the melodramatic narrative.

The effect of two elisions from the novel are also interesting, specifically Isabel's growing friendship with Ralph and the much earlier appearance of Isabel's friend Henrietta. Whatever the merit of the elisions, the effect is clear. At the point of her rejecting Warburton in the novel, Isabel and Ralph are already quite close as friends, although they will become closer yet. Henrietta appears in the novel two chapters and several days before Warburton's proposal. In the novel, then, Isabel's rejection of Warburton is cushioned, if not directly in the verbal sense, then indirectly, by the tacit emotional support that Ralph and Henrietta provide. Henrietta, indeed, comes partly as an emissary of Goodwood, whose suit she favors over Warburton's. In eliding both these relationships to this point, the film presents Isabel's actions as taken in a much less comforting social framework in which she appears very much as a friendless orphan with not even a sympathetic ear to turn to for comfort. The starkness of her isolation from
friendly, honest conversation with a trusted intimate makes her rejection of Warburton stand out even more and makes the action, under these circumstances, a much more powerful statement of Isabel's desire for personal independence.

The latter is about to change, but not before another tight, foreground-cluttered shot of a carriage coming through an archway in a busy city, continuing the film's refusal to open up visually. Isabel and Ralph are in the carriage, and Isabel picks out Henrietta in the crowd; even as Henrietta enters the carriage, people and other carriages glide by to obstruct our open view of it. The foreground clutter continues through much of the ensuing scene, occasionally including actual bars, during which Isabel and Henrietta, wandering through a museum, discuss Goodwood, who has accompanied Henrietta to England. This is the first time in the film that two characters have a longer conversation while both remain in the frame, and this is not an accidental choice, as Henrietta is Isabel's friend. However, this positive development is undercut in two ways: First, what the two are mostly looking at are sarcophagi; second, each time they bend down to peer closer, or touch, the sarcophagi, a guard blows a shrill whistle at them. These points relate the scene to the previous one, emphasizing the differences between what is acceptable behavior in America and what is acceptable in England; the sarcophagi function on this level as well, as they are not commonly exhibited in American museums, and also forecast the literal and metaphysical deaths that are to come.

The next scene opens with a long shot of upper-class row houses, but tree limbs still obstruct the foreground; because the shot is longer than most in the film so far have been, and perhaps because it is the third scene that includes the outdoors, the absence of the sky as a visual presence in the film becomes increasingly noticeable. Isabel and
Ralph enters one of the row houses, and one of the film's lighter moments occurs; Isabel's face is quite close to the camera, out of focus and screen left; screen right is Ralph in the background, framed in the crook of Isabel's arm, which is ranged over her head. The camera then reverses to a shot from Ralph's perspective, and Isabel is revealed to be standing in front of a mirror, balancing a golden candelabra on her head. As with the earlier scene with the dog, this is the playful, more human side of Isabel showing, further emphasized by her telling Ralph that he is free to do anything so long as he amuses her; marriage proposals are clearly not amusing, and she has previously told Mr. Touchett that they indeed upset her a great deal.

Ralph disappears from the shot while Isabel remains in front of the mirror, but he is heard asking Isabel what she had in mind in rejecting Warburton. Isabel's face is now doubled in the frame; the back of her head visible screen left, while the mirror shows her full-face screen right as Ralph talks. The effect is quite beautiful because it contrasts so sharply with the earlier one between Isabel and Mr. Touchett, in which the gaping absence of a figure on one side or the other of the frame was so striking. But here, it is Isabel who occupies both sides of the frame (not coincidentally, criticism of the Isabel of the book is preoccupied with the concept of her duality on several levels); the fact that it is Ralph, however, who is talking, visually indicates the closeness between them, much as if Isabel is talking to herself. As they discuss Warburton's proposal, Isabel moves to a chair across from the couch on which Ralph reclines, and the scene proceeds for a few shots using a more traditional shot-reverse shot technique. Ralph asks, "What was the logic that dictated so remarkable an act?," emphasizing that he too, despite being much
more Isabel’s contemporary in age, likewise fully realizes that rejecting Warburton’s proposal is not just different, but indeed remarkable.

Isabel’s response is to pose the question, “Why do you call it remarkable?,” showing us again the clash in their views of marriage negotiations. She then continues, “He was too perfect,” and as she makes this pronouncement she reaches down, removes one of her boots, the camera showing among other things her white petticoat sharply contrasting with her black skirts, makes the point of sniffing the boot, and then tosses it aside. This action adds to what is now a chain of small events by which the film is indeed establishing that Isabel views English nobility as far too proper for her tastes. The proper upper-class English-woman would not kiss a dog, go unescorted to London, touch the objects in a museum, balance a candelabra on her head, sniff her boots, or show her petticoats. The film’s purpose is to make of Isabel a less aristocratic character than her setting would indicate, and therefore simultaneously closer, if only by degrees, to the more conventional melodramatic heroine.

Ralph then says that he is actually happy that Isabel declined Warburton, and she leaves her chair and moves towards him, kneeling in front of him as he sits on the couch, and asks, exactly as she does in the novel, “Are you thinking of proposing to me?” But in the film, everything about how the scene is played indicates that Isabel would not be particularly unhappy were Ralph to do so. The negative tone of her earlier comment to Mr. Touchett about being proposed to is entirely altered here; she asks the question without any hint at all of not wanting to be proposed to, she has moved towards Ralph and is kneeling in front of him, her face is open and she is slightly smiling. Indeed, it seems clear that this Isabel has just proposed marriage herself, as much as a woman of
the times could. When Ralph explains that that was not his meaning, Isabel averts her head and looks downwards, surely the visual gesture of being disappointed.

The possibility of Isabel and Ralph being the great love affair of the novel has often been noted in criticism; Millicent Bell, to take a recent example, says that “Ralph’s superior mental and emotional qualities would seem to make him the only one among the men who love Isabel who is her true mate. But the relationship is closer still” (767). In dramatizing this particular scene, then, Campion has gone beyond the literal text, in which only Isabel’s words are presented, but certainly not its potential spirit. Just as importantly, the scene indicates why Isabel’s appropriate partner is Ralph: with him, she can be more natural, less aristocratically dignified, as signified by the play with the candelabra, removing her boots, showing her petticoat. The dialogue also is used to more strongly convey the potential of an Isabel-Ralph union. In the novel’s scene, Isabel repeats to Ralph the sentiments she had earlier expressed to Mr. Touchett, saying, “I don’t want to begin life by marrying. There are other things a woman can do’’” (133); this dialogue is elided from the film, with the result that Isabel’s desire not to marry is not foregrounded as it is in the novel. However, the scene does include a line that she speaks earlier in the novel to Warburton, in his second proposal, which she now says to Ralph: If she should marry Warburton, she would be protected “From life. From the usual chances and dangers.” The effect of transposing these words to the conversation with Ralph is significant because it is Ralph’s illness that is present in front of us as one of those chances and dangers to which Isabel refers, and from which she does not wish to be protected. This reading of the scene as Isabel’s metaphorical proposal to Ralph emphasizes its melodramatic function of making Isabel more of a victim, although
admittedly not to the degree that we typically associate with the melodramatic heroine. The one man whom Isabel would accept a proposal from, Ralph, does not propose to her, and she becomes a victim not only of Ralph’s own conscience, but also of a society that sets rigid rules of marriage negotiation.

The transition to the next scene is jarring: The camera shows high screen left a row of well-dressed men looking down and yelling at something going on in the street below them. The camera pans down and screen right, revealing another row of fine people, now including a few women, a male figure in the background walking through an archway, and then finally the street itself, on which a carnival strong man is trying to burst the chains that his handlers have placed him in. The figure from the archway pauses as he reaches the strong man, glances down at a piece of paper, then continues on through the crowd and up the stairs, where he crosses a threshold with the words ‘Pratt’s Club,’ the shouts of the crowd still heard in the background. The door closes behind him, and the camera cuts to the man, now with Isabel in the background, in what are her rooms at the club.

As Isabel and the man, Caspar Goodwood, begin to talk, Goodwood surveys the rooms, the shouts of the crowd still heard in the apartment. Isabel comes forward in to the room Goodwood happens to be looking in and closes its door, on the back of which is revealed a corset hanging from a hook; when she is back in the room they began in, she snatches at stockings and other intimate garments hanging from the furniture as the conversation continues. Isabel asks Goodwood to leave her alone, upon which he approaches her and puts his arms on an overhang above her, literally enclosing her for a moment in a threatening gesture. But, when he asks her to clarify whether she wants to
be left alone for one year or two, she says, "Call it two then," and he retreats and soon leaves, after Isabel has said that she probably will never marry, but not before he strokes her cheek in a surprisingly gentle way.

Surprisingly because the film has quite deliberately chosen to associate the carnival strong man and Goodwood, and Goodwood is clearly impatient, direct, even physically threatening, in powerful contrast to both Warburton and Ralph, who have very much granted Isabel’s right to her own space. Goodwood’s presence is an invasion, and an invasion of a private space associated with sexuality through the camera’s showing of the corset and stockings. In contrast to Isabel’s freedom in revealing her petticoat to Ralph, she is clearly embarrassed to have her lingerie in Goodwood’s sight; and yet she suffers his touch—the first touch she has received from a male hand in the film—and his touch has quite the quality of what we might have thought that Ralph’s touch would have had, gentle and wistful. The novel’s scene similarly includes physical contact near its end: “They stood so for a moment, looking at each other, united by a hand-clasp which was not merely passive on her side” (144).

Goodwood departs, Isabel shuts the door, and then lifts her own hand to her cheek in imitation of Goodwood’s touch; she stands and begins to walk around the room, now fondling her face with her hand, as the music builds. She sits down on the bed, and the camera reveals a man’s hand reaching out to clasp hers; then Goodwood is revealed, and he begins to kiss Isabel’s face, kisses which she does not resist. At this point, it is quite possible to be reading the scene as if Goodwood has returned, perhaps encouraged by Isabel’s allowing him to so gently caress her face. However, the camera then glides left down Isabel’s body and reveals Lord Warburton kissing her leg, then glides back up to
reveal Ralph also lying on the bed, watching the entire scene. One of the men whispers, "I love you," although it is unclear which; and just at that point the fantasy begins to end. Isabel opens her eyes, looking at Ralph, and then the men rise and vanish into the wallpaper.

As the film's first scene amounting to an intervention in the novel—fully dramatizing something that is not dramatized at all in the novel—this scene deserves comment. That the intervention is a modernist one there can be no doubt of; it was left to later modernists than James to more fully depict sexuality and to Freud to argue that such desires can be repressed, and, indeed, the modern perspective of the upper-class Victorian world reads into it much repression. Visually, the scene has been forecast by the petticoat in the previous scene and the corset and stockings in this one. Nancy Bentley says of the scene that "Campion's imaginary love scene suggests not only that Isabel sexually desires both of the men, but that there is something erotic for her in refusing them in marriage" (176). Following Bentley's lead, the scene can be read as a continuation of Isabel's banishment of Goodwood, an action that privileges Isabel's power and agency, but in a circumscribed way: Isabel's society allows her to reject proposals, but not to make them; she has the agency to choose not to be possessed, but not the agency to possess. Thus, while Isabel is not the fully pathetic melodramatic heroine such as Tess, who has the agency neither to reject nor to choose, neither does she enjoy anything close to full agency.

Isabel and Ralph return to Gardencourt on hearing the news of Mr. Touchett's grave illness, and a brilliant shot leads into Isabel's first meeting with Madame Merle. Isabel hears, from some distance away, the sounds of a piano playing, and comes down
the stairs to investigate. She pauses for a moment beside a wall mirror, the shot showing Isabel's full face and her reflected one, the latter slightly cut off by the mirror frame. Unlike the earlier mirror shot in the scene with Ralph, in which Isabel is the object of her own gaze, here both images are seen only by the viewer, which forecasts that Isabel's agency, her ability to be primarily the subject of her own gaze, and own making, will soon be undermined. The significance of the moment is emphasized by a sudden slowing down, as Isabel pauses by the mirror, listening intently. The portentous effect is heightened by her entry into the chamber from which the music emanates. From the interior of the room, we see Isabel open the door and very slowly, almost painstakingly, make her way forward in the room towards what we know must be a piano and a pianist, but which the shot withholds from our view. Finally, the shot reverses, and from behind Isabel we behold what she sees, an elaborately-coiffed, beautifully-costumed middle-aged woman seated at the piano.

Visually the contrast between Merle and Isabel, as well as Merle and all the women so far seen in the film, is extremely powerful. Isabel has invariably been costumed in black dresses, either with their own high collars or a high-collared blouse as the only touch of color; her hair has been in its natural curly state (a modified Harpo Marx do, one might say), and she has not worn jewelry of any kind except for very small earrings. By contrast, Merle's gown is a rich burgundy color and features noticeable decolletage, her hair is elaborately piled on her head, and she wears long golden earrings. A similar contrast exists between Merle and the other women; although Henrietta's costumes have been more flamboyant than others, they could not be described as elegant. In short, Merle is dressed and adorned exactly as we have come to expect the
sophisticated European woman of the time to be dressed and adorned; she is also, as in the novel, engaging in an activity which the well-bred woman engages in, playing the piano. The contrast between Merle and Isabel here clearly places Isabel in a far more ‘middle class’ position, much closer to that shared by the conventional melodramatic heroine.

The piano music is the sound bridge to the next scene, in Mr. Touchett’s bedroom, in which Ralph persuades his father to make Isabel rich through the agency of his father’s will. The scene has all the elements of classic melodrama: the dying father, the son who wishes to make his father happy, the son who is himself dying and doesn’t wish to be a burden to a woman who might love him, and whom he might love were he not dying, and the desire on the part of both men to provide for Isabel. It is not acted, however, with the high emotions associated with film melodrama; Ralph’s somewhat pained expression as he tells his father he is not in love with Isabel is as close to emotion as the scene comes. Ralph’s actions, however, are entirely consistent with the melodrama of renunciation; although he says to his father that he’s not in love with Isabel, he admits that, if things were different—that is, were he himself not afflicted—he could be.

The Ralph of the film, then, is a sympathetic character who, prevented by his fatal illness from himself becoming Isabel’s protector, is genuinely trying to become her fairy god-father, so to speak, out of wishes of true generosity and without any awareness that Isabel’s fortune will make of her a victim for those such as Merle and Gilbert Osmond. In this sense, Campion is making Ralph a far more recognizably melodramatic character than the novel does. Although the ultimate result of the bequest works similarly in both the novel and the film, it is a fair question to ask if this presentation of Ralph also serves
to greatly simplify his character from the novel’s version, at least at this point, and the answer is, in my view, yes. At the same time, however, it must be noted that, the mystery at the novel’s ending notwithstanding, it is indeed Ralph in the novel who remains its most impenetrable figure in terms of motivation and character. Whether the film has merely simplified Ralph, or whether it has distilled into more successful clarity a character whose presentation in the novel is really quite ambiguous, is a question that readers of the novel will disagree about.

In the film’s next brief scene, melodrama’s gender issues are given a characteristically modernist turn as issues of same-sex, heterosexual, and narcissistic love are raised. Isabel enters a room behind Ralph, who is playing with the ever-present dogs, comes forward quietly after he has sat down on a sofa, and, from behind, puts her hands over his eyes, leans close to him, and asks, “Who is this Madame Merle? She’s very charming; she plays beautifully.” The question she asks and its staging effect an extraordinary transformation. In the familiar game between intimates that Isabel plays, the question should be “Guess who?,” referring to herself as the mystery lover. Ralph would say, “Is it someone who is very charming?,” and so forth; yet it is Merle whom Isabel asks about, effectively transforming Merle into the lover and Isabel’s own self within the dynamics of the game. When Ralph proceeds to say, as he had done earlier in the novel, that “I was once in love with her,” the film achieves a very pure distillation of a dynamic romantic triangle that crosses gender boundaries. Merle has already been the object of Isabel’s intense and pleasurable gaze, and Isabel’s questions about her confirm both Isabel’s interest in and high appraisal of her. We can read this as a latent presentation of same-sex love; as Robert Martin notes, “James was aware of the subject...
of same-sex desire when he wrote *The Portrait of a Lady* (90), and that Campion's film can hint at that in a far more open way because of the changed times is not surprising. But the manner in which the scene is here handled through the lover's game Isabel plays does more. In the traditional structure of the game, Isabel should play Ralph's lover; when Ralph admits that he was in love with Merle, it is Merle who becomes the lover. Isabel thus must transform herself into what Merle appears to be in order to be the object of Ralph's manifested love; and in doing so, Isabel will likewise be transforming herself into the object of her own attraction. Turned in a slightly different direction, Merle, as the object of both Ralph's and Isabel's love, suggests the possibility even of bi-sexuality.

Those familiar with criticism of the novel will be aware of similar readings of its gender negotiation. Martin's point, based on the historical James, is amply in evidence elsewhere. William Veeder notes that "Henry James understood what recent feminist scholars have insisted upon—that gender is socially produced... This is why I say that 'woman' as a gender construct is a social fate available to persons of either sex" (733). Martin's and Veeder's comments illuminate Isabel's attraction not only to Madame Merle, but to both Ralph, and, later, Osmond, two men who are feminized because, as Veeder argues, "In James's America, a male who is not in business is feminine in gender because he is signed by, is singled out for, nonexistence" (733). The sexual connection apparent between Isabel and Madame Merle has been thoroughly outlined by Melissa Solomon, among others, who notes of one passage in the novel between the two, "When Madame Merle expresses her reciprocal interest in Isabel (and Isabel's body), the fixity of their gazes on each other is exponentially amplified with sexual possibility" (451).
And the novel's many invitations to analyzing its narcissistic aspects are apparent in lines such as Henrietta's to Ralph early on, that "'You’re in love with yourself, that’s the Other! . . . Much good may it do you!'" (108).

Two scenes that cement the growing closeness between Isabel and Merle follow; in the first, the film actually begins to open up visually, as, for only the second time, the sky is quite visibly present in an establishing shot, and the scene, of Isabel and Merle walking and talking in the rain, has a lush, impressionistic richness in its presentation of the surroundings that has been quite absent so far. The technique is appropriate because the viewer is well aware that Isabel's life is indeed about to open up because of the bequest; ultimately, however, it becomes ironic because of its association with Merle, although she herself is unaware that Isabel will soon be rich. This conversation, using language from the novel, also raises an important theme for the rest of the narrative when Merle replies to Isabel's question about Ralph and Merle that they are "'Perfectly [good friends], but he doesn’t like me" (173). In the film, the line causes a jolt, emphasizing as it does the distinction between the social sphere and the private sphere, and indicating that one might behave as a perfect friend in the social sphere, while keeping one’s private thoughts well out of sight. Isabel’s failure to realize this is a central subject of both the novel and the film, and perhaps the root of her downfall. Such revelations that things or people are not as they seem are, of course, characteristic of the melodramatic plot.

The next scene continues to establish Isabel’s fascination with Merle, as Isabel says to her, "'To me, you’re the vivid image of success," and features the film’s first non-fantasized kiss, not surprisingly one that Isabel bestows upon Merle. Merle has given Isabel a small watercolor, saying "'I should like you to have this. I’m going to six places
in succession, and I shall meet no one I like as well as you." Isabel's look at Merle is the look of a love-struck admirer on the point of tears after having received a token from the loved one, and Isabel rises from her chair, kisses Merle on the cheek, then puts her arms around her and hugs her. I make no claim that such an action constitutes the presentation of latent same-sex love, since such a scene is not uncommon between women. What gives the scene its power, however, is that in a film in which Isabel has already been the romantic object of two suitors, this is the first kiss, initiated by Isabel and given to a woman.

After Mr. Touchett's death scene, the film immediately signals, visually, an altered world, reflecting the revelation of Isabel's bequest. The shot is a low-angle one of a city street, strewn with dead leaves; a grey sky is visible in the upper middle of the screen, while foreground are the iron railings of an outside bannister, shot as if leaning screen left at a thirty degree angle, paralleled in the background by the pillars of a building also in a pronounced diagonal. Merle walks towards us on the sidewalk, then turns and walks up the stairway screen left. The foreground obstruction and literal bars are not new to the film, but the tilted camera is, and they signal that from this point onward, vision and understanding will be severely distorted, and the presence of Merle will be associated with that distortion. Inside the house, Mrs. Touchett gives voice to the revelation that Isabel has received a fortune from Mr. Touchett, and Merle's plot is set in motion.

The middle section of the film, focusing on Osmond's courtship of Isabel, now begins. The inter-title 'Florence' is followed by several shots of Merle arriving in Florence that continue the visual distortions of the previous scene. Ultimately, a high
angle view reveals a young woman in a beautiful summer garden, alternately blocked and revealed by foreground balustrades on a balcony that the camera tracks down, while a voice-over discusses the young girl. A cut to an inside room reveals that the speaker is John Malkovich, dressed in a flowing brown robe, speaking to two nuns about the young woman. The nuns tell Malkovich that the young woman, although perfect, is not one of them, and belongs in the world; but he avers that “Nothing’s settled yet.” A high angle shot shows Pansy, the young woman, coming up the stairs carrying a bouquet of flowers, but the camera is again behind the balustrade and behind her, so that even in this short space of time her potential freedom, or rather, her comparative imprisonment, has been undermined both by the shots through the balustrades and the words of her father, Gilbert Osmond.

Moments later, Merle arrives, the nuns depart, Pansy is sent to the garden to collect more flowers for Merle, and the conversation between she and Osmond that sets up the plot to entrap Isabel takes place. Malkovich’s Osmond differs significantly from the novel’s Osmond, if not in general outline than surely in tone. His costume, of which we see first only the long brown robe, suggests a Bohemian style, but the scene later reveals that it is quite literally a bathrobe, under which he is wearing pajamas; the effect is to present Osmond not as a man of perfect taste, as he is in the novel, but rather as a man concerned only with his own comfort. That presentation is reinforced when he tosses a piece of food into his mouth, quite without the humor or grace with which Katherine Hepburn tosses an olive into her mouth in *Bringing Up Baby*; and later proceeds to grunt/chatter quite clearly like a monkey.
As Karen Chandler accurately notes, there is a “...hissing coarseness and obvious sadism” (193) in this portrayal. Indeed, tossing the food into his mouth and grunting like a monkey are actions so uncharacteristic of the Osmond of the novel that the portrayal can only have been purposeful. It is key to note, however, that Osmond does nothing so coarse in his scenes with Isabel during the courtship part of the film, so that he is not viewed in this way by Isabel. What was Campion’s intent in revealing Osmond in this way to the film’s audience? The answer lies in melodrama; although Osmond is not revealed to Isabel as a villainous brute, he is revealed as that to the audience. In this sense, then, the choice to coarsen Osmond is of a piece with the earlier choice to sympathize Ralph, aligning each with much more conventional melodramatic models.

Campion’s film here is relying quite strongly on its viewers’ familiarity with another intertextual relation, that to Dangerous Liaisons (Frears 1988) a connection quite explicitly made as this scene continues, when Osmond sits down next to Merle on the sofa, pushes her back to a reclining position, and begins to kiss and fondle her. The novel’s own sub-text of sexuality has been frequently remarked on, but the film’s visualization of that sub-text owes rather more to Frears’s film. Much as there, what is emphasized here is the heartlessness of Osmond and Merle in their treatment of Isabel as simply a pawn in some greater game. The attendant revelations that will ensue later, for example Osmond’s revelation of himself to Isabel as essentially coarse, and Pansy’s true parentage, are of course a key aspect of the melodramatic narratives; Campion’s choice here, somewhat unlike James’s, is to remove for the viewer any mystery about Osmond’s true nature. The result places us, as Annette Kuhn notes, in the usual position of the
spectator of classic film, who is "... in a privileged position of knowledge in comparison with the characters in the film about what is going on in the story" (49-51).

The next scene stands in sharp contrast, as Isabel and Ralph comfortably, playfully, and unthreateningly interact, and, since we now know of Osmond and Merle's plot, we are strongly encouraged to view Isabel in a highly sympathetic way. Isabel's status here as the innocent melodramatic victim is also signified by her white dress, the first time she has worn anything other than a black dress. In the film, then, the change stands on its own to signal a different Isabel, if not a purer one. The conversation contrasts sharply with that between Merle and Osmond, which revolves around power and control, over both Pansy and Isabel; however, the dramatic irony is referenced in their conversation when Isabel asks whether it might not be a mistake for her to now have such a fortune. Ralph shrugs that idea off, however, which, given his own status as an experienced man of the world, puts Isabel in an even more sympathetic position; if he cannot sense danger, even knowing Merle and Osmond, surely Isabel would not be able to either.

The next five scenes cover the courtship; although I intend to analyze only the fourth one fully, it is key to note that Osmond's courtship of Isabel is the only courtship that is dramatized, just as in the novel; and that any tone of 'hissing coarseness' from Malkovich's portrayal of Osmond when he is with Isabel in these scenes is quite absent. The scenes continue to be lit, by and large, quite brightly, and, in general, the contrast between the visual richness of these surroundings and the previous scenes in England is strongly evident, continuing the ironic interplay between the very pleasant appearance of the environment and the successfully unfolding plot to snare Isabel for Osmond. Even
without this contrast, however, the scenes never let the viewer lose sight of the plot to entrap Isabel. The first opens, for example, with an extremely tilted shot—forty-five degrees or more—of the Duomo of Florence, emphasizing even more than the previous use of diagonals that vision can be distorted; the camera then tilts back to the horizontal. Later, while Isabel and Osmond talk, Merle and the Countess Gemini also talk, and the Countess says to Merle, “You’re capable of anything, you and Osmond . . . you’re dangerous.” Similarly, the third scene shows Merle and Osmond meeting, apparently in a cafe, obstructed by much foreground clutter, and discussing their plot. Osmond remarks that Isabel’s only fault is that she has too many ideas, but that, since they are very bad ones, they can be sacrificed; Merle replies, “You’re unfathomable . . . I’m frightened by the abyss into which I’ve cast her.” If the originator of the plot is now frightened by what she has begun, certainly we also must be.

The last two scenes of this sequence, taken together, present the film’s explanation for Isabel’s choosing to marry Osmond. In the first, at the Palazzo Farnese, Isabel leaves her friends to retrieve her parasol, which she has left in an underground chamber, and there finds Osmond, who has found the parasol and, in returning it, makes much use of it as a wooing tool. The underground chamber provides an extremely apt location for Osmond’s declaration of love, both because of the atmospheric lighting, featuring patches of light coming from above amidst a low-lit interior, and because Osmond seeks to mine Isabel’s sub-conscious sexuality. Initially, Isabel does not find the parasol, and begins to walk back out of the chamber. As she walks towards the camera, a cut to a closer shot of Isabel in the foreground reveals Osmond in the shadows behind her; the sound of the parasol opening startles Isabel, and she turns to see him. He then
holds the parasol in front of himself and twirls it, creating the effect of the hypnotic eye because of the design on the parasol and shielding himself from view. In a remarkable moment, the camera dissolves, using the whirling parasol’s design as a focal point, from Isabel’s point-of-view in front of the parasol to Osmond’s behind it. The effect of granting Osmond a point-of-view shot is extremely important; he has had very few so far in the film, and those mostly of Pansy in his first scene, and the shot shows that the look of the hypnotic eye the parasol creates is also seen by him. Given his comment to Merle just a few moments before that Isabel has only one fault, and that easily dealt with, the effect of the shot dissolving to Osmond’s point-of-view is to suggest that he himself perhaps believes he loves Isabel. In playing the role of the gentle courter of Isabel, he has even succeeded in hypnotizing himself.

As the scene continues, Osmond presents himself in the position of weakness, noting that Isabel may well never return to Florence after her world tour; when she comments that he must think her plans ridiculous, he replies, “No . . . go everywhere . . . do everything . . . be happy . . . be triumphant.” The contrast between this scene and the film’s first, of the end of Warburton’s proposal, could not be greater, since Osmond is urging Isabel to follow her own agency, rather than imposing one on her; or, perhaps more accurately, he is not forcing her to choose between two alternatives, marriage or not-marriage. Then, instead of making a marriage proposal, he makes a love declaration, acknowledging that he knows that he has very little to offer Isabel. As the scene ends, Osmond, using the parasol they are now both holding, draws Isabel to him and gently
kisses her several times. This action is made possible by the earlier fantasy scene, which has told us that, while no one has kissed Isabel, she desires to be kissed, and thus continues Campion’s modernist intervention.

But equally important is the fact that, just prior to the kisses, Osmond has asked Isabel to visit Pansy before Isabel embarks on her trip, a request that is the bridge to the next scene, when Isabel visits Pansy and the film’s second explanation for Isabel’s choice of Osmond is made clear. The scene opens with a view of a lovely garden, into which Isabel walks, talking. Her companion, Pansy, stops exactly where the shadow of the house falls. Isabel, now several yards in front of Pansy, turns, and Pansy explains that her father has told her not to go past the line the shadow makes because she will “Get scorched.” Isabel opens her parasol, saying “Share this,” but Pansy remains immobile, weeping quietly and pathetically. Isabel looks at her keenly, with a look evocative of sudden insight and concern, returns to Pansy, and they walk back into the house.

Based on a similar scene in the novel, Campion’s scene succeeds in dramatizing the importance of Pansy in Isabel’s choice. Here, Isabel recognizes that Pansy needs a protector beyond Osmond, otherwise she may be destined never to enter the garden. The symbolic dynamic is simple enough, just as it is in the novel, but is here furthered by the contrast of Isabel’s white clothing with Pansy’s black clothing; more importantly, and unlike the novel’s scene, in returning to Pansy and then entering the house (although not before glancing significantly back towards the garden) Isabel both acts as Pansy’s protector and enters Osmond’s house, a visual forecast of the narrative’s direction. Thus the film inserts more dramatically than does the novel at the comparative point Pansy’s significance, and once again does so in a specifically modernist intervention via a
psychodynamic reading; as Beth Sharon Ash notes in analyzing the novel, "Like Isabel, Pansy is made the daughter of a dead mother whose absence is preserved; a mother, moreover, who is replaced by a father—one who is himself idealized by his daughter. Pansy and Isabel thus double one another . . ." (130). Indeed, in choosing to entirely elide any reference to Isabel’s immediate family, the film seems pointedly to be encouraging a reading in which, through marriage to Osmond, Isabel steps directly into the roles of much-loved daughter vis-a-vis Osmond, and both sister and mother vis-a-vis Pansy, simultaneously filling three notable absences in her life. And, of course, on a more obvious melodramatic level, the plot of an orphan or semi-orphan protecting another orphan or semi-orphan is quite standard fare.

A second modernist intervention occurs next, in a brief interlude representing the novel’s almost entirely elided grand tour. Against the background of the images of the tour, Osmond’s sexual charm and fascination is shown first by Isabel’s dream of Osmond’s hand encircling her waist while she is dressed in the same costume in which she last saw Pansy; then by Osmond’s repeated line, “I’m absolutely in love with you,” haunting Isabel’s mind; then by her own voice repeating the phrase; then by Osmond appearing in a vision, with the now hypnotic disc spinning round him, followed by a cut to the back of a nude Isabel falling away from Osmond and then a cut to the still-nude Isabel frontally, falling towards Osmond’s hypnotic image. In dramatizing Isabel’s attraction here as a sexual one, the film distills in this segment thoughts that Isabel has in the novel that are spread out over both literal reading time and narrative time, and that thus have a comparatively diffused power versus their power here. Depicting Isabel’s sexuality acknowledges, as Kurt Hochenauer rightly argues, the novel’s “. . . tension
between the passionate Isabel and the inhibited Isabel, [which causes] James’s portrait
to run the risk of becoming a cheap, contrived painting rather than the epitome of the
new literary realism” (19); Bonnie Herron has pointed out that the 1908 revisions James
made to Isabel’s characterization produce a “... sexually charged depiction...” of an
Isabel who is “... more sexually aware...” (132). Thus, in this sequence and the
previous one of her fantasy, Campion brings into clarity and focus an aspect of Isabel
quite present in the novel, as well as more in keeping with a contemporary audience’s
expectations. The film also makes a standard move in setting Isabel’s transformation into
a more fully sexual being in the context of an exotic background (just as Orlando’s
transformation occurred in).

While the previous several scenes have positioned Isabel in a variety of ways as a
victim—of Osmond and Merle’s plot, of her inheritance, of Ralph’s naivete, of Osmond’s
sexual fascination, of her own desire to protect Pansy—the next two, in which she
confronts first Goodwood and then Ralph with her decision, re-establish the tension
between Isabel as victim, and Isabel as agent, by emphasizing her desire for social
agency. Both scenes are typical of domestic melodramas in which women are
interrogated about their choices of marriage partners. The short Goodwood scene focuses
on Isabel’s displeasure that he has come at all and her declaration that she had not
deceived him, sharpening the film’s presentation that Isabel wants a partner to do as she
pleases, not as he pleases. The impact is increased when, unlike their earlier scene in
which Goodwood reaches out on his own and caresses Isabel’s cheek, she offers him her
hand in a ‘to-be-kissed’ gesture; although he lightly grasps her hand with his, as one
might a dancing partner’s, he chooses not to kiss her hand, another display of what
amounts to a battle of wills between them as to who's in charge. When he does not do so, Isabel abruptly withdraws her hand, and Goodwood turns and stalks out of the room, without good-bye, as she asks, as she does in the novel although not at the same moment, “Do you mean you came simply to look at me?” The question is uttered as Goodwood is already exiting, and the timing indicates Isabel’s desire to end the interview on her terms, which Goodwood refuses to do. The effect of eliding almost all of the novel’s dialogue in the parallel scene indicates that Goodwood has indeed come ‘simply to look at’ Isabel, putting her in the object position that she so strongly desires to escape from.

The longer scene with Ralph contrasts sharply with both the Goodwood scene and the scene in the underground chamber. While the Goodwood confrontation occurs in a brightly-lit room, the Ralph scene occurs in a dim stable whose chief architectural feature is a series of iron railings that quite literally foreshadow Isabel’s coming entrapment, her being, as Ralph says, “Put into a cage.” The choice of the dark surroundings is quite consistent, because Goodwood’s desire for Isabel is, if aggressive, quite out in the open, while Ralph’s desire for Isabel has remained hidden, existing on the level of brotherly love and complicated by his illness. As Kidman plays the scene, and appropriately given the film’s progression, she is initially almost coy in her look and in the tone with which she replies to Ralph, “If I like my cage, that needn’t trouble you.” She clearly has not looked at her marriage to Osmond, or rather Osmond himself, as having the negative aspects Ralph expresses in an increasingly anguished way; finally, when he says, as he does in the novel, “But weren’t you meant for something better than to keep guard over the sensibilities of a sterile dilettante?,” Isabel slaps him.
The words and the slap (in the novel, Isabel simply abruptly stands up, and "... they stood for a moment looking at each other is if he had flung down a defiance or an insult" (292), creating much the same situation) serve to release each to a level of honesty not attained up until this moment. Ralph declares that he said what he did because "I love you, but I love without hope," and Isabel goes on to describe Osmond as having "The gentlest, kindest, lightest spirit." The latter shows us, as it does Ralph both in the film and the novel, that Osmond has successfully deluded Isabel; as Ralph thinks to himself in the novel, after her longer defense, "She was wrong, but she believed; she was deluded, but she was dismally consistent" (294). In this sense, both the film and the novel also strongly suggest an Isabel who is simply naive, inexperienced in the ways of life and the ways of devious people, and indeed quite like many melodramatic heroines in these respects. In both, the high irony results from the fact that Isabel judges Osmond only by his outside appearance, failing to realize that the appearance masks a secret; yet she consistently accuses others of poor judgment when they argue that the fineness of her own appearance must indicate a fineness of mind and character.

Ralph's declaration of love becomes the first of what will be the melodramatic revelations that characterize the film's movement towards its end. As the film has done throughout, it places him in the sympathetic position, since he 'loves without hope,' another staple of melodramatic conventions. Consistent with its presentation of an Isabel here concerned with exercising her social agency, however, Isabel makes virtually no response other than questioning Ralph's objectivity in judging her marriage plans; one must wonder whether, had Ralph uttered these words in their scene at the row-house in London, Isabel would have indicated that his love was hardly hopeless. On another level,
however, Ralph’s revelation now, and not then, illustrates the vagaries of timing consistent with melodrama; had he spoken up earlier, his declaration might have had very different results; his speaking up now only hardens Isabel’s resolve to marry Osmond.

The next scene opens with a view of a bright public garden, in which Isabel and Osmond walk arm in arm, preceded by Pansy. The beauty and brightness of the surroundings is the visual marker of Isabel’s continued illusion, an illusion furthered by Osmond’s words that “Loving you has made me better,” and his protestation that, having never attempted to earn a living, or otherwise involve himself in “grubbing and grabbing,” he can hardly be accused of being interested in Isabel’s money. As he has done in all his scenes with Isabel, Malkovich delivers the lines clearly, but without any coarseness to suggest that his feelings aren’t genuine, and it is perhaps at this moment in the film that the viewer might consider that Osmond actually is in love with Isabel. Here again, the casting issue suggests to us that, while Malkovich might have seemed to be reprising his Dangerous Liaisons role in the first scene he appeared in, actors also can work against earlier roles to avoid being stereotyped. However, the film visually undercuts such an optimistic reading in two important ways. The first is another noticeable change in Isabel’s costuming. Having first appeared in solid colors, mostly black, and then in almost all white, her costumes in these scenes alter again to show more color and design. In the Goodwood and Ralph scenes, she wears a solid blue skirt with a complementary over-wrap with subdued colors in wide vertical stripes. The suggestion is that in the intervening year Isabel has become more sophisticated and is able, quite literally, to be and see more than plain black or white. The irony exists in the point that while she now can dress in more than simple black or white, her conceptions of the
world, or at least the people in it, seem not to have altered. In the scene in the garden, Isabel’s dress is light blue, with darker, thin vertical stripes that suggest prison bars, foreshadowing her approaching imprisonment.

The second disturbing event centers on Osmond’s final words of the scene; speaking of Pansy, he says to Isabel that “We’ll amuse ourselves making up some little life for her.” Although they are essentially the same words as Osmond speaks in the novel, the film privileges them by reducing the words that precede them and by letting the words end the scene, investing them with a significance the novel is unable to achieve. Yet the words are key to understanding several important melodramatic elements of both stories. First, in asserting that a life can be ‘made up’ for Pansy, Osmond is also indicating that anyone’s life—his, in this case—can be made up, a suggestion which should shock Isabel but does not. Second, that making up someone’s life should serve to ‘amuse them’ suggests that Pansy will be a mere plaything for them, a suggestion which Isabel also should be shocked by and is not. Finally, the remark serves as another connection between Osmond and Ralph; just as Osmond will amuse himself dreaming of and then making a life for Pansy, Ralph admitted to Isabel that marriage to Osmond was not at all what he had dreamed of for her, and his manipulation of his father’s will was tantamount to making up a life for Isabel, at least in vague outline.

Thus, even though the film makes of Ralph a more sympathetic hero, and of Osmond a less sympathetic villain, it manages to suggest a similarity between them based on each one’s manipulation of others. All of these implications inevitably suggest melodrama, since it is in melodrama that characters are, unknown to themselves, primarily the objects for others to manipulate.
Like the novel, the film now moves forward three years, and the first shot in its third and final movement is striking. For the first time in the film, the camera shows nothing but the sky, against which a flock of small birds wheels and chirps. Like much else in both the film and the novel, however, the effect is contradictory. The sudden opening up of the visual field is a welcome relief in a film that has been dominated by a characteristically melodramatic mise en scene of interiors and severely restricted, even claustrophobic, outside shots, and the birds, if viewed as free spirits in their natural setting, might suggest an Isabel whose spirit has indeed been set free in the intervening years. Yet this is not only a sunless sky but also a gloomy, gray one as well, so the welcome expansion of the visual field is undercut both by its lack of brightness and lack of color.

The plot focus of much of the remainder of the film revolves around Pansy, and whether she will be given leave by Osmond to marry the man she loves, Rosier, or be forced to marry Warburton, who reappears on the scene when he brings Ralph, now in an advanced state of decline, to Rome. However, while this constitutes the novel’s second plot, James continues to focus on Isabel’s consciousness, and the film likewise uses the Pansy plot not as an end in itself, but as a way of highlighting the situation Isabel finds herself in. While the first half of the film included several modernist extensions of James’s already modernist material, the second half of the film is dominated by a sharpening and highlighting of the melodramatic aspects of the novel, and it is those aspects which will be its primary focus from here on.

The second scene in this section quickly captures the domestic world Isabel now exists in. In an immense and ornate Roman mansion, Osmond, in formal wear, moves
purposefully through a series of rooms, directing the activities of several servants preparing for a party. He is serious, brisk, commanding, and clearly in his element in arranging for what we later find is the Osmond’s weekly night in, a night in which looks rather more like anyone else’s annual party. The circumscribed number of fine things in Osmond’s small apartment has increased by a factor of, perhaps, a hundred, so that every shot is filled with fine furniture, fine china, fine cushions, fine silver, fine paintings; indeed, throughout many of the scenes in this part of the film, the camera purposely focuses in on fine objects, creating a sense that Isabel is being smothered not by the weight of several large houses, as she might have been had she married Warburton, but by the density of this one. Few if any of the shots of all these objects are, however, from Isabel’s perspective; it is, rather, Osmond whom we can be certain is responsible for this enormous collection of bibelots. In this sense, Osmond was sincere in his earlier statement that it was not Isabel’s money that he cared for; rather, Osmond cares for fine things, and money is useful only to the extent that it allows one to collect such fine things.

As the scene continues, Isabel enters in the background. She is now coiffed and costumed much as Merle had been earlier, hair elaborately done up on top of and behind her head, her dress a complicated affair of luxurious fabric; no longer does any sense of a natural look attach itself to her as has been the case until now. When Osmond sees her, he asks abruptly, “Where is Pansy?,” without so much as a ‘Good evening” or a “You’re looking lovely, darling,” an immediate sign of his loss of cordiality, much less politeness, in interacting with his wife. Osmond sweeps on, and smoothly and efficiently arranges
the three of them (Pansy now having appeared) to receive their visitors, the two women sitting, he standing between, in a tableau which, repeated every Thursday evening, must seem a living strait-jacket to all but him.

More pointedly than the novel, the film reveals that in the time gap Isabel had a son who died, and thus re-positions her in the film’s final section as a victim: The scene of the Osmond’s night in opens with Isabel, seated at her dressing table, holding the cast of a child’s hand, head bowed over it. Dale Bauer calls this brief glimpse of Isabel mourning “One of the most compelling scenes in Campion’s Portrait . . .” (194), and it is compelling exactly because it is visualized. In the novel, the only follow-up to Merle’s revelation to Rosier of Isabel’s dead child is “She [Isabel] had lost her child; that was a sorrow, but it was a sorrow she scarcely spoke of; there was more to say about it than she could say to Ralph. It belonged to the past, moreover; it had occurred six months before and she had already laid aside the tokens of grief” (330). In visualizing early in the second half of the film, in this small way, Isabel’s continuing grief over her dead child, the film signifies that it will now extend the melodramatic aspects of its source, which it continues to do.

As the Pansy plot develops in this scene and later, another way the melodrama is heightened is by making Rosier younger than he would appear to be in the novel (in which he is a few years older than Isabel). While it highlights the age difference between not only Pansy and Warburton, but also Rosier and Warburton as well, and thus serves to sharpen our focus on the differences between the two men, Rosier’s youth in the film also serves another purpose, namely to draw the parallel between Isabel’s choice to marry the much-older Osmond, and Pansy’s ‘choice’ between Rosier and Warburton. Both of these
results further the greater melodrama the film achieves at this stage, the first by emphasizing the real differences in age between Pansy’s suitors, the second by reminding us that, should Pansy choose Warburton, she may be making the same mistake that Isabel made in choosing Osmond. The latter impact is heightened by a slight but significant change in wording in this scene; when Isabel tells Rosier that Osmond will not think him rich enough to marry Pansy, Rosier replies, “Ah, well, you would know that.” While Isabel is offended in both the film and the novel, where Rosier’s line is “Ah yes, he has proved that [his interest in money]!” (316), the film’s alteration to refer to Isabel’s knowledge, not Osmond’s action, ties the two situations together by equating Osmond’s motive for his own marriage to Isabel with his motives in orchestrating whom Pansy will marry. Finally, the scene also furthers the novel’s melodrama by featuring an Osmond who reverts to the coarser melodramatic villain we saw in his first scene with Madame Merle; when he refers to Rosier as a “donkey” to Merle, as he also does in the novel, he is then heard braying as the camera shifts to record Merle’s response.

A short scene of Isabel visiting a now much more invalid Ralph follows, and likewise extends the melodrama of the novel, already present merely because Ralph is now dying. The central difference is that it is in conversation with both Isabel and Warburton that Ralph announces he’ll not be going on to Sicily as he’d planned, because the journey is too much for him, and that, should he die in Rome, Isabel will bury him. In the novel, a similar conversation occurs, but between only Ralph and Warburton, so that the film highlights, beyond just visually, Isabel’s more complete knowledge of Ralph’s condition. The scene also foreshadows a certain predictive agency on Isabel’s part; in the novel, Ralph says to Warburton, “But I shall not die here” (333), while in the
film the words "You shall not die here" are given to Isabel in this scene. The effect is a transference of agency from Ralph to Isabel which effectively parallels the transference of agency from Osmond to Isabel regarding Pansy's marriage that will occur in the next scene.

That scene reproduces the conversation between Isabel and Osmond that occurs in the novel's Chapter XLI, and ends with Osmond leaving Pansy's marriage to Warburton "... in your [Isabel's] hands" (354). While the film follows both the transfer of agency and the dialogue of the novel, however, it much extends the melodrama of the scene in two ways. First, as soon as Osmond brings up Warburton's attentions to Pansy, an obviously distraught Isabel breaks a china cup (conveyed through the sound of the cup breaking); second, throughout the scene Isabel's eyes are filled with tears, and, as the scene progresses, she continues to fight back those tears, not entirely successfully. By the end of the scene, she indeed looks as red-eyed as if she had been fully sobbing throughout. It is not, however, Isabel's tears alone that do the melodramatic work of the scene. Rather, it is the fact that Osmond so purposely refuses to acknowledge Isabel's emotional state in any beyond the most distant way. After she breaks the teacup, he asks the servants to excuse them; alone a few moments later, he remarks, as he does in the novel, "Your temper isn't good"; just before he leaves, he acknowledges Isabel's tears by lightly brushing them away with his fingers. The effect is quite powerful, perhaps even horrible; Osmond plainly sees the emotional distress Isabel is in, yet does absolutely nothing to discover why she is in this distress, much less attempt to comfort her. In the novel's scene, there is very little hint that Isabel is distressed; she speaks of Pansy almost as dispassionately as Osmond himself does. The result of Campion's version is a much
more human Isabel, a more melodramatic scene, and an even less sympathetic Osmond. Campion’s portrait of Isabel makes her transition into a more deeply emotional character a more gradual change, and perhaps a more believable one as well, than the novel’s. This is an Isabel who still mourns for her dead child, who can be hurt by Rosier’s suggestion that she is aware that Osmond’s attraction to her was based on her money, and who is distraught that Pansy may be forced into a loveless (if more congenial than her own) marriage.

Despite the preparations for the new, more melodramatic Isabel the film makes, Campion is fully aware that Isabel may still be rightly viewed as a divided self. Indeed, the change in Isabel’s costuming and hairstyle noted earlier continues to remind us that she has made herself over, at least superficially, to conform to Merle’s and Osmond’s notions of propriety. Significantly, then, in her first scene with Ralph in the film’s final section, Isabel is wearing, for the first time since the scenes in England, a solid black high-collared dress. The significance, however, relates not to a more deeply emotional Isabel—Isabel was not deeply emotional early in the film—but rather to a less deluded Isabel. But the film, like the novel, refuses to present this Isabel in a simplified manner. Ralph’s assertion that Warburton’s real interest is still in Isabel, and not Pansy, is a double revelation to Isabel. First, it reveals that even kindly people, such as Warburton, may falsely present themselves. Second, and equally as important, Isabel’s own complicity in being deluded is revealed. In the novel, the moment’s significance explains Ralph’s comment about the ‘voice that he had never heard on her lips’; in the film, the viewer has seen the more gradual emergence of the new Isabel.
This two-sided Isabel emerges forcefully in the next scene, when Isabel discusses with Pansy the marriage possibilities. While her words carefully encourage Pansy to seriously consider Warburton’s suit as an attractive one, and carefully avoid endorsing Rosier’s suit, the previous three scenes have made it increasingly clear that Isabel’s sympathies are with Rosier. For the first time in the film, then, Isabel is herself hiding her true feelings. Campion reflects Isabel’s ‘two-facedness’ by literally doubling the image of her face during part of this conversation; if the effect may be seen as heavy-handed, it simply visually stresses the novel’s words. In James, before they begin speaking, Isabel realizes that “... if she [Isabel] desired the assurance [that Pansy doesn’t care for Warburton] she felt herself by no means at liberty to provoke it” (390), and, later, she “... hypocritically cried” (392) that she does not admit Rosier’s right to think of Pansy as a lover. Thus, James provides in words what the film literally visualizes, that Isabel is being purposefully deceptive. And, in an extremely subtle touch, Isabel’s dress in this scene is used even more fully to reveal meaning. First, she has reverted to an even more sophisticated look, wearing a light-colored lace-topped dress with significant decolletage, indicating here that the role she is playing is one which either Merle or Osmond would themselves play. Second, Pansy is wearing a strikingly similar dress, the first time the two have been mirrored through their costumes, signifying the similarity of Pansy’s current situation with Isabel’s former one.

The film moves quickly on; Warburton, having taken the hint that his own interest in Pansy is less than noble and that she has no real interest in him, announces that he has been called to England in the next scene. The immensity of the Osmond’s mansion is on conspicuous display, as are Osmond’s poor manners; the latter is perhaps a misstep in the
film, because, while Osmond's coarseness has been suggested in two scenes with Madame Merle, it has not displayed itself until now with others. In the novel Warburton "... sat there for a quarter of an hour ..." (396) before Osmond excuses himself, while in the film Osmond excuses himself almost immediately. The next scene, which reproduces the conversation between Isabel and Osmond after Warburton takes his leave, at the end of Chapter XLVI, further coarsens Osmond and confirms the film's presentation of him as a purer melodramatic villain. In it, he first sits Isabel up on a mound of decorative cushions (which he attempts to do, although unsuccessfully, in the novel); he then confronts Isabel with what he perceives as her treachery in arranging Warburton's retreat. When she twice answers his interrogatories unsatisfactorily, he slaps her.

While the slaps are consistent with the Osmond the film has presented in two earlier scenes with Merle, and can be read as an extension of his entirely uncaring attitude towards Isabel in their previous scene together, they do strike a jarring note. If the Osmond of the novel may be (in the most positive view) considered tragic in his own right, the film's Osmond is now a pure melodramatic villain, a narrative position only emphasized when he proceeds to trip Isabel by stepping on the train of her skirt as she leaves the room. The following interaction, in which Osmond butts/nuzzles Isabel’s face and she responds to the physical attention by seeming to almost kiss him, further emphasizes the film’s attempt to update its source; Isabel is so desperate for physical contact that even violent contact is better than none.

A brief but notable scene follows, expressed entirely visually, and quite arresting. An extreme long shot of the rolling lowlands near Rome reveals a woman walking in a
grove of trees. Coming mid-way through the Rome section, the shot is visually paired with the shot of the birds that opens the section on the basis of the long shot itself, the prominence of nature, and its visual open-ness in an otherwise melodramatically claustrophobic film. A cut to a long shot reveals the woman to be Isabel, dressed as she was in the previous scene, breathing heavily and apparently distressed. But as she walks, slowly, her breathing becomes more regular, and she places her hand on her chest, as if to calm her wildly beating heart. Symbolically the scene is a key one in the film; whether Isabel’s anxiety is to be read as concern about Osmond’s physical attack on her, or as continued sexual arousal, or both, is less important than the fact that she regains control of that anxiety, and, not surprisingly, regains that control in a far more natural environment than she has been pictured in during the Rome section of the film. And, in keeping with the film’s presentation of Isabel and not unlike the novel’s treatment of Isabel in its final sections, it is clearly her emotions that Isabel is gaining control of, not her intellectual understanding or consciousness of the situation she finds herself in.

Three short scenes follow, the first establishing that Ralph is leaving Rome to return to England, the second a highly abbreviated version of Isabel and Goodwood’s conversation in Chapter XLVIII, and the third Isabel’s and Ralph’s parting before his departure. The last is notable because it shows Isabel’s new resolve; as she does in the novel, she says, “If you should send for me I’d come” (419). In both, Ralph responds by saying, “Your husband won’t consent to that” (419), and in both, Isabel asserts that she will indeed come if he should call. Although neither James’s scene nor Campion’s is freighted with heavy symbolism, this is the scene in both where Isabel regains her agency to act on her own—or rather, where she determines that she plans to act on her own.
directly against Osmond’s wishes. While Isabel’s role in preventing Pansy’s marriage to Warburton was duplicitous—she lived by the letter of Osmond’s words, but not the spirit of them—going to Ralph’s deathbed would be an open violation of both Osmond’s words and the spirit of his words.

The next four scenes return to the Pansy plot. Merle, returned to Rome, pleads with Isabel to “Let us have him [Warburton],” prompting Isabel to wonder what Merle’s interest can possibly be, although she does not yet have the revelation, as she does in the novel, that “Madame Merle had married her” (430). Merle then confronts Osmond, in a scene more superficially melodramatic than the novel’s because of her tears and outbursts; and Rosier next reappears, announcing that he has sold his own collection of bibelots and is now rich enough to be considered as a husband to Pansy. True to her word to Osmond, however, Isabel rushes Pansy away, so that all Pansy and Rosier can do is see each other briefly between characteristically barred-off spaces.

These scenes prepare the way for the film’s culminating scenes in a somewhat different way than the novel does in terms of the Pansy plot. The next scene in the film is a family dinner at the Osmond’s with Isabel, Osmond, and the Countess Gemini; Isabel inquires about Pansy’s absence, and Osmond tells her that he has sent her back to the convent. The effect of eliding any intervening scenes makes Osmond’s action far more precipitous, mean, and melodramatic than the novel’s handling of the same series of events; here the effect is that Osmond has heard that Pansy has seen, from a distance, Rosier, and immediately banishes her. In the novel, a week passes between the Rosier and Pansy meeting, and then Pansy tells Isabel that Osmond has decided to send her to the convent. This difference between the two versions is crucial to understanding their
differing approaches to the same raw material; the film's effect is to deliver a series of
sledgehammer blows to Isabel unseparated by the passage of time. In a similar move, the
telegram announcing Ralph’s deteriorated state arrives in the next scene; although Isabel
is dressed in a different gown than the one she had dinner in, no other separation marks
the scene, so the viewer is under the impression that these three scenes have all happened
in the course of one afternoon and evening. It is not that James’s version substantially
distances these events in terms of reading time; rather, they are distanced by narrative
time, while Campion’s film sharply reduces this distance, and, in doing so, exponentially
increases the impact of this series of emotional blows on Isabel.

Isabel’s receiving the telegram is marked in a noticeable visual way; in the course
of her taking the telegram and reading it, and then rushing through the corridors to
Osmond’s room, not a single full shot of Isabel is shown. The technique increases for a
few moments the mystery of what the message contains, versus a more traditional
handling, which would have shown the telegram and then a reaction shot of Isabel’s face.
Yet it also serves to emphasize that Isabel’s world has become a partial one, a world in
which what is important—Pansy and Ralph, for example—has been removed. The
tracking shot of the flounced train of Isabel’s skirt as she rushes down the corridors
conveys not just the speed at which she moves, but also emphasizes that she is
fragmented and incomplete, both on the physical level, and, as will be shortly discovered,
the knowledge level as well.

The confrontation with Osmond about her journey to Ralph’s side follows, and is
played very much as the novel’s scene is, although considerable parts of the dialogue are
elided. The central feature of the scene that differs is, as before in the scene in which
they discuss Isabel’s role in encouraging Warburton’s pursuit of Pansy, Isabel’s heightened emotions, expressed through her tears and her distraught facial expressions. That Isabel was feeling emotion in the novel’s scene is evident in words (“his wife’s quick emotion” (446)), but, not surprisingly given the change in Isabel that the novel asserts, she neither cries nor is described as looking tragic or distraught. Here again, then, Campion’s Isabel is far more emotionally expressive and the effect is both to humanize the novel’s Isabel—who would not be crying at the news that her best friend is dying—and to heighten the obvious melodramatic impact.

Much like the novel, however, Campion again portrays Isabel as becoming a divided self in response to Osmond’s argument that she should not journey to England. In both, Isabel’s statement to Ralph that she would come if sent for, and her intention to do so when she enters Osmond’s room, is blocked or parried by Osmond’s objection that for her doing so would dishonor their marriage, since, even if they are unhappy, they “must accept the consequences of our actions” (446). As Isabel leaves Osmond’s room, Campion again briefly doubles the image of Isabel’s face, emphasizing that her mind itself is divided, wishing to fly to Ralph, but as equally wishing not to be accused of dishonoring her marriage vows.

The film continues to follow the novel in giving to the Countess Gemini the role of revealing that Osmond’s honor has long ago been compromised by his affair with Merle and his covering up of Pansy’s maternal lineage. Again their conversation is much abbreviated, even more so than in the previous scene with Osmond, and Isabel’s continued tears, distraught facial expressions, and wail and bodily response to the revelation that Merle is Pansy’s mother give the film a far more melodramatic tone than
the novel. However, to have given Isabel’s own desire to see Ralph the primary agency here would have moved the story, or at least Isabel’s independent agency, far too close to current times. Thus, although the film is more pointed in revealing this news, and does so in a more melodramatic manner, in both versions it is the truth of Osmond’s dishonor that sets Isabel free, at least in this situation, to act.

In the next three scenes, however, the film offers some interesting variations from the novel. The first is the meeting between Isabel and Merle that occurs before Isabel visits Pansy. Reproducing very little of the conversation between the two, the film poses Merle standing next to a wall-sized image of Christ on the cross. The shot is initially a deep-focus one, with Isabel screen front and right, the Christ image screen back and in the middle, and Merle also screen back, but left. One clear symbolic implication is that both these women have been sacrifices; Merle has sacrificed her chance for being a public maternal figure to Pansy, while Isabel’s happiness has been sacrificed to ensure Osmond’s security and acquisitiveness and Pansy’s marriage prospects. But part way through the scene, the camera moves in, so that Isabel is lost from the shot and only Merle and the enormous Christ image remain, mirroring the upcoming claim that Merle makes, and Isabel does not disagree with, that it is Merle who is the unhappier of the two.

Whatever the merits of that issue, which neither the film nor the novel debate, there is a certain lack of subtlety in the visual presence of the Christ figure, unless it is read in an ironic sense, which is, I think, Campion’s intention. It is true that this story in both forms can be seen as centering around the melodramatic nexus of sacrifice to a very great extent. Beyond the sacrifices noted above, Isabel’s refusal to sacrifice her independence results in her not accepting either Goodwood’s or Warburton’s proposals;
Ralph's refusal to consider marriage to Isabel is motivated by his refusal to sacrifice her to his illness; Isabel's refusal to sacrifice her notion that people are at heart honest leads to her failure to perceive that she has been the object of a plot, not a love object. The irony, however, is that while all these are indeed sacrifices, they are motivated by decidedly selfish or egoistic reasons, or, at best, notions of social mores. Read in this light, the very enormity of and focus on the Christ image makes of the sacrifices made by these characters something incredibly trivial, superficial, and meaningless. Yet a larger insight looms here, an insight into the entire body of James's works; James is surely one of the first generations of English-language authors, and perhaps the first major writer, in whose works God is noticeably absent, and Campion's sudden presentation of and focus on the Christ image points out this lack in an extremely powerful way.

If the enormous Christ image is a significant addition and ironic commentary on both this story and James, the next change represents a major subtraction that sets up the film's more modernist, open-ended conclusion. In the novel, Isabel first promises Pansy that she will not desert her, then actually says, "'Yes—I'll come back'" (463). In the film, both statements are elided, and nothing else Isabel says in the short scene between them indicates any promise on Isabel's part either to not desert Pansy or to actually return to Rome. As we will shortly see, these words in the novel are crucial to interpreting its ending.

The next scene, between Isabel and Merle after Isabel and Pansy's conversation, might be subtitled, "Merle's Revenge," for she reveals to Isabel that Ralph is responsible for Isabel's having the money that made her an attractive match for Osmond. The film's scene is staged outdoors in a driving rain, another touch of heightened melodrama, the
rain standing in for tears. However, the staging is also appropriately considered in light of it being the third scene between Isabel and Merle staged in the rain. As will be recalled, one of the earliest scenes between the two was a walk in the English rain; indeed, the novel indicates that their friendship grew during “A period of bad weather” (162). The film continues by setting an earlier scene between the two, in which Merle tells Isabel that she has “Everything” to do with her, also in the rain, albeit a light one; and this final one occurs in a real downpour. The rain, which nurtured their relationship initially, now is associated with its ending. Significantly, these are the only three scenes with rain in the film, so that the rain becomes associated in particular with the relationship between Isabel and Merle.

A brief scene of Isabel riding in a train features her doubly-exposed face again; just as notably, her hair style is now the same as it was before her marriage to Osmond, an obvious representation of the emergence, at least for the moment, of the old Isabel. Met by Henrietta at the station, with little further transition, Isabel is suddenly seen in the piano room at Gardencourt, while the same piano music that Merle had been playing at their first meeting plays on the soundtrack. The camera looks down on her from a relatively high angle, and the image, as several earlier ones were, is noticeably tilted, this time left of vertical. Both the room and the piano music connect Ralph’s death to Mr. Touchett’s, and rightly so, since it was that event and the meeting with Merle in this very room that sealed Isabel’s fate. This effect is emphasized both by the design on Isabel’s dress, which is again pin-striped, suggesting prison bars, and by having her stop to look at herself before a mirror. In the earlier scene, her face had been seen in a mirror, but she had not been looking at her own reflection, while here she is actively looking, suggesting
a self-awareness that the earlier Isabel had not possessed. Thus, in going to Ralph’s side, Isabel has regained her own agency, and the shot of her possessing herself in her own gaze, as she did much earlier when she balanced the candelabra, as well as the reversion to her natural hairstyle, strongly signal that she has regained her position as subject, not object.

The actual visualization of Isabel’s copious tears and tortured facial expressions as she goes to Ralph on his deathbed heighten the scene’s melodramatic impact, which is not inconsiderable in the novel to begin with. But several touches the film brings to the scene alter its impact in important ways. First, the lead-in to this scene in the novel is strongly mediated, initially by several pages of Isabel interacting with Henrietta and Mr. Bantling, then by several pages of her interactions with Mrs. Touchett. Both include news of marriage, specifically Henrietta and Mr. Bantling’s and Warburton’s and, as Mrs. Touchett says, “‘Lady Flora, Lady Felicia, something of that sort’” (474). Whatever James’s intent was, this tying up of very minor loose ends serves very little purpose; in moving much more quickly to this scene, the film achieves a more focused dramatic intensity.

Second, while the dialogue in the scene is from the novel, some of the novel’s dialogue is elided; one important elision is Ralph’s assertion that, even though Osmond considered marrying Isabel only because of her wealth, he was indeed in love with her when they married. Removing this language is in keeping with the film’s presentation of an Osmond who is several levels more villainous than the novel presents him, and continues its sharpened focus on more clearly melodramatic villains and heroes. It also serves the opposite purpose; the novel tends to excuse Ralph for his mis-judgment in
directing his father's money to Isabel, because at certain moments, such as this, it
indicates that Osmond did indeed love Isabel. The film is at once easier on Ralph in
presenting him as less of a spectator hoping to vicariously live through Isabel's life, but
harder on him in not allowing him the out of declaring that Osmond did indeed love
Isabel at the moment of their marriage.

Third, and consistent with the elisions in the earlier conversation with Pansy, the
novel's entire passage concerning Isabel's future is elided. In the novel, this conversation
begins with Ralph asking,

"It's all over then between you?"
"On no; I don't think anything's over."
"Are you going back to him?" Ralph gasped.
"I don't know—I can't tell. I shall stay here as long as I may. I don't
want to think—I needn't think. I don't care for anything but you, and that's
enough for the present . . ." (478)

None of this conversation is present in the film, which, along with the elision of the lines
in which Isabel promises Pansy she'll return to Rome, lead to a much more open ending
than the novel does. However, as will be shortly argued, these lines do not in any way
'prove' that Isabel's intent is to return to Rome; rather, they suggest that her relationship
with Osmond is yet to be over, just as her relationship with Ralph was not over because
of her marriage to Osmond. By not stating these lines, the film brings to greater life the
novel's implicit existential quality, and allows viewers to imagine that Isabel can indeed,
as Osmond has said to her earlier, "Go anywhere . . . be anything . . ."

Fourth, and perhaps the most obvious alteration, in the film Isabel literally gets
into the bed with Ralph, and, in the last few moments of the scene, kisses him in very
much the same way a lover might, and has those kisses returned. This visual treatment is
coupled with the absence of the novel's scene's last spoken line, which is Isabel saying,
"Oh my brother" (479). Having already noted Bell's argument that the novel presents Ralph as Isabel's most appropriate partner, arguing about the faithfulness of the film's depiction of that possibility in ways that go beyond the novel is not necessary here. Rather, the film very successfully complicates the novel's ending. While the novel conveys Ralph's objections to a marriage with Isabel, it never directly confronts any potential attraction of Isabel to Ralph and the barriers she may see to such a union; as noted earlier, Isabel herself brings up the question, and Mr. Touchett clearly sees the arrangement as quite natural. Campion reads the novel as one in which the repressed love affair is central, and the fact that her film acknowledges as much at its ending should hardly be a surprise. Are other readings possible? Of course, including that Isabel's most desired love object is Merle. That Campion's film must generally choose one somewhat coherent, if not exclusive, approach, is the result of a difference in industrial reception and success, not of some essential alteration of story line.

Perhaps the most perfectly realized scene in the film is the meeting between Isabel and Goodwood after Ralph's funeral. Isabel is wandering in a snow-clad landscape, muttering to herself about being 'adored,' which was Ralph's last word to her. Kidman's acting conveys perfectly both Isabel's attraction towards and shrinking from Goodwood's attentions, an approach-avoidance situation that James conveys in the long melodramatic quote about Isabel's response to Goodwood's kiss, noted earlier. Isabel's desire for this kiss, and simultaneous repugnance to it, are beautifully illustrated by Kidman's acting here, and, much as in the novel, she has no choice but to run away from it. Here Campion makes her last modernist intervention. In the film, Isabel runs away from the kiss and towards Gardencourt, where she finds the doors locked against her
entry. She turns away from the door, and the film ends in a freeze-frame of Isabel in front of the doors. In the novel, when she puts her hand on the latch, “She had not known where to turn; but she knew now. There was a very straight path” (490). Two days later, Henrietta reports to Goodwood that Isabel has left for Rome. The difference is substantial. In the film, Isabel has not promised Pansy that she will return to Rome, nor has she indicated to Ralph that her relationship with Osmond will continue, both of which she has done in the novel. Isabel in the film ends, like Orlando, in a suspended state; for Orlando, the suspension is a better state, because she has just published her poem. For Isabel, her suspended state is far less positive. The film’s choice to lock the doors of Gardencourt is crucial, because it signifies that Isabel cannot go backwards, and stay at Gardencourt forever, as Ralph suggests. Like the novel, she also runs away from Goodwood yet again, so he is no more of an option in either than he ever was.

Yet just where the film puts Isabel at its end versus the novel’s end is more a matter of emphasis than of essence, and again a matter of Campion’s subtle extensions to, rather than disruptions of, the novel. At the novel’s end, Henrietta reports to Goodwood that Isabel “. . . this morning . . . started for Rome” (490). To what end is left for readers to decide, and different readers have decided quite differently. For its time, James’s novel ended on a very ambiguous note, leaving the fallout from Isabel’s decision to go to England and the potential of her rescuing Pansy as important but unresolved issues. In eliding her commitment to not desert, and perhaps even rescue, Pansy, the film ends with an even greater ambiguity than the novel, and so embraces an even more powerfully modernist, and specifically existential ending, since it seems to suggest that Isabel’s existence itself after the pains she has suffered is enough for closure. The
answers are easy in neither case; my suggestion would be that Isabel's return to her plain black dress and freer hairstyle, and her possession of her own gaze in the mirror, signify in the film that she will return to being the freer spirit she was earlier in the film, but a freer spirit whose knowledge of human frailty and dishonesty will make her far more aware of the motives of others.

No doubt in eliding much of James, Campion's film loses some subtlety; to its credit, it also loses some of the more contradictory aspects of James' novel. In important respects, the film ends up sharpening James' work, particularly its modernist qualities, and enhances the melodramatic aspects of the novel; it makes of Isabel a more human heroine, introduces several interesting visual elements, and opens up even further an already ambiguous ending. Just as James himself was attempting to push the boundaries of the realist novel, Campion's film is trying to push the boundaries of mainstream film melodrama beyond the level of Terms of Endearment, Titanic, and the like. In this case, the value of the adaptation is that, like its source, it refuses to step over the boundary into full-blown melodrama, while acknowledging at the same time that a realist work can also be infused with melodramatic influences. If Linda Williams's outline of mainstream films is accurate, Portrait, like its source, refuses both the "paroxysm of pathos" and the "variants of rescue, chase, and fight" (58), and thus may indicate that a far more realist approach to melodramatic film is possible within the mainstream tradition.

But what of the film's relationship to the heritage tradition? Like Orlando, the film's mise en scene and costuming may lull viewers into considering it part of the Merchant-Ivory tradition. However, the film's general sense of claustrophobia and Campion's noticeably disruptive camera work in the last half are quite uncharacteristic of
heritage cinema. In addition, Isabel reaches no point of comfortable stasis by film's end, and whatever nostalgia there is for a time past is seriously compromised by the film's presentation of the scheming Merle and villainous Osmond. At the same time, however, the film occupies a somewhat complicated stance to heritage film in that its ending, like the novel's, and like melodrama's, yearns for a pre-lapsarian world, although this world is occupied by the displaced Americans of Gardencourt, and not represented primarily by a strong native English presence. The film's primary characters, like the novel's, are Americans, Americans whose responses to Europe represent both the best of worlds (the Touchetts) and the worst (Merle and Osmond). Thus, the film's narrative and denouement, quite unlike the conventional heritage film, emphasize tension and discord, not peace and harmony.
CHAPTER 5

MRS. DALLOWAY AND THE THEMATICS OF LOSS

Much as both Orlando and both Portraits, in their own ways, strike fragile narrative balances between a characteristically melodramatic loss and a non-melodramatic element (a corresponding gain in the case of Orlando, and knowledge in the case of Portrait), the two Mrs. Dalloways achieve a similar but different balance. In both, melodramatic loss is the dominant narrative trait, but that loss is in a dynamic balance with the non-melodramatic stylistics of modernist technique. Initially, in turning to Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway and Marleen Gorris’s adaptation, we may well feel on much more solid ground, at least when it comes to the source text, than was the case with either Woolf’s Orlando or James’s Portrait. Unlike Orlando, Mrs. Dalloway is unquestionably one of Woolf’s most canonized and most purely modernist texts, and its narrative is squarely within the realist mode, at least as modernist practice understands that mode. Unlike Portrait, in which character motivations are frequently ambiguous and significant narrative events are elided or referred to in off-hand ways, Mrs. Dalloway offers us characters who are, if at times frighteningly ignorant and patriarchal, perhaps even less than usually scheming and never nefarious, and its narrative appears to include all the important events germane to the characters’ current situations.
Indeed, compared to either *Orlando* or *Portrait*, a summary of *Mrs. Dalloway* highlights its classic simplicity of structure. The dramatized action of the novel occurs entirely in an eighteen-hour period on a day in June, 1923, between 10:00 a.m. and 3:00 a.m., the day that Clarissa Dalloway and her husband Richard, a member of Parliament, are giving their annual party. In the course of the day, Clarissa’s thoughts range over a wide variety of topics: the party; her daughter; her decision more than thirty years earlier to reject another suitor in favor of Richard; her life with Richard; the suitor, Peter Walsh, and their friend Sally Seton, whom she hasn’t seen for years; and a myriad of other topics more briefly registered.

While Clarissa’s thoughts and actions are the focal point of the novel, the thoughts and actions of two other characters are also significant. The second is Peter himself, who has just returned, for a brief visit, from his government position in India; like Clarissa, he too is thinking about their long-ago romance and his own romantic life since then. The third is Septimus Warren Smith, a World War I veteran suffering from shell-shock, and particularly the loss in battle of his friend Evans; Septimus’s wife Rezia tries to comfort him throughout the day, and the novel also reveals her thoughts about her husband, his doctors, and their life.

To this central group of characters whose thoughts form the backbone of the novel, scores of other more or less minor characters whose thoughts are also revealed in anywhere from less than a full sentence to several pages are added. The thoughts of all the characters, including the principals, are revealed as they go about doing, with two exceptions, quite mundane activities. Mrs. Dalloway visits a flower shop in the morning, mends the dress for her party, visits with Peter; Peter walks through the park and then,
later, to his hotel; Richard has lunch with a politically influential woman; Clarissa’s
daughter, Elizabeth, and her tutor Miss Kilman go on a brief shopping trip. The
exceptions are both centered on Septimus; first, he and Rezia visit a specialist, Dr.
Bradshaw, to consult about Septimus’s condition; then, some three-quarters of the way
through the novel, Septimus commits suicide rather than submit to the treatment regimen
Bradshaw has proposed for him. Bradshaw’s mentioning of the incident when he arrives
at the party gives rise to an extended meditation on Clarissa’s part, which serves to tie the
two plot lines together in an intellectual/emotional space, although not an actual one.

Comparing Mrs. Dalloway to both Orlando and Portrait on certain shared aspects
is rewarding not only because of what the comparison continues to reveal about the
important similarities between Woolf and James, but also because of what it reveals
about the progress of melodrama and modernism. While both Portrait and Orlando are
bildungsromans, Mrs. Dalloway breaks away from that mold in both its compression of
narrative time into less than a day and its examination of two of the main characters,
Clarissa and Peter, in what are certainly not their formative years. However, these
characters’ focus on the past, and in particular at a point in the past that was during their
formative years, ties the novel back to the bildungsroman, as does both Clarissa’s and
Peter’s continuing belief in the possibility of personal happiness. In keeping with the
novel’s greater realism than either Orlando or Portrait, no fairy godmother appears to
magically enable any of the central characters; yet many critics have perceived, in the
coming together of the entire novel at Clarissa’s party, a certain magical quality. J. Hillis
Miller, for example, notes that “... Mrs. Dalloway has the form of an All Souls’ Day in
which Peter Walsh, Sally Seton, and the rest rise from the dead to come to Clarissa’s party” (190); here again, then, the novel both deviates from but yearns back to *Orlando* and *Portrait*.

That pattern of difference and similarity continues in other important aspects of comparison among the three novels. While Orlando and Isabel are significantly transformed in exotic settings, any transformation of the main characters in *Mrs. Dalloway* is much more difficult to be sure of, even in the case of Septimus. Yet at the same time, the main characters in the course of the novel seem in important ways to come to terms with their lives, or rather, both metaphorically and literally, the loss of those lives, even if that resolution leads, in Septimus’s case, to death. Gender also remains an important topic of this novel through its presentation of the Clarissa-Sally relationship, Septimus’s relationship with Evans, and its treatment of Miss Kilman. And if the novel does not deal specifically with the Victorian era’s pressures on women to marry, marriage is a central concern for both Clarissa and Peter. Much like Orlando and Isabel, who struggle to assert their identities as conscious subjects, so too do Clarissa and Septimus, both within a context that is leavened with contrasting cultural values. Indeed, Susan Squier goes so far as reading the novel as “… exploring the roots of war and sexual oppression in the sexually polarized society of early London” (93), and concludes that Septimus shows “… that such polarized sex roles and limitations on female activity and male passivity breed military aggression” (110), a reading that surely brings to the forefront thematic concerns shared with both *Orlando* and *Portrait*.

In these ways, then, *Mrs. Dalloway* does have strong connections to both *Orlando* and *Portrait*. However, when we turn to its potential for melodrama, it would seem to be
a far less promising source for adaptation than Portrait, and it certainly contains none of
the fantastic qualities present in Orlando that would make it attractive to the film-maker.
While Portrait is rife with traditional melodramatic situations, beginning with its
orphaned Isabel and ending with a series of very nearly exaggerated melodramatic set-
pieces, Mrs. Dalloway has only two significant, traditionally melodramatic situations,
Septimus’s condition and ultimate suicide, and the meeting of former lovers. Yet the
novel is undeniably infused with melodrama well beyond both those contexts, and quite
from its start. Clarissa’s first memory of the past is of herself, at eighteen, “. . . feeling as
she did, standing there at the open window, that something awful was about to happen
. . .” (3). As she walks towards the flower shop early in the novel, she thinks to herself
that “. . . she had always had the feeling that it was very, very dangerous to live even one
day” (11). Likewise Maisie Johnson, a minor character who asks directions of Septimus
and Rezia, thinks to herself about them, “. . . the girl started and jerked her hand, and the
man—he seemed awfully odd; quarrelling, perhaps; parting for ever, perhaps . . .” (38).
Much later, when Elizabeth and Miss Kilman go off on their shopping trip, Clarissa,
“With a sudden impulse, with a violent anguish, for this woman was taking her daughter
from her, Clarissa leant over the bannisters and cried out, ‘Remember the party!
Remember our party tonight!’” (191). Awful things about to happen, life being full of
danger, parting forever, sudden impulse, violent anguish, and women stealing other
women’s daughters are the emotional responses and actions of melodrama, but they are
not traditionally associated with the most mundane of situations—going to a flower shop,
asking directions, seeing one’s daughter off on a short shopping trip. Likewise, the novel
approaches melodrama’s positive counterpart, romance, in much the same way: Early in
the novel, Peter Walsh, after his visit to Clarissa, follows a woman he happens to see in
the street, thinking to himself, “There was colour in her cheeks; mockery in her eyes; he
was an adventurer, reckless, he thought, swift, daring, indeed . . . a romantic buccaneer”
(80).

Peter quickly realizes that his feeling is “. . . made up, as one makes up the better
part of life, he thought—making oneself up; making her up; creating an exquisite
amusement, and something more” (81). Through Peter’s thoughts, Woolf puts her finger
on the pulse of melodrama as modernism transforms it: It is ‘made up, as one makes up
the better part of life.’ In the hands of the classic modernists, melodrama is no longer
caused by a situation that inherently leads to an emotional response, but rather an
emotional response is affixed to any situation, even the most quotidian, that presents
itself at the appropriate moment. Thus Clarissa, already uncertain of her relationship
with her daughter, infuses Miss Kilman’s taking Elizabeth shopping with an extremity of
emotional value far beyond its actual potential, and Peter, after seeing the woman who
rejected him more than thirty years earlier, makes his shadowing of a pretty girl into a
romantic adventure, starring himself as a buccaneer on the high seas of love.

The connection between Mrs. Dalloway’s handling of melodrama and Portrait’s,
in particular, however, needs to be made clearer in order to fully understand how classic
modernism’s approach to melodrama alters in its treatment from James to Woolf. Mrs.
Dalloway in no way repeats Portrait, but does refine certain of its melodramatic aspects.
Isabel was trapped into a marriage; she lost a child; her best male friend and possibly
most appropriate lover’s fatal illness prevents their marriage and his death disrupts her
own marriage; her step-daughter is imprisoned by her own father, Isabel’s husband; her
admired friend Madame Merle thoroughly betrays her. Clarissa, by contrast, suffers at worst some typical doubts about her choice of marriage partners, worries that her nearly grown child may be too much under the influence of the depressing but hardly threatening Miss Kilman, and considers Septimus’s death as a detached although interested second-hand listener.

James, then, relies on the traditional melodramatic situation in Portrait far more than Woolf in Mrs. Dalloway, who reduces the number of such situations quite significantly. Yet James’s handling of these situations suggests Woolf’s in certain respects, because for James it is not only the melodramatic situation, but also the emotional response that is significant. Isabel’s marriage decisions are invested with a melodramatic weight far beyond their actual meaning; her domestic troubles matter not a whit in any higher scheme of things. Her son’s death in infancy is mentioned in an almost off-hand way; Osmond’s vehemently negative response to Isabel’s desire to travel to Ralph’s deathbed is a triumph of delicate emotion over any possible rational consequence. In Woolf’s hands, James’s tendencies towards making the melodramatic a subjective matter, essentially independent of practical results and consequences, reaches modernist heights like those achieved by Ford and Joyce before her, in which the everyday becomes replete with meanings far beyond its practical or situational meanings.

To continue the comparison raised in the previous chapter, then, in circumstance Clarissa is as far from Isabel as Isabel is from Tess Durbeyfield. Yet Clarissa and other characters have much the same emotional responses as Isabel, investing, if only in a moment-by-moment fashion, the ordinary with the extremity of melodramatic emotion. It is only to Septimus that Woolf allows the truly melodramatic gesture; yet the novel’s
characters continue to think constantly with, to borrow Brooks's label, the melodramatic imagination. As a fully modernist work, then, *Mrs. Dalloway* takes James a step farther, maintaining in full the melodramatic imaginations of his main characters, yet reducing to a minimum both classic melodramatic situations and classic melodramatic gestures.

Clearly the challenge for the film-maker to adapt *Mrs. Dalloway*, then, is an order of magnitude greater than to adapt *Portrait*, in which both the melodramatic situation and the melodramatic gesture are present in much greater amounts; beyond Septimus, the melodrama in *Mrs. Dalloway* is entirely a mental melodrama, and a melodrama that is often wildly out of proportion to its particular object. Indeed, one of the supreme ironies of the novel is that the only character who has any traditionally legitimate claim to melodrama, Septimus, must commit suicide because Bradshaw and those like him insist that he must be mentally ill for responding melodramatically. While that particular plot line of the novel has the potential to translate well to film, however, the other plot lines are far less attractive.

So much so that Eileen Atkins, who wrote the screenplay, initially responded to the idea of creating a screenplay for *Mrs. Dalloway* by saying, "'You must be insane! There's no way you could make a movie out of *Mrs. Dalloway*'" (Pruzan 1). Given that Atkins had at this point already created the stage version of *A Room of One's Own* (which was also later filmed), and was on the verge of another play, *Vita and Virginia*, which dramatizes the letters of Woolf and Vita Sackville-West, her initial response should certainly serve as an important warning. As Atkins tells the story, it was actually Vanessa Redgrave, her co-star in *Vita and Virginia*, who "...pushed Atkins to begin writing [the] screenplay" (Pruzan 1).
Quite unlike the previous two adaptations, which were very much the start-to-finish projects of the directors, Marleen Gorris’s involvement in *Mrs. Dalloway* came long after the screenplay had been written, specifically with Redgrave in mind for the role of Clarissa. Unlike Potter and Campion, who had read their source works as young women and had long envisioned filming them, Gorris first read *Mrs. Dalloway*, “‘which had been sitting in my bookcase for 25 years’” only after being offered the project (Worsdale 2). However, like both Potter and Campion, Gorris came to the project with a very solid reputation as a feminist film-maker, perhaps even as a more militant feminist film-maker, considering that her first two feature films, *A Question of Silence* (1981) and *Broken Mirrors* (1984) are absolutely unambiguous indictments of patriarchal society and attitudes, and are violent well beyond anything in either Potter’s *Thriller* or Campion’s *The Piano*.

Indeed, it would be difficult to imagine that the director of *A Question of Silence* and *Broken Mirrors* would be drawn to filming *Mrs. Dalloway* unless one had seen Gorris’s then most recent film, the much-decorated 1995 *Antonia’s Line*, which won the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film and a much wider audience for Gorris as well. The connections between the two films are immediately apparent: In both, the dramatic action occurs in one day and focuses on a woman recalling the past, and war plays a significant role in each, with *Mrs. Dalloway’s* action occurring in the post-World War I context, while Antonia’s recollections are of the post-World War II period. Gorris’s summary of *Mrs. Dalloway* could well be a summary of the basic narrative of *Antonia’s Line* as well: “‘Well, I think it’s very much about making choices and about being aware of what you have become . . . There’s that fork in the road—what if I had
taken the other road instead of this one? It’s about . . . reconciliation with what you have finally become, and in ‘Mrs. Dalloway,’ this is pretty strong’” (Foundas 5).

Not surprisingly, Gorris’s insight also connects Mrs. Dalloway to Portrait in particularly modernist ways. In both works, the marriage choice of the female protagonist is a central plot element, and, in both, their later attempts to understand their choices form a complementary plot element. The salient modernist element involves the element of choice, more so again in Woolf than in James, but here again we can see that James paved the way for Woolf. In Isabel, James creates a protagonist who does indeed have a real marriage choice, even when she is relatively poor, and, when she becomes rich, her choice grows. Isabel is thus already in the modern woman’s position of having marriage choice. However, much like James’s use of melodrama versus Woolf’s, Isabel’s freedom is undercut by the machinations of Madame Merle and Osmond, and, arguably, by Ralph’s as well. We should not underestimate the level of freedom that Isabel does have, however, compared to a pre-modern heroine such as Tess Durbeyfield, whose freedom is not only minimal compared to Isabel’s, but also the result of her poor fate. Clarissa’s marriage choice, by contrast, is even freer than Isabel’s, at least when it comes to Clarissa’s choice of male partners; as we will see later, Woolf also takes another modernist step in presenting the potential that a same sex partner, Sally Seton, is Clarissa’s best match, but society perforce closes that possibility out.

Before turning to just exactly what Gorris made of this film, two other points about its production are noteworthy. While Gorris’s success with Antonia’s Line as her previous project very much recalls Campion’s with The Piano, it would be a mistake to think that, like Campion’s Portrait, Mrs. Dalloway came with a relatively large
production budget and was intended for wide release. Quite the opposite is the case, in fact; Gorris reports that the film cost “… only $4.5 million” (Worsdale 2), and its financing was tenuous at best, since the original “… British finances dried up” part way through production and only the intervention of “… the American distributor of Antonia’s Line” allowed the production to continue (Worsdale 2). Unlike Portrait, then, Mrs. Dalloway was not a generously financed film intended for wide distribution.

Second, as noted above, Gorris, unlike both Potter and Campion, was working from a script that she had no hand in producing, although of course like them was working with an adaptation. Because all four of Gorris’s previous films were from her own screenplays, and none were based on pre-existing source material, there may be the potential among some to think that the resulting film is unrepresentative of Gorris’s work, or, perhaps even worse, suffers from being an adaptation. If either is the case, however, it is not because Gorris has reverted to creating her own original scripts; indeed, at the time of Mrs. Dalloway’s release she indicated to one interviewer that “… she now feels there are no more scripts in her and is quite happy to be directing” (Stone 2), and her most recent film, The Luzhin Defense (2000) relied not only on an independently written script, but also on the pre-existing literary source of another canonized modernist writer, Vladimir Nabokov.

The previous two chapters argued that the adaptations of Orlando and Portrait distilled from their sources an essential dynamic tension between the melodramatic and the non-melodramatic; took portions of the narratives with continuing relevance to today’s audience and altered and sharpened them to make the narratives more clearly related to contemporary issues; used the medium of film itself to extend in interesting and
significant ways each novel's early postmodernist and early modernist elements, respectively; and, within the context of a heritage-film mise en scene, depicted a very non-heritage film thematics. Gorris's film does much the same in balancing the melodramatic elements with a modernist reflective tone, altering certain aspects of its source's narrative to respond to a contemporary viewer; using the film medium to reflect its source's modernistic aesthetics, and undermining heritage-film ideology in the context of heritage-film mise en scene.

The privileging of certain narrative elements with particularly contemporary interest manifests itself, as always, in those narrative elements that are lessened or augmented, dropped entirely or added, and rearranged in the translation from novel to film, three of which will be focused on here. The first is, as it was in Portrait's choice to open with Warburton's proposal to Isabel, immediately clear here. In beginning the film with a scene of Septimus on a World War I battlefield, warning his friend Evans not to advance and then watching in horror as Evans is obliterated, the film privileges not only the melodrama of Septimus's story, but also the novel's pacifist, anti-patriarchal message. As we have noted earlier, current theories of melodrama as a film mode admit of the war scene as having potential melodrama. Even without those, however, Gorris's depiction of Septimus here as the pathetic, passive, although emotionally horrified, on-looker as the war destroys Evans puts Septimus into the position frequently associated with the melodramatic protagonist.

This alteration from the novel's opening serves not only melodramatic purposes, but also immediately establishes the narrative as taking place in a modernist historical context, one of the central aspects of which was the impact of World War I. The scene

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shifts from the battlefield to Mrs. Dalloway in her home in 1923, and one of her lines in voice-over is, “Those ruffians, the gods, shan’t have it all their own way. Those gods who never lose a chance of hurting, thwarting, and spoiling human lives...” The juxtaposition of Clarissa’s thoughts coming immediately after Evans’s obliteration serves, as Michelle Mimlitsch notes, as Clarissa’s “... intentional refutation of the powers that lead to war” (287). Clarissa’s reference to “those ruffians, the gods” further emphasizes both the pathos and the external conflict characteristic of melodrama; how could Septimus, or anyone, stand a chance against the gods themselves? That the foregrounding of the war is quite purposeful is shown a few moments later, when Clarissa meets Hugh Whitbread on the street; not only is a one-legged man in the background on the sidewalk behind them, but Hugh tells Clarissa that his wife “... is a good deal out of sorts. The war may be over but there’s still the echo of it. The Bexborough boy was killed, you know, and she is very close to Lady Bexborough.”

This opening, however, does more than serve the purposes of melodrama. As Squier notes, there is no question that the novel has a strongly pacifist message. What the film is doing, as suggested earlier with the element of Isabel’s sexuality in Portrait, is bringing into sharper perspective elements presented more diffusely in the novel. In Mimlitsch’s eyes, “... Gorris participates in our process of reevaluating the history of this bloodiest of human centuries, reminding us of Woolf’s pacifism while reflecting our end-of-the-century need to better understand the violent conflict that in too many ways has shaped our culture” (286), an analysis with which I fully agree. What needs to be added, however, is the role of history as it exists in the modernist context, for Woolf’s Dalloway is very much intertwined with the changing notion of history. As the historian
Norman Cantor notes, how Victorians and how modernists viewed history was quite different; for Victorians, "... the explanation of the nature of things is gained from the description of their histories" (15), and history was dominated by "... the tendency for macrocosm, for the big picture, for large-scale views" (18). By contrast, modernism's view of history is that "What happens in history is unanticipated ... fortuitous, chancy, and not determined over a long term. It is accidental and immediate" (11), and its focus is not on the macrocosmic, but "... on the microcosmic level, the smallest discernible unit ..." (19). Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* is a primary example of the modernist approach to history on both those levels; that Septimus survived and Evans did not is, for example, purely fortuitous, and no amount of thinking about the fact will help Septimus understand why; likewise, Woolf's pacifism, as it is expressed in the novel, is on the microcosmic level of the war's disparate and unpredictable impact on individuals, not society as a whole.

It might appear, then, that the film's choice to privilege the war in such a marked way at its start, while emphasizing melodrama, is actually a mis-step from the modernist perspective, because, while it retains the fortuitous element of the modernist attitude towards history, the initial concentration of the war references acts as a macrocosmic backdrop against which the remainder of the film unfolds. My argument would be that for readers of the novel in its own time, however, such a backdrop would have been automatic to their thinking; for such readers, the fact that direct references to the war are diffused, occurring on pages three, nine, and thirteen, for example, would be less important than their recent actual experience of it, an experience that would inevitably color their reading. Indeed, Woolf herself says as much within the pages of the book, as
Clarissa thinks, “This late age of the world’s experience had bred in them all, all men and women, a well of tears. Tears and sorrows, courage and endurance . . .” (13). The melodramatic appeal of her thoughts is obvious, but, for the contemporary viewer of the film, the experience of the war is not a prism through which the narrative will be viewed, and so the film rightly foregrounds it.

Since the film begins by foregrounding the war as the backdrop for the narrative, and since it is Septimus who is, in both the novel and the film, the character who is the most obviously connected to that theme, it is appropriate here to discuss the film’s treatment of him versus the novel’s. Much as Campion did with both Ralph Touchett and Gilbert Osmond, Gorris here presents a much less layered, much less complex and interesting Septimus (and Rezia), if no less sympathetic, than Woolf did. While Gorris’s Septimus functions plot-wise in much the same way as Woolf’s, gone are virtually all of his many ‘mad’ visions, with the exception of the few devoted to Evans. Gone, then, are those wonderfully surrealist visions of the bird chirping to him in Greek (36), the Skye terrier turning into a man (102), the red flowers growing through his flesh (103), his looking “. . . over the edge of the sofa down into the sea” (213). Since it would be quite easy for a film to create such scenes, even on a modest budget, the decision to omit them must have been purposeful; the effect is to make of Septimus a more serious, more purely melodramatic character whose madness has only a melancholic aspect, with no manic, much less potentially comic, side.

In the case of the alteration of Ralph and Gilbert Osmond in Campion’s Portrait, I argued that the result, while ending in less complex characters, was consistent with the film’s greater emphasis on the melodramatic aspects of its source. Such a motivation is
partly at work here as well, but, I suspect, for very different reasons. Since Septimus is the central representative of the negative impacts of the war, including in the film his bizarre if darkly comic visions might have been thought to undercut the very real tragedy of his condition; in the case of Portrait, there was no real tragedy to contend with. However, I suspect that the decision was also made, consciously or unconsciously, with an eye towards current-day political correctness both as regards Woolf herself and as regards the plight of those today who, like Septimus, suffer from mental illness. As a victim of mental illness herself, Woolf has a privileged stance from which to write about it; indeed, she herself had a vision of birds singing to her in Greek which she passes on to Septimus. The current popularity of the ‘Woolf-as-victim’ school of thought, which Eileen Atkins, if not Gorris herself, was surely aware of, may account for the reluctance to dramatize Septimus’s visions, since to do so might imply that Woolf’s own mental illness was anything other than unremittingly tragic. Whatever the reasons, the impact on the film of eliding these visions makes the film, in the eyes of some, such as Andrew Worsdale, “... sometimes too dour for its own good” (2).

The second major narrative alteration in the film, the presentation of the relationship between Clarissa and Sally as young women and more specifically its presentation as the appropriate romantic relationship for Clarissa versus her relationships with either Peter Walsh or Richard Dalloway, stems from a modernist rather than a melodramatic impulse. Like the first, this one is rooted in modernism’s more open approach to the possibility of same-sex relationships, and as has been widely noted, the novel itself more than strongly raises this possibility; early on, Clarissa recalls of that night at Bourton, “Then came the most exquisite night of her whole life passing a stone
urn with flowers in it. Sally stopped; picked a flower; kissed her on the lips. The whole world might have turned upside down! The others disappeared; there she was alone with Sally” (52). Even given the propensity of adolescents to dramatize, the context of Clarissa looking back through more than thirty years and declaring this moment as “the most exquisite night of her whole life” is striking. True to the patriarchal era in which the kiss happened, the early 1890s, Peter and another male friend interrupt Clarissa and Sally’s exquisite moment in a characteristically brutal way, so that their intrusion “... was like running one’s face against a granite wall in the darkness! It was shocking; it was horrible!” (53). But also, true to Woolf’s own reluctance in her fiction to unequivocally present the rewarding potential for same-sex relationships, her novel quickly backs off on that potential. Within a few pages, Clarissa abandons thinking about the potential of her relationship with Sally, and returns to thinking of her choice of Peter versus Richard, and further issues revolving around sexual identity in any obvious ways are deferred until the novel’s consideration of Miss Kilman.

In this case, the film makes the more modernist and contemporary move of making explicit what the novel less powerfully engages. The kiss scene is preceded by a separate, long flashback from Clarissa’s point of view that begins with the older Clarissa holding up her dress in the mirror, and then cuts to Bourton and the young Clarissa brushing her hair in front of a mirror. In both time frames, Clarissa’s concern for her appearance provides the match on theme. The film then goes on to show Clarissa and Sally interacting on the grounds of Bourton, and their body language is clearly that of lovers; they discuss early in the scene whether Clarissa loves Peter, and then Sally
embraces Clarissa and says, “But you do love me, don’t you?” The subsequent flashback to the kiss features Clarissa and Sally dancing, quite sensually, before the kiss, and the kiss itself has an undeniable but gentle erotic power.

The film also visually contrasts Clarissa and Sally’s kiss with the kisses Peter gives Clarissa, which are not present in the novel; Peter’s kisses are harsh and somewhat explosive, arising out of the pain of love, not the pleasure, from which Sally’s kiss arises. While Peter’s kisses seem barely able to contain a geyser of desire bubbling just below his surface, Sally’s kiss, by contrast, is slow and languid, arising naturally and rhythmically from her and Clarissa’s dance. The presentation of the kiss in the context of their dance (unlike the novel) further emphasizes the physical, sensuous connection between Clarissa and Sally; not surprisingly, Clarissa and Peter, by contrast, are never seen in the flashbacks as interacting physically in a comfortable, much less sensuously comfortable, way.

The film’s visual handling of the Clarissa-Sally relationship, then, makes clear that, at least in that summer in the early 1890s at Bourton, Clarissa’s appropriate romantic partner was Sally, not Peter. The point is driven home even farther in some recasting of the novel’s language; leading up to the point in the novel where she recalls the kiss, Clarissa remembers, parenthetically, that she and Sally “… always spoke of marriage as a catastrophe)…” (50); in the film, Sally says to Clarissa, “Marriage is a catastrophe for women,” to which Clarissa replies that it is inevitable. In recasting the novel’s more general statement to one about marriage being a catastrophe only for women, and in
showing the close, comfortable, sensuous physical connection between Clarissa and Sally, the meaning is quite clear: Were marriage between women possible, marriage would not be a catastrophe for women.

At the same time, this conversation between Clarissa and Sally states quite squarely why Clarissa must marry: Marriage—to a man—is, for a woman of Clarissa’s time and class, inevitable, catastrophic as it may be. This is a particularly important reminder for a contemporary, general audience of the narrative, which is likely to realize that marriage, and even sexual relationships, between women of that day and age was impossible, but less likely to understand that the vast majority of women of Clarissa’s class were not free to choose to remain single either, or, if they did so, were apt to be thought of as some version of Miss Kilman. And here the film clears up what remains somewhat elusive in the novel, the question of why Clarissa chooses Richard over Peter. As Mimlitsch notes, “Combined with her need to feel safe, this comment provides a reason for marrying Richard: he is the better choice when marriage remains inescapable” (288). To this I would add that the film presents the young Richard quite differently than the young Peter; Richard is tall, handsome, elegant-looking, physically calm, and never aggressive in his language or demeanor to Clarissa. The young Peter, by contrast, is short, not particularly handsome, not nearly so elegant, and at times critical of and even bullying towards Clarissa in his ardor. The film provides a linchpin to such a reading when it allows the older Richard a flashback of his young self bringing flowers to the young Clarissa, a romantic nicety of the type that the young Peter is never shown doing.

But while the film clarifies why Clarissa ultimately chooses Richard, it insists that a Clarissa-Sally relationship would have been still more desirable by showing the kiss
again in a flashback near the end of the film, when Clarissa is on the balcony considering Septimus’s suicide. In the novel, as Clarissa considers Septimus’s death, she thinks, “If it were now to die, ‘twere now to be most happy,’ she had said to herself once, coming down in white” (281). Those words are the same that Clarissa remembered earlier in the day, thinking of Bourton; and she felt that way “… all because she was coming down to dinner in a white frock to meet Sally Seton!” (31). Including the actual flashback of the kiss here, however, is a much stronger reminder to the viewer of the connection between Septimus’s suicide and the Clarissa-Sally relationship. Despite the comic dimension of some of Septimus’s hallucinatory visions in the novel, he is in essence a melodramatic character driven to suicide by an implacably inflexible external world, pointedly represented by Dr. Bradshaw. That world is as unable to tolerate Septimus’s mental condition after World War I as it would have been to tolerate a same-sex romance in the world of the 1890s.

Gorriss’s association of the flashback with Septimus’s death, then, gives to the episode an impact well beyond its weight in the novel, in which there is a purely referential weight that only the most careful readers will note. Viewers are strongly reminded in the association, then, of Septimus’s interaction with Rezia just before Dr. Bradshaw calls to take him away, an interaction that is as gentle and natural as that between Clarissa and Sally before Peter and the other man interrupt them. And, while Clarissa never speaks the words she spoke in the novel about that interruption—“It was shocking; it was horrible”—her vision of Septimus’s fall onto the spikes of the fence in the flashback stands as a visual metaphor for the horror of the men’s interruption of her and Sally’s interaction.
Beyond this stronger linking of Septimus’s suicide to Clarissa’s past, the film also handles the sequence at the end of the novel in a way that re-positions Clarissa more centrally. In the novel, Clarissa’s response to the Bradshaws occurs in a single long scene, from the bottom of page 279 through the top of page 284, uninterrupted by scenes of anyone else. Then, however, Clarissa disappears until the novel’s last line on page 296; the bulk of those pages center on Peter and Sally’s conversation about that long ago summer, and the novel ends, in fact, in Peter’s point of view, as he sees Clarissa: “It is Clarissa, he said. For there she was” (296). The film, however, switches between Clarissa on the balcony, Peter and Sally, and shots of various guests at the party, eschewing the novel’s structure of revealing Clarissa only as referenced by Sally and Peter, and instead letting the viewer continue to see her.

That move to more fully make the narrative Clarissa’s is continued; when Clarissa does reappear, in the doorway to the room in which the guests are dancing, she is revealed not from a particular character’s point of view, as in the novel, but instead to the camera; only then does, not Peter, but Richard see her. When Sally then sees Clarissa, the two stand together, Sally’s arms clasped around Clarissa’s neck, in a pose that reminds us again of their dance and kiss from the past; yet their bodies are not touching as they were then. It is now Richard who interrupts, taking Sally off to dance, and Clarissa goes off to find Peter, who has remained in the library where he and Sally had been talking; this scene recalls the flashback to Clarissa’s finding Peter in the past to coax him to go boating on the night that she chose Richard. And, as she enters the room in the film, it is Clarissa who says, “Here I am, at last.” All these changes succeed in giving Clarissa a far greater agency than the end of the novel does, reminding the viewer that
this, after all, is primarily Clarissa’s story, not Peter’s. The final shot in current time shows Richard dancing with Sally, Clarissa dancing with Peter, and Elizabeth dancing with a beau, but only Clarissa and Peter are holding each other closely as they dance, the first time in the film that we have seen them interacting physically in a comfortable, relaxed manner. The clear indication is that only now, after all these years have passed and the ardor of youth has calmed, can the two find comfort with each other.

The third significant alteration is, unlike the first two, neither a re-arranging nor an augmentation, but a narrative element from the novel that is lessened very significantly in its importance: The role of Miss Kilman is reduced in the film to almost nothing. This alteration also differs from the first two in that its impact would not be likely to be understood unless one was quite familiar with the novel; even a viewer unfamiliar with the novel will understand that the film (regardless of what Woolf’s novel does) foregrounds Septimus’s wartime experience by placing it as the initial scene, foregrounds the Clarissa-Sally kiss by reprising it, and extends Clarissa’s claim over the story as her own. However, the reduction of the Miss Kilman character in the film’s narrative is, as we will see, a complementary element to the alteration of Septimus’s portrayal; to the extent that the film sharpens Septimus’s melodramatic aspect at the expense of his comic ones, reducing Miss Kilman’s role reduces the novel’s melodramatic moments, restoring a similar but different tension. To understand the effects of this change, however, will require a somewhat more careful consideration of the role Miss Kilman plays in the novel itself.

As noted in the plot summary, Miss Kilman is Elizabeth’s tutor, and the dramatized action she appears in during the novel consists of her leaving the Dalloway...
home with Elizabeth, their shopping trip and afternoon tea, and the following along of
Miss Kilman after the two part company to her visit to Westminster Cathedral. The
episode covers some twenty pages about two-thirds of the way through a nearly 300-page
novel, so in a certain sense, Miss Kilman is a minor character. However, she is a
powerful and on-going presence in Clarissa’s thoughts throughout the day; she appears in
those thoughts just twelve pages into the novel, when Clarissa thinks, “Elizabeth really
cared for her dog most of all. The whole house this morning smelt of tar. Still, better
poor Grizzle than Miss Kilman; better distemper and tar and all the rest of it than sitting
mewed in a stuffy bedroom with a prayer book! Better anything, she was inclined to say”
(15). Her last appearance in Clarissa’s thoughts comes late in the novel, during the party,
when she thinks, “Ah, how she hated her [Miss Kilman]—hot, hypocritical, corrupt; with
all that power; Elizabeth’s seducer; the woman who had crept in to steal and defile
(Richard would say, What nonsense!). She hated her: she loved her. It was enemies one
wanted, not friends . . .” (265-266).

Indeed, Clarissa’s first and last thoughts of Miss Kilman aptly illustrate the power
and range of Clarissa’s feelings about the woman: Elizabeth’s caring about anything else
would be better in Clarissa’s view than her caring about Miss Kilman, who is
hypocritical, corrupt, powerful, and Elizabeth’s seducer; yet Clarissa both hates her and
loves her. What is to be made of these powerfully negative feelings and yet this
acknowledgement of both love and hate? Two important critical approaches to
understanding the Clarissa-Miss Kilman relationship both provide guidance and
demonstrate how central Miss Kilman is to the novel. Kenneth Moon argues that
understanding Miss Kilman’s role is crucial to understanding Clarissa herself: “She
[Miss Kilman] both provokes the fierce hatred from Clarissa and becomes at the same time the externalizing and informing image of what Clarissa detests and fears in herself” (276). Moon argues that the link between Clarissa and Miss Kilman is to be found in their relationship to “the flesh” (194). Clarissa rightly senses that the hyper-religious Miss Kilman rejects the flesh in an entirely hypocritical way; she in fact devours with nearly disgusting relish the eclairs at tea, but wants, more frighteningly, to devour Elizabeth as well: “She [Miss Kilman] was about to split asunder, she felt. The agony was terrific. If she could grasp her [Elizabeth], if she could clasp her, if she could make her hers absolutely and forever and then die; that was all she wanted” (199-200).

Clarissa, by contrast, has rejected the similarly devouring love of Peter Walsh for the far less possessive love of Richard; likewise, after she and Sally’s kiss, “... she felt that she had been given a present, wrapped up, and told just to keep it, not to look at it...” (52). In Moon’s analysis, “Love to this Clarissa looks like unrestrained, demanding, debasing flesh; like sexuality. Its naked portrait is Kilman” (278). For Moon, however, Clarissa’s abhorrence of Miss Kilman masks her own fear that deep inside herself is this same monster, to the extent that Miss Kilman “... herself is Clarissa’s sexual alter ego” (278).

Moon’s reading is supported by his outline of several similarities between Clarissa and Miss Kilman, and the idea of Miss Kilman as Clarissa’s alter ego is further supported by the physical differences between the two not only in terms of their body characteristics themselves, but their dress and demeanor as well. However, Miss Kilman can be read as an even more significant character than Moon credits her with being, as Makiko Minow-Pinkney argues. For her, Miss Kilman stands at one end of a potential
behavioral spectrum available to Clarissa, with Septimus at the other end of that spectrum:

How is it possible to recognise and valorise the position of woman as difference? There are two obvious ways open to feminists. One may deny the difference in order to be admitted as subject in the symbolic order, becoming a token man. Or one may refuse the symbolic altogether, and risk being even more marginalised than before, or, worse, expelled as mad from society. These alternatives are in a sense represented by Kilman and Septimus; Clarissa must negotiate a precarious balance between them. Either way, a woman is grievously at risk. (190)

In Minow-Pinkney's view, then, Miss Kilman represents far more than a lurking monster of gross physical and sexual appetite; she is, instead, a less successful model of potential ways of achieving subject-hood. In her view, Clarissa's choice "To behave 'like a lady,' as patriarchy's 'perfect hostess,' is thus a cautious programme for survival" (190).

These two approaches to Miss Kilman's function in the novel do not, of course, need to be read as contradicting each other. Rather, Moon's approach deals with the narrower dimension of the physical and sexual aspects of subject-hood for women. Indeed, the strength of Miss Kilman's feelings towards both eclairs and Elizabeth stands in sharp contrast to what Septimus refers to as his problem: "... that he could not feel" (131), as does Miss Kilman's appetite for food, for in Septimus's current condition, "Even taste (Rezia liked ices, chocolates, sweet things) had no relish to him” (132). In this regard, then, Clarissa has managed to successfully negotiate the physical dimension that Moon focuses on as well, neither giving up taste entirely as Septimus does, nor making it an obsessive concern, as Miss Kilman does.

Minow-Pinkney's argument is particularly compelling given that other, more minor, characters fill out the spectrum of possibilities open to Clarissa. Hugh Whitbread's wife, Evelyn, who never makes a physical appearance in the novel, is
constantly beset by physical ailments; Clarissa remembers “Times without number [she] had visited Evelyn Whitbread in a nursing home” (7). Evelyn thus is the classic portrait of the woman who uses her physical frailty to avoid the public world, and is thus in between Clarissa and Septimus in terms of subject-hood possibilities. On the other end is Lady Bruton, who, like Miss Kilman, is mannish in appearance, yet because of her birth and class, is able to influence national politics at least by manipulating men such as Richard Dalloway and Hugh Whitbread. One can very easily extend the spectrum to the male characters as well, using Septimus again as one end of a spectrum of male behavior, followed in increasing levels of patriarchy by Richard Dalloway, Peter Walsh, Hugh Whitbread, and, at the extreme end, Dr. Bradshaw.

If Miss Kilman represents in the novel either Clarissa’s alter ego, or, on the larger level, a significant if unhappy potential position for Clarissa in terms of woman’s subject-hood, the reduction of her role in the film to a merely unfashionable, short-term companion on Elizabeth’s shopping trip inevitably changes the film’s presentation of different positions available for women in terms of their subject-hood. In approaching Miss Kilman from an essentially structuralist perspective, neither Moon nor Minow-Pinkney emphasizes about Miss Kilman that one of the real tragedies about her character as presented in the novel is her extreme self-consciousness about her deficiencies on the level of traditional femininity. However negatively one wishes to read Miss Kilman, she surely does not suffer from the complete blindness of a Dr. Bradshaw or a Lady Bruton; on the contrary, Miss Kilman is acutely aware herself that other subject-positions would be available to her if only she were prettier, less clumsy, or of a different class, among other accidental events. As David Dowling notes, the reason Clarissa is able to love Miss
Kilman is because "... Miss Kilman is an individual full of contradictions, try as she
might to be a theory" (80). In the novel, these contradictions clearly mark Miss Kilman
off from characters such as Dr. Bradshaw and Lady Bruton, who are as extreme in their
theory as Miss Kilman is, but entirely ignorant of their own deficiencies, much less the
deficiencies of their ideas about life.

As important as Miss Kilman’s role in the novel is in the ways that Moon,
Minow-Pinkney and Dowling argue, she is also important in adding to its melodramatic
force. If Septimus’s visions make of him a less melodramatic character, Miss Kilman is
all about the melodramatic, as is Clarissa’s response to her. She is pathetic, the beset
victim of a world that defines women’s value in terms of qualities she does not possess;
and her responses are characterized by her own extreme emotions, just as Clarissa’s
responses to her are characterized by extreme emotions. However, while Septimus, like
many melodramatic figures, is an unremittingly sympathetic character, Woolf succeeds in
undermining any sympathy for Miss Kilman by deliberately exposing her as hypocritical.
Thus, rather than passively submitting to an unkind world, or choosing, as Septimus does,
to end his life because of the power of that unkind world, both characteristic responses of
the melodramatic character, Miss Kilman rages internally, stuck in the Freudian defense
mode of reaction formation, railing against those things in life that she actually wants, but
are denied to her.

In stark contrast to her weight in the novel, the Miss Kilman of the film is almost
non-existent. She is present in two scenes: The first, about a minute long, shows she and
Elizabeth saying good-bye to Clarissa as they prepare to leave the Dalloway’s home; the
second, lasting some two minutes, is she and Elizabeth’s tea. Other than one remark to
Richard about Miss Kilman, Clarissa never mentions Miss Kilman, nor is she mentioned in any of Clarissa’s voice-overs throughout the film. Unlike the novel’s Miss Kilman, who is shabby, the film’s Miss Kilman seems at most unfashionable; and although she is not particularly attractive, there is little about her that is obviously mannish. The film does convey the dislike between Clarissa and Miss Kilman, shown through Clarissa’s pointed remark to Miss Kilman that those who have converted often seem to her to be “callous” and returned in kind by Miss Kilman’s remark to Elizabeth at tea that women like Clarissa should have better things to do with their time than give parties. Absent entirely are any suggestions that Miss Kilman has more than a normal fondness for Elizabeth; any background about Miss Kilman’s difficult life and her considerable education; and any of Clarissa’s thoughts about her as aggressive, horrible, bestial, or the like. What is left is a Miss Kilman whose interest in religion Clarissa distrusts, but who is quite clearly more pitiful than anything else.

Radically minimizing Miss Kilman’s role in the film has several significant results, but we will focus here only on those that center on melodramatic issues and those that relate to issues of the contemporary audience. First, to the extent that the film makes Septimus a more purely melodramatic figure, its making of Miss Kilman into a much less melodramatic figure achieves a different, if less complex, balance than the novel achieves. Second, although I have earlier argued that Miss Kilman’s pathetic-ness and extreme emotion are in keeping with melodrama, the porous boundaries between melodrama and tragedy are aptly illustrated by her character, and her internal conflict, her self-hatred, can be read as at least as tragic as it is melodramatic. Similarly, Clarissa’s responses to Miss Kilman are at least as extreme emotionally as Miss Kilman’s own
feelings; but they threaten, as Moon’s argument acknowledges, to tip the novel’s mode into tragedy since it is Clarissa’s “own fear that deep inside herself is this same monster” (278). Finally, the very ambiguity of the feelings of each—for surely it is not just Clarissa who both hates and loves Miss Kilman, but also Miss Kilman herself who both hates and loves Clarissa—threatens to undermine the more traditional moral clarity of melodrama. In all three ways, then, reducing the role of Miss Kilman as the film does is consistent with its less tragic view of the novel, and, for those unfamiliar with the novel, the elision does not create any noticeable gaps in the film’s own dynamics.

Beyond the impact on the film’s melodramatics, however, depicting the Miss Kilman of the novel, including Clarissa’s complex response to her, surely would have posed problems for a contemporary audience. More than being simply a ‘token man,’ as Minow-Pinkney suggests, Miss Kilman, although complex and perhaps tragic, is simultaneously unpleasant in certain ways on both the surface and more deeply. Unlike the women who populate Woolf’s other novels of the 1920s, both Miss Kilman’s sexual ambiguity and her struggle with a “world that had scorned her, sneered at her, cast her off, beginning with this indignity—the infliction of her great unlovable body which people could not bear to see . . .” (195) are immensely painful. There can be no doubt that at the time the novel was written, the difficulties women such as Miss Kilman faced were extraordinary. Seventy years later, the world, one hopes, would not be quite so unkind.

The result of these three narrative alterations is also to make of the film a more pointedly modernist work in certain respects than the novel. Foregrounding the novel’s treatment of World War I reflects the contemporary understanding of modernism as being
strongly influenced by the war; opening up more powerfully the potential of a Clarissa-
Sally relationship is a step farther than Woolf herself was willing to move, although
contemporaries such as Radclyffe Hall did so; and reducing Miss Kilman’s role as a ‘token man,’ full of both anger and hatred, plays to the modernist value of a non-
judgmental democracy that would never regard a person primarily in light of her physical characteristics. But if the film sharpens the modernism of Woolf’s plot, how does it deal with Woolf’s structure, which is probably the most thorough-going modernist aspect of the novel? On one level, its depiction of time, the film succeeds quite well; on another, point of view, it reverts to a more traditional approach than does its source.

_Mrs. Dalloway_, like Joyce’s _Ulysees_ before it and Lowry’s _Under the Volcano_ after it, is one of the great modernist experiments with time and the novel. On the most obvious level, each takes to heart William Blake’s exhortation from “Auguries of Innocence,”

> To see a World in a Grain of Sand
> And a Heaven in a Wild Flower;
> Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
> And Eternity in an hour. (209)

Blake’s view that eternity could be experienced in an hour, at least as applied to the novel, did not have an impact on the Victorian novel, but, with the influence of the theories of both Bergson and Einstein, Dayton Kohler rightly argues that the modern novel’s approach to time is based on the idea “... that every present moment incloses [sic] the past and anticipates the future, and that memory charts the course of personality in the continuous stream of time” (17). Woolf’s concern with time in all of her novels
written in the 1920s was particularly acute; although Orlando expands time in terms of its plot, its narrator acknowledges that “An hour, once it lodges in the queer element of the human spirit, may be stretched to fifty or a hundred times its clock length” (158?).

As Woolf well knew, the time of the mind is Bergsonian, a time not of the precise, equal proportions indicated on a clock, but of durational experience; a second can indeed seem like an hour, and an hour like a second. Equally important to this understanding is that the past exists vitally in the present, and the future exists vitally as well. The modernist turn away from event/plot, which are measured on a linear scale, and towards character/psychology, which finds its height perhaps in Alain Robbe-Grillet’s Jealousy, in which it is uncertain whether anything happens, is started on its way by works such as Mrs. Dalloway, in which only Septimus’s suicide stands out as a significant plot event. Gorris’s articulation of the novel’s handling of time in terms of the film medium can be divided into three elements, including editing and style, casting, and the use of voice-over.

Gorris’s editing and style quite successfully establish the significance of the interaction of past and present in three ways: the interpenetration of scenes from the past with scenes from the present; the frequent use of match cuts in moving from present to past; and the absence of typical special effects to denote the past. The interpenetration of the past and present is actually increased in the film; as Melba Cuddy-Keane notes, there are nineteen flashbacks in the film versus ten in the novel. As she sees it, “The film thus increases the number of temporal shifts and speeds up the alternation between past and present” (173). I would phrase the result somewhat differently: The effect of the more frequent time shifts in the film ultimately reduces the sense of alteration, emphasizing a
temporal unity in which both past and present are at once present. It is this quality that Howard Harper surely must be speaking of when he notes that, in the film, “Clarissa is somehow both eighteen and fifty-one” (170). The effect of the film is similar to the experiment in which lights at a short distance apart are alternately turned on and off. At a certain frequency, the viewer perceives a continuous line of light, rather than two alternating ones. Thus, as Cuddy-Keane herself later notes, “The film’s rapid plunge in and out of the past also helps to convey the temporal fluidity of the novel, so that the characters seem not to be recollecting the past so much as living the present through the past” (174). Still, this does not quite capture the ‘temporal fluidity’ of the film; what must be added is the effect is that the characters are also living the past through the present.

On this level, the film uses its medium to take Woolf’s use of time to a further degree. In the novel’s first flashback, Clarissa thinks, “For so it had always seemed to her, when . . . she had burst open the French windows and plunged at Bourton into the open air” (3). Similarly, the novel’s second flashback begins with the words, “She could remember . . .” (8). In recreating these flashbacks, however, the film avoids the insistent past tense (had seemed, had burst, plunged, could remember) of Clarissa’s thoughts; the visual image of the young Clarissa opening the door, plunging out into the grounds of Bourton, is just as much in the present tense as the older Clarissa opening her door in London. In this case, the absence of linguistic transitions actually highlights the interpenetration of past and present, present and past.

The film’s flashbacks to Bourton are also of two different kinds, as Cuddy-Keane has noted. First, there are those such as the first flashback, which are relatively brief,
with, as Cuddy-Keane describes them, “... no informative function” (174). Second, there are those that are longer and result in significant information, for example Clarissa’s refusal of Peter. However, in both cases the cuts are almost invariably on match, with some visual or other similarity between the present and the past immediately apparent. In the first flashback, for example, the present-day Clarissa opens her door in London, and the young Clarissa opens the doors at Bourton; in the second, the present-day Hugh walks away from Clarissa after their meeting in the street, and the young Hugh walks away from Clarissa and Peter at Bourton. The effect of the match cuts strongly reinforces the continuity between the past and present; both sights and actions are forever being repeated, connecting through and beyond time.

Thus, Cuddy-Keane rightly sees the five short information-less flashbacks as emphasizing “... the continuous repetitions of the past in the characters’ present experience,” and she notes that they emphasize “... the on-going nature of the past” (174). However, the film’s choice of subjects for the short flashbacks also represents moments strongly endowed with significant levels of self-conception/definition for the characters. In three of the short flashbacks, for example, Clarissa ‘plunges into life,’ running from the house onto the grounds of Bourton; both the other two, the reprise of the Clarissa-Sally kiss near the end of the film, and Clarissa’s coaxing Peter to go boating, are significant moments to Clarissa and Peter respectively. Not surprisingly, in two of these cases, the film chooses to speak directly to the status of contemporary women, who are far more able to plunge into life and engage in satisfying same-sex relationships than women of Woolf’s time or of the young Clarissa’s time.
Three of the flashbacks in the film stand out, however, because of the absence of any matching elements. This is far from an accidental oversight; all three of these flashbacks are connected to Septimus. In the first, the present-day Peter glances at Septimus and Rezia as they all sit in the park, then has a flashback that begins with him and Joseph Breitkopf playing chess at Bourton. In the second, the present-day Peter is walking by Septimus and Rezia, still in the park, and has a flashback to the dinner party at which he realized that Clarissa would marry Richard Dalloway, not him. In the third, the present-day Clarissa, having learned of Septimus’s suicide, is standing on her balcony and has the reprised flashback of her and Sally’s kiss. Since these three have no matching elements and are all associated with Septimus, the message is clear: Septimus disrupts time continuity. This message is confirmed because, while the flashbacks of Clarissa, Peter, and Richard are all presented entirely in the world of the past, Septimus’s single visual sight of the dead Evans in the film is not of Evans on the battlefield, but of the uniformed Evans appearing on the meadow of the present-day park, as he does in the novel: “A man in grey was actually walking towards them. It was Evans!” (105).

The film’s presentation of the difference in how Clarissa, Peter, and Richard see the past and how Septimus sees it is crucial. For the first three, the past interpenetrates their thoughts, but remains enclosed within itself as a separate time apart from the present. Thus, the present Clarissa does not see her younger self dancing in the present, nor does the present Peter see the past Clarissa in the present. For Septimus, however, the past Evans erupts out of the world of the past and into the world of the present. Seeing and thinking of Septimus disrupts the continuity of the matches to the past that
characterize Clarissa’s and Peter’s other flashbacks, illuminating the film’s point (like the novel’s) that the influence of the past on Clarissa and Peter is different than the influence of the past on Septimus.

A third quality of the editing of past and present is the absence of any of the typical special effects frequently used in film to mark off a vision that is actually a memory or a dream. As Cuddy-Keane notes, the film “... employs a predominantly realistic mode” (172), and the few special effects are not associated with the flashbacks. Leslie Hankins has argued that “The novel Mrs. Dalloway lends itself to fantasy flights about possible films, as we imagine playing with lenses, light, distortion, angles, colors, filters—perhaps even subtle computer morphing” (32). While the result of that approach to filming the novel would no doubt have merits of its own, so too does the absence of special effects. The result here, rather than focusing on distortion and therefore highlighting the artifice of the film, renders the present and the past on co-equal terms. The past happened as it happened, just as the present happens as it happens; the past is not denoted by the artificiality of filters, lenses, or, as Hankins suggests it might be, “... a dazzling array of technical devices to capture the emotional landscape and fantasy life” (32). On the contrary, to engage in such filmic theatrics to denote the past would have succeeded in lessening the significance in the film of the past as an on-going, ever-present, co-equal part of the present moment.

A second group of filmic issues that relate to the novel’s presentation of time is activated by considering the film’s casting choices. The immediately striking point is that the film uses entirely different actresses and actors to play the present characters than those who play the past characters. This is a very different strategy than many films
make when faced with such a situation (except in the case of having to represent an adult as a child). A more traditional approach is to cast actresses and actors who are young enough to appear, in this case, twenty, and then age them through make-up and the like to make them convincing as fifty-year-olds. The common reasoning for this practice is that whatever is lost in the convincing presentation of age is gained in what might be termed the ‘continuity of person.’ Here again, Hankins has put the matter bluntly, worrying about “What would happen to the novel’s celebration of Clarissa’s elastic fluid age if this complex character were divided instead into the ‘young’ Clarissa and the ‘older’ one, played by two different actors?” (30), the exact approach Gorris’s work has used.

This particular move that the film makes seems to me quite successful, however. While the pleasures of looking through high school year-books may well involve noting how similar some of our classmates still look to their younger selves, we at least as often note that we would never recognize them in their present-day appearance. The dangers of trying to convincingly age a character by thirty or more years are quite successfully shown by such films as It’s a Wonderful Life; no viewer can possibly believe that Jimmy Stewart is twenty or twenty-one in certain parts of the film. Despite the advances in film technology, such a stretch automatically calls to the forefront our ‘willing suspension of disbelief,’ and, in today’s world of pre-release publicity, viewers would go to the film well aware of the fact that the actress who played Clarissa was nowhere near eighteen, or fifty-two, or one or the other.

More importantly, however, using different actresses and actors for the younger and the older Clarissa, Peter, Sally, Richard, and Hugh continues the film’s attempt to enclose the past within itself, and as a result highlights the difference between these
characters’ relations to the pasts and Septimus’s. Here again, the film is attempting to shed light on the novel; since Clarissa, Septimus, and Peter are all equally preoccupied with the past, why is it that only Septimus’s preoccupation is problematic? The film approaches the question by assuming, correctly, that it is not the preoccupation with the past in and of itself that is the crucial difference, but the inability to differentiate between the past and the present. The choice, then, of different actresses and actors for the younger and older Clarissa, Richard, Peter and Hugh serves to draw a boundary line between present and past that Septimus fatally crosses, much as he does in the novel. Significantly, then, Septimus’s single visual memory of Evans is of the uninjured Evans, an Evans who exists in memory only; the other characters who are equally preoccupied with the past recognize themselves, and others, as having been altered by time.

Another obvious point to be noted about the casting is the choice of Vanessa Redgrave and Michael Kitchen as the older Clarissa and Peter. While both are perfectly imaginable slightly-over-fifty characters, both are far less ravaged by time than those who play Richard, Hugh, and Sally. Richard has progressed from being a quite good-looking young man to a balding, jowly, soft-looking older man; Hugh from a slightly heavy-set, curly-haired young man to a quite stout, balding older man; and Sally from a strikingly beautiful young woman to a blandly cabbage-faced, stout middle-aged woman. While none of these changes are beyond the boundaries of the novel, they mark off both the older Clarissa and the older Peter as different from the other three characters who exist in both the past and the present. The film’s message here seems to be that Richard, Hugh and Sally have all overcome their focus on the past and moved forward into the present, Richard and Hugh by becoming influential politicians, Sally by marrying and
bearing “. . . five enormous boys” (261). By contrast, Peter is considered a failure, having literally removed himself for most of his adult life to a post as a minor administrator in India, and Clarissa has borne only one daughter, while remaining, as she acknowledges, fearful of life: “. . . there was in the depths of her heart an awful fear. Even now, quite often if Richard had not been there reading the Times, so that she could crouch like a bird and gradually revive . . . she must have perished” (281-282). In the film’s logic, the failure of Clarissa and Peter to more fully embrace the on-going present has at least the effect of reducing the physical ravages of time on both.

Finally, the film’s use of voice-over is also strongly intertwined with time, just as it inevitably is in any film that uses such a technique. While the film’s use of the flashbacks establishes a powerful connection between past and present, its use of voice-over suggests that the present itself also exists in two time streams, the stream of physical action and the stream of thought or consciousness. In its most extended use, near the end of the film as Clarissa stands on the balcony considering Septimus’s suicide, Clarissa herself is notably not moving in space, strongly contrasting action as a measurement of time with thought as a measurement of time. The effect in the film, as in the novel, is to challenge the pre-modernist notion that only action is a measure of existence, and to revive the Cartesian idea that it is thought that is the measure of existence, a revival central to the modernist philosophy of existentialism, and central to the novels of modernist writers such as Woolf and Joyce.

A second, more particular use of Clarissa’s voice-over also relates strongly to time: Except for the first brief flashback, Clarissa’s voice-over is granted only to herself in the present, not to her younger self. While this approach is true to the novel, since it is
the older Clarissa who is remembering herself in the past, its effect here works somewhat differently. The emphasis is very strongly placed on the older Clarissa's reflectiveness and mental life, versus the younger Clarissa's physical energy and bodily life. Such a strategy is entirely appropriate, since the conflict for the younger Clarissa is clearly on one level a conflict over control of her body, as she makes her choice to marry or not. Thus the absence of the voice-overs for the young Clarissa not only accurately reflects the book's privileging of the memory of the older Clarissa, but also furthers the film's purpose of making Clarissa's choice of partners a more central thematic concern.

The voice-over also provides a link to the film's handling of a second central modernist quality of the novel, specifically its approach to the novel's representation of the consciousnesses not only of its major characters, but also of many of its very minor ones as well. The cast of characters beyond the major ones whose consciousnesses are presented by the novel is truly extraordinary; on its second page, for example, we are in the mind for a few lines of Clarissa's neighbor, Scrope Purvis, who then disappears from the narrative; several pages later, the flower-shop's Miss Pym's consciousness is briefly present; a few pages on, Moll Pratt, the street flower vender, makes a short appearance. The list goes on and on, reaching virtuoso heights at the party, where Woolf dips in and out of the minds of a score of the guests.

A number of critics of the novel find Woolf's technique of entering into many consciousnesses ultimately unified by some larger principle. Reuben Arthur Brower, for example, argues that "The dramatic sequences are connected through a single metaphorical nucleus, and the key metaphors are projected and sustained by a continuous web of subtly related minor metaphors and harmonizing imagery" (67). In the case of the
film, a variety of repeated images also serve to connect sequences, most prominently flowers, exiting and entering, and clocks. However, other critics have pointed out that the novel’s jumping from consciousness to consciousness as it does poses significant problems. Dowling, for example, notes that “Despite the patterning in the novel, it remains essentially disorganized” (73); Ben Wang has recently argued that the novel “. . . seems to be a depiction of various disparate, monadic consciousnesses, isolated from each other and impossible to be unified into a spiritual community” (177). Purposefully or not, the film in effect responds to the problems raised by Woolf’s technique by drastically narrowing the consciousnesses presented. Like the novel, only Clarissa, Peter, Richard and Septimus have visions of the past; unlike it, however, only Clarissa is given a more powerful subject-position through the voice-overs. The result is a film that is far more unified and focused much more strongly on those four main characters than the novel, but, at the same time, a film that is less modernist and more traditional on this particular level than its source. While the coherence of the narrative is solidified, that coherence is gained at the expense of a drastic reduction in the presentation of subject positions that the novel is replete with.

Of course, a voice-over is only the most obvious way of a film creating consciousness, and, given its generally poor standing as a technique in the film industry, perhaps it is not surprising that the film relies on it so little. In fact, Atkins has said that she “. . . wanted to have as little voiceover as possible” because “I’ll be considered a failure if I have to use voiceover” (Pruzan 3). It is worth remarking here that Atkins clearly was aware of the general disdain of film critics for the use of voice-over, and her awareness that an adaptation that relied heavily on such a technique would, as she says,
be judged a failure. On the other hand, Gorris not only used a considerable amount of voice-over in *Antonia's Line*, but, as Atkins's reports, Gorris "In the end came up to me and said she wanted everybody to have voiceovers, all the characters" (Pruzan 3), a technique Atkins would not permit. What was lost in not allowing Gorris to have her way with the film is a significant part of the novel's democratic fragmentation, what Dowling argues was Woolf's desire "... to resist the temptation to take over the male position of *authority*" (73). In the film, Clarissa herself becomes the primary subject, perhaps an improvement over 'the male position,' but none-the-less a retreat from the fragmentation of high modernism to a more early modernist position such as James took in *Portrait*. And it is noteworthy that a sense of consciousness can also be conveyed in more subtle ways than voice-overs, such as granting minor characters standard point-of-view shots, a technique the film also eschews in any thorough-going fashion.

In its use of the medium to advance its source, then, the film's portrayal of time through editing, casting, and voice-over advances the novel's modernist quality, while its use of subjective devices, such as the voice-over and point-of-view shots to create consciousness, are more traditional than the novel's more modernist approach. We turn next to a consideration of what the film makes of this novel's contradictory mood. Potter's *Orlando*, as we saw, radically upset the much more settled emotional note on which Woolf's *Orlando* ended; Campion's *Portrait*, by contrast, extended its source's already somewhat fragmentary, inconclusive ending. In the case of *Mrs. Dalloway*, Gorris moves in a different direction, giving the viewer a work with a more somber tone, but also a more settled, comfortable ending.
Much of the film’s more somber tone is the result of changes already remarked on. Opening with Septimus watching Evans being obliterated on the battlefield, while important to remind viewers of the context in which *Mrs. Dalloway* was received, sets a far more melancholy tone than do Clarissa’s trip to the flowershop and the skywriting airplane mystery that are the focus of the novel’s opening, in which Septimus is not introduced for some seventeen pages. Hankins has criticized this change using Woolf’s own remark, from *A Room of One’s Own*, that “A scene in a battlefield is more important than a scene in a shop—everywhere and much more subtly the difference of value persists” (74). While Hankins argues that the alteration “undermines the design of Woolf’s feminist insight, dramatically reversing her gendered ‘difference of view’ by reinscribing the traditionally male values she rejects in *A Room of One’s Own*” (369), the change does not go quite so far. Indeed, as Hankins’s herself describes Septimus as he appears in the scene, he is “traumatized” (369), so that whatever reinscribing of male values occurs by foregrounding this scene is simultaneously undercut by Septimus’s very untraditional, at least in terms of traditional male values, response. What the scene surely does achieve, however, is to set a tone that we are about to see a film that is throughout and ultimately about loss, and how characters respond to loss.

The sense of loss the film increases in its depiction of Septimus’s character is also advanced by the elision of what might be called the manic Septimus. This is the Septimus who is capable not only of the disturbing and yet darkly comic hallucinations noted earlier, but also the Septimus who, looking at the skywriting airplane, thinks,

> So, thought Septimus, looking up, they are signalling to me. Not indeed in actual words; that is, he could not read the language yet; but it was plain enough, this beauty, this exquisite beauty, and tears filled his eyes as he looked at the smoke words languishing and melting in the sky and bestowing upon him in their
inexhaustible charity and laughing goodness one shape after another of
unimaginable beauty and signalling their intention to provide him, for nothing, for
ever, for looking merely, with beauty, more beauty! Tears ran down his cheeks.

(31)

This is only one of many passages in the novel in which the melancholy side of
Septimus’s condition is considerably complicated by his ability to look around himself
and as suddenly see beauty as he is to see his dead friend. Eliminating that side of
Septimus makes of him in the film a character who is not only associated only with a
melancholic loss, but also, ironically, makes his suicide less of a loss, since viewers are
never privy to the extraordinary imaginative creativity with which the Septimus of the
novel is imbued. As Hankins in this case correctly notes, “Without his inner visions,
Septimus is more pitiful than poetic . . .” (372). Rather, I would argue, he is more
melodramatic than comic.

The tone of loss is further emphasized by the film’s handling of the Bourton
flashbacks, particularly in its use of different performers to play the roles of the younger
incarnations of the characters. While I argued earlier that this choice actually furthers the
novel’s sophisticated handling of time, its effect in this respect is to privilege the loss of
youth that the main characters, in particular Clarissa and Peter, are facing and
contemplating just past their fiftieth years; it also illustrates a crucial difference between
the kind of showing that film is capable of and the kind of showing that writing is capable
of. In the novel, the reader of course is aware that the Clarissa of the current time is fifty-
two, but any sense of her physical presence is quite subtle. Early on, Scrope Purvis
describes Clarissa as having “. . . a touch of the bird about her, of the jay, blue-green,
light, vivacious, though she was over fifty, and grown very white since her illness” (4).
Later, Clarissa herself thinks, regretfully, that she “. . . had a narrow pea-stick figure; a
ridiculous little face, beaked like a bird’s. That she held herself well was true; and had nice hands and feet; and dressed well, considering that she spent little. But often now this body she wore . . . this body, with all its capacities, seemed nothing—nothing at all” (14). Other than a sense of slenderness and the references to her face somehow resembling a bird’s, little sense of this Clarissa as a physical presence is conveyed by the novel.

Similarly, we are aware that the Bourton Clarissa is eighteen; however, other than its occasional references to the color of her clothing, little if any idea of Clarissa as eighteen in a physical sense is conveyed by the novel, and those moments when it is are only apparent to the very careful reader, such as when she remembers that “. . . she had burst open the French windows and plunged at Bourton into the open air” (3). While the activity and power of ‘burst’ and ‘plunged’ are apparent in this memory, and imply a physically active young woman, they do not form a continuing descriptive motif associated with the young Clarissa.

The film, by contrast, literally shows the viewer Vanessa Redgrave and Natascha McElhone, and the difference in their physical presence is quite sharp. Redgrave’s face, although still striking, is certainly not that of an eighteen-year old, and the pronounced lines on her throat clearly mark her as in late middle-age. Like the novel’s Clarissa, she indeed carries herself well, but with a noticeable calmness and repose of movement and physical activity. McElhone is sharply different in both her appearance and her physicality. Both her face and throat are unlined, yet to be marked by the inevitable passage of time; and her movements are strong and active, as befits a high-spirited young woman. That the film’s presentation of this contrast is quite consistent with a thirty-four year difference in the ages of the characters is certainly true; the greater point, however,
is that in so palpably allowing us to see these differences, it emphasizes far more strongly than the novel does what time has done to Clarissa's physical body. Although the novel could have insisted on such differences, it does not, leaving them, instead, much to the reader's imagination. These differences would not have been nearly so marked had the film chosen to use a performer in her early thirties to play both roles, and much the same happens in the cases of Richard, Sally, and Hugh, all of whom show significant physical changes due to their aging.

I do not mean to suggest that the film in this way functionally alters the tone or mood of the novel; rather, in so clearly visualizing it, the viewer's perception of lost youth for the main characters is much sharper than in the novel, and sharper still because of the casting choices. Both Clarissa and Peter in the novel do indeed mourn for the loss of their youth, but as readers we 'see' this loss primarily in an imaginative, metaphorical way, rather than in a literally visualized way. In this sense, then, Hankins's argument that "The narrative is not limited to the younger Clarissa or the older Clarissa; rather, by holding her various ages within an elastic temporal consciousness, it blurs the divisions between them" (26) is only partially correct. Clarissa's consciousness does indeed include both her current and her former self, and, because her consciousness does not focus on the physical differences between those selves, such divisions are indeed blurred. However, the narrative is limited to only one consciousness, in the case of Clarissa, and that is of the older Clarissa. The film's decision to separate the two Clarissas works in this sense simultaneously to broaden the narrative consciousness, and also to focus the viewer's attention on the loss of youth.
That loss of youth is further privileged by the film’s final image. While the novel ends in the present, with Peter beholding Clarissa, who has returned from her solitary meditation on Septimus’s death, the film chooses to end in the past. The specific shot is a freeze-frame of Clarissa, Sally, and Peter lounging on the lawn at Bourton, a shot which is held as the ending credits proceed to roll over it. Hankins views the ending as emphasizing “. . . cliched regrets about aging” in which “Nostalgia and youth triumph” (370), versus the novel’s ending, which features “. . . Peter experiencing the thrill of Clarissa in her full age” (370). Although there is no denying that such a reading is possible, mine is quite different. The film allows us to see an actual Vanessa Redgrave in the fullness of her age, while the novel can allow us to do no more than create, if we wish, a Clarissa in the fullness of her age, and in that sense, its effect is rather greater than the novel’s. To the extent that the past that the characters have lost is a physical one, the shot does indeed privilege that loss. However, the past is also a time of lost opportunities. Significantly, the shot does not include Richard; also significantly, the film has just moments earlier reprised the shot of Clarissa and Sally’s kiss. It can also be read, then, as a final reminder that the actual love triangle at Bourton was Sally-Clarissa-Peter, and that a Sally-Clarissa union was impossible at the time. Far from being nostalgic, then, the shot works in quite the opposite way, reminding viewers that in our own day and age, Clarissa’s choice, thankfully, could be quite different. In either reading, loss is central, but exactly what the loss consists of is poles apart.

It is changes such as these that presumably led Worsdale to the earlier-cited remark that the film is “. . . sometimes too dour for its own good” (2). One must of course wonder how he would have responded to the film had it attempted to re-create
Miss Kilman in a more faithful manner. It may be more dour than the novel; yet its ending in its present time leaves the viewer with a far more settled, comfortable sense of closure than does the novel’s ending. As has been noted, the film’s ending grants to Clarissa a far greater agency and subject position than the novel’s ending, in which Peter is granted the power of the gaze over Clarissa. Moments before he actually sees Clarissa, Peter has a premonition of her arrival, and thinks, “What is this terror? what is this ecstasy? . . . What is it that fills me with extraordinary excitement?” (296). Quite clearly, then, Peter is not just still in love with Clarissa on some level, but in what remains a passionate, not a purely nostalgic, way. Peter’s future happiness with the woman who will soon be his new wife is surely called into question by this ending, the obvious reading being that he has never stopped loving Clarissa, and never will, a reality which has already and will continue to disrupt his relationships with other women.

The novel’s treatment of Clarissa at its end is also somewhat unusual, at least in a structural sense. Woolf, as has been widely documented, began the book with the intention of having Clarissa commit suicide. In its final form, however, it is Septimus who commits suicide, and virtually all critics agree that Clarissa’s solitary consideration of his act, as Howard Harper among many others notes, “. . . redeems and renews her life” (168). Yet Harper also argues that “Until the very end of the book, and beyond, a fate like that of Septimus seems possible for Clarissa . . .” (168, emphasis added). Structurally the ending of the novel emphasizes Clarissa’s presence-in-absence, much as Septimus’s is, and much as Evans’s is; on page 284, Clarissa “. . . came in from the little room” in which she contemplated Septimus’s suicide, yet she then disappears as a physical presence in the narrative until the novel’s last line, twelve pages later. In the
intervening pages, Peter and Sally discuss Clarissa, and the consciousnesses of others at
the party are entered as well, but Clarissa is physically absent. The novel’s ending, “For
there she was” (296) is quite abrupt, as unfinished in its own way as Isabel’s having left
for Rome in Portrait. The novel refuses to give us any rapprochement between Peter and
Clarissa, much less any set piece of rapprochement between all the principals gathered at
the party.

The film, however, does nearly that when it goes on to a final shot in its present
time which shows Clarissa dancing with Peter, Sally dancing with Richard, and Elizabeth
dancing with an anonymous beau, all apparently quite comfortable and happy in their
ritualized and now normalized relationships. An obvious point of comparison is to the
only other dance in the film, that between Clarissa and Sally at Bourton, which was
clearly sensual and unconventional. Here, by contrast, the dancers are all in conventional
positions, and, although Clarissa and Peter are dancing body to body, nothing of the
uncontrollable and too-pressing passion that characterized the young Peter’s physical
interaction with the young Clarissa remains. No sense of terror, ecstasy, or extraordinary
excitement is remotely present; rather it is quite absent not only from the older characters,
but also from Elizabeth and her young man. The past may still be looked at by some
regretfully, as Peter’s conversation with Sally makes clear he does, but it is safely
enclosed within itself, and the future of the young Elizabeth, already more secure because
of the absence of the desirous Miss Kilman, is safely in the hands of a young man far
more reminiscent in demeanor of the young Richard than the young Peter.

This scene immediately precedes the final shot back to Bourton, and the order of
the two seems to me another argument against the view that the Bourton characters are
those that the film longs for. For all the youth and excitement it may represent, Bourton is also characterized by romantic conflicts of all types: between Clarissa and Peter; between the potential of a Clarissa-Sally union and a surely, if only implied, disapproving society; and between Peter and Richard, even if only Peter perceived the conflict. Much like *Antonia's Line*, then, and rather unlike her source's ending, Gorris's ending puts to rest the demons of the past rather than letting them linger, threatening to re-emerge at any unguarded moment.

In this sense, as well as others, Gorris's adaptation of *Mrs. Dalloway* would seem to be a far more conservative adaptation than either Potter's or Campion's. Hankins acknowledges that on the aesthetic level, "The shimmering visual surface of the cinematography and the subtle evocative aural play delight the viewer" (370). These qualities are indeed there, yet they are achieved without the cinematic flourishes that characterize both *Orlando* and *Portrait*. In Damion Searls's view, that is a positive aspect of the film, "... because it downplays Woolf's literary stylistic brilliance and focuses instead on the characters" (361). In choosing a realist style, the film's presentation of the interaction of present and past, a central concern of the novel, is finely realized. However, in not picturing some of the surrealist moments, associated especially with Septimus, the film not only loses a central part of his character, but also reduces its range of tone and mood substantially.

On the ideological level, Hankins likens the film to a "... Merchant Ivory love story about courtship, chaste kisses, lost youth, old houses, and dinner parties" (370). My own argument would be somewhat different; on the one hand, the film avoids raising the novel's difficult questions about Septimus's condition and almost entirely elides Miss
Kilman, in deference, I suspect, to a contemporary audience’s sense of political correctness. With respect to Miss Kilman in particular, Woolf’s complex relation to her own sexuality and to the spectrum of lesbian performance models in her own time, as well as Clarissa’s ambiguous relation to Miss Kilman, are matters that looked much different in the 1920s than they do more than seventy years later, and a contemporary audience lacking significant knowledge about the times in which Woolf wrote, much less Woolf herself, could easily have been mystified by any attempt to recreate these complex ambiguities. On the other hand, the film successfully re-orient a contemporary audience to the importance of World War I as a context in which to understand Mrs. Dalloway, and also sharpens the novel’s presentation of the potential of woman-to-woman relationships by lingering far more lovingly on the Clarissa-Sally relationship than the novel. And, in much the same manner that the previous two adaptations have done, the film grants to Clarissa an agency, particularly at the film’s end, that is missing in the novel, an agency far more in keeping with a contemporary audience’s views of the agency that accrues to women.

Like both its source and Potter’s Orlando and Campion’s Portrait, Gorris’s Mrs. Dalloway successfully resists the temptation of traditional approaches to film to rely on its source’s most melodramatic aspects, instead keeping those aspects in a careful balance with, in this case, a modernist reflectivity and style. Like the novel, the film grants tears to only two characters, both male, Septimus and Peter. Although Septimus’s character is indeed more pitiable than poetic as presented here, the film refuses to play his suicide for purely melodramatic purposes: We do not see his body flying towards the spikes of the railing on which he impales himself, much less the body hanging limp and bleeding. And
the film’s ending, if more settled than the novel’s, shows us not a Clarissa and a Peter
who are still shedding tears over a lost past, but who have reconciled with it. Whatever
else its merits may be, Gorris’s Mrs. Dalloway continues the tradition of opening up a
space in film for a more modernist realistic melodrama, resistant, as its source was, to the
excesses of literary melodrama, and as importantly, to the pressure on film-makers to
revert to the easy emotional appeal that film has the ability to arouse.

Finally, although the film is about nostalgia and loss, as Hankins argues—or
rather, more accurately, the coming to terms with loss—it is surely not about the
nostalgia and loss characteristic of the heritage films of Merchant-Ivory that Hankins
cites. Heritage films yearn for a simpler time, for an earlier socio-cultural context less
complex than that in which we currently find ourselves. Gorris’s Mrs. Dalloway deals
with a far more universal loss, the loss of youth, a loss which does not privilege a
particular era, since youth is and always has been lost, at least for those, unlike Septimus,
who grow older. The film’s message is that the attitude that drives Septimus to suicide
may have been overcome, and that the social view of women’s roles that so tortures Miss
Kilman may also be perhaps a thing of the past. True, the film’s final image privileges
the pre-lapsarian adolescence of its characters, an adolescence in which the world is full
of possibilities, including the possibility of a Clarissa-Sally romantic union. Far from
longing for that past era, however, the film succeeds in reminding us that in today’s
world, such a union is a far more realistic possibility than it was at the time the characters
existed. If anything, the film might be characterized as Romantic in the term’s meaning
of ‘emotion recollected in tranquillity,’ but the Romantic impulse is essentially a personal
one, not that attaches, as the heritage film does, only to a particular era.
CHAPTER 6

THE WINGS OF MELODRA MA

If a question for the three previous adaptations was, for many critics, not just why
now, but why at all, that question runs in a different direction for James’s Wings: Why
now, but not earlier (a made for television adaptation was indeed undertaken in 1979)?
Despite the characteristic James’s mode of interiority and elision, Wings is a narratively
compact tale that begins with thwarted love, expands into a love triangle, introduces not
one but two melodramatic heroines, and ends with one incontrovertibly dead, and the
other incontrovertibly unattached, and presumably unhappy, although perhaps rich, a
supreme irony because it was the lack of wealth that was the basis for the initially
thwarted love. If any of the plots of these novels fits most squarely into the melodramatic
paradigm, surely it is this one.

A closer look at Wings’s plot reveals several aspects of its melodramatic potential.
Set initially in London at the turn of the century, it introduces us to Kate Croy, a
beautiful, intelligent, but comparatively poor young woman, in love with Merton
Densher, a young journalist with no prospects for fortune. Kate’s past has not been so
poor economically as her present; her father has not only brought dishonor on the family
name, but ruined what were once somewhat greater family fortunes. However, wealth
remains in the Croy family in the figure of Kate’s Aunt Maud, sister to Kate’s dead
mother and the widowed possessor of immense wealth. Maud has offered to be Kate's patron, on the conditions that Kate give up both her contact with her father and any plans for marriage to Densher.

Despite her attraction to the lifestyle that wealth can buy, Kate begins the novel bravely, suggesting to her uncaring father that she, he, and perhaps Densher become a household, respectable at least, if poor. Mr. Croy, however, has his own designs, seeing in Kate's connection with Maud the chance for future profit; his thinking is clearly that, should Kate marry wealth, her family feeling, already evidenced by her giving up half of her mother's small legacy to her widowed, child-burdened sister, will benefit him far more than Densher's working-man's income ever could. So, rejected by her father, and unwilling to be part of the general sordidness of her sister's household, Kate settles on moving to Maud's and biding her time. She pledges herself to Densher, but their transaction is private, and she does not prevent Maud from arranging social interactions with Maud's versions of eligible partners, primarily in the figure of Lord Mark, a down-on-his-wealth, somewhat dissipated, although not entirely unpleasant, aristocrat.

The melodramatic characteristics of this initial plot situation, while not the extreme of a work such as Tess, are quite apparent: Will a poor heroine be forced into a loveless marriage to a dissolute aristocrat, and what will be the fate of the romantically ideal couple? This trajectory is furthered by Densher's newspaper assigning him to a three-month stint reporting from America, and the reader can almost predict the direction the narrative will take: Abandoned by her true love, Kate will be wooed, probably falsely, by Lord Mark; Densher's letters to her will have been intercepted by Maud, and his return will be delayed to the point that Kate, thinking Densher has abandoned her, is
ultimately won by Lord Mark. Some year and a half later, Densher will return, he and Kate will clandestinely rekindle their love, and the melodrama will proceed in any of a number of directions, hopefully involving murder and mayhem.

James, however, is not the master for nothing, because that trajectory, much like the potentially comic one of the first third of *Portrait*, is interrupted by the sudden appearance of a second leading lady, the rich, unattached (in all senses) young American woman, Milly Theale, a character whom James almost immediately shrouds in melodramatic qualities that perfectly counterpoint Kate’s. Milly is fabulously wealthy, but recently orphaned; and to turn the melodramatic heat up a little, James has her come to London to consult a physician about a mysterious illness. Milly is quickly taken up by Maud, through her earlier friendship with Milly’s companion, Susie Stringham, and Kate and Milly form a friendship independently, based as much as anything else on their mutual otherness: Milly is fascinated by Kate’s beauty, intelligence, and social finish, while Kate is drawn to Milly’s wealth, carefree attitude, and lack of concern for convention.

The plot quite literally sickens when Milly visits the famous doctor and seems to be told that she is indeed ill, with an unspecified but potentially fatal disease. In one of literature’s most puzzling diagnoses, the doctor tells Milly “‘ Isn’t to ‘live’ exactly what I’m trying to persuade you to take the trouble to do?’” (151). This ‘diagnosis’ is not just perplexing, but, from our perspective, perhaps even inexplicable; the other physically doomed character of James’s whom we’ve seen, Ralph Touchett, early on at least specifies his disease as “an advanced stage of pulmonary disorder” (159). Yet *Wings* proceeds all the way to its ending without ever specifying Milly’s illness. The two
typical speculations in critical literature are that Milly has tuberculosis, which claimed
James’s cousin Mary (Minny) Temple, or that she has inoperable cancer. In my own
view, however, James’s failure to specify Milly’s disease is fraught with melodramatic
overtones. The melodramatic heroine’s struggle is not one caused by a divided self, but
rather is with something external: an uncaring world, a betraying villain. In not
specifying the disease, the physician, Sir Luke, nevertheless treats Milly, saying, “... you ought of course, now, as soon as I’ve seen you again, to get out of London” (151).
Thus it is not the disease that will kill Milly, but rather something external to her,
London. The prescription opens itself up to medical meanings, in that the London
climate may be bad for Milly’s condition; as well as social meanings, such as that Milly,
with her wealth and innocence, might be devoured by the hawks of London society.
Either way, however, it places the point of conflict not within Milly’s body, but
somewhere outside it, which is exactly the location of the melodramatic conflict.

The rest of the tale can be told succinctly: Milly and Densher had met earlier in
the first days of Densher’s assignment to America, and Milly is smitten with Densher.
Kate, realizing ultimately that Milly is ill, that Milly loves Densher, and that Milly’s
money would free her and Densher to marry, encourages Densher to be at least passively
receptive to Milly’s interest in him. The principals all remove to Venice, where, again
ironically, Milly has decided to live. Densher is, or at least pretends to be, unaware of the
bargain he’s made until Kate spells it out for him; he contracts for completion by
requiring Kate to visit him in his Venice rooms for a tryst. Then, left alone in Venice
with Milly, he proceeds as a constant, if unenthusiastic, lover.
Kate’s plan goes swimmingly until Lord Mark re-enters. Having already proposed to Milly soon after she came to Venice, and been rejected, he returns to Venice and reveals Kate and Densher’s secret engagement, which, in Susie’s words, makes Milly turn “... her face to the wall” (331). Densher, having been turned away from a visit with Milly, sees Lord Mark and immediately guesses what he’s been up to; yet his response is to do nothing, to save himself from being seen as a fortune hunter, until not only Susie visits him, requesting that he see Milly, but also Sir Luke authorizes his approaching Milly. Here James is conducting an extremely complicated symphony about the conflicts in both melodrama and tragedy: Milly’s health has so far been guaranteed by the appearance that Kate and Densher are not involved and Densher’s passive attentions to her, both external factors over which she has no control. Lord Mark’s revelation, also an external factor, in effect shifts the conflict entirely inside Milly, and makes of her a divided self more characteristic of a tragic heroine: Should she believe the evidence of her eyes, or of Lord Mark? Indeed, James seems here to be saying, through his narrative, that it would be possible for Milly to continue to exist in a melodramatic world, but not a tragic one: As long as Milly’s conflict is external to her, she can survive, but once she becomes a divided self, she is doomed.

Densher, however, is in exactly the opposite situation. As long as only he and Kate know of their secret, he can control his own divided self, one self knowing that he loves Kate, the other being receptive to Milly. Once their secret is revealed by Lord Mark, however, Densher’s conflict becomes a melodramatic one, because he is immediately aware that ‘the world’ will label him a fortune hunter, and that change in the location of the conflict to a melodramatic space immobilizes him. This reading reveals
another, and more ironic, meaning to the twice-repeated phrase “circle of petticoats” (299) that Densher feels himself surrounded by at this stage of the novel: As long as he conceives of himself in the position of the divided self of the tragic character, he can manage the situation, but once he is cast into the feminine role of the melodramatic character, he is unable to function. As Doran Larson has effectively argued, however, it is just at the moment that Densher refuses to remain surrounded by the circle of petticoats that represent what she terms a “female-homosocial” economy (82) that the action of the novel begins to move to its unhappy conclusion. Indeed, that downward movement could well be said to begin with Densher’s entirely unsubtle agreement with Kate that, in order for him to continue their scheme, she must let him quite literally penetrate her circle of petticoats.

By the time Densher follows Sir Luke’s recommendation (ignoring Susie’s, and once again indicating his ultimate allegiance to a male power paradigm) several days after being originally turned away from Milly’s villa, it is already too late for Milly. As we now expect from James, their interview is elided from the text; if the reader is to believe what Densher says, Milly forgives him for his deception. Densher leaves Venice, at Milly’s urging he later reports, and returns to England. When Milly dies a month or so later, she leaves Densher a substantial part of her fortune. Even on his return to England, however, Densher distances himself from Kate; he finally conditions his union with her on the basis of his rejecting Milly’s bequest. Kate turns the tables on Densher by saying that she’ll renounce the bequest only if he can say to her that he doesn’t love Milly’s
memory, which he is unable to do. The novel ends with Kate walking out of Densher’s apartment; she may now be rich (he’s said he’ll give the money to her), but both are alone.

As this summary indicates, *Wings* relies on several narrative and thematic concerns that it shares with *Orlando*, *Portrait*, and *Mrs. Dalloway*. Although it ultimately rejects the bildungsroman aspects of those novels, its first half, particularly as it pictures Milly, contains the possibility of the bildungsroman, and the tantalizing nature of Milly’s disease, the cure for which is “to live,” even momentarily sharpens that possibility. Like *Orlando* and *Portrait*, the fairy godmother figure is present, but actually doubled, in the forms of Aunt Maud and Milly herself. Like *Mrs. Dalloway*, in which Clarissa’s party serves as a magical and transcendent episode, Milly’s party—her last public appearance in the novel—is also magical and transcendent. As in *Orlando* and *Portrait*, an exotic backdrop is the setting for some of the novel’s most significant events, a backdrop that adds its own sense of mystery, fascination, and transgression. Gender continues to remain an important topic through, among other things, the presentation of the active, aggressive Kate versus the passive, inactive Densher, and the evident attraction between Kate and Milly. The question of marriage is as important here as in all the other novels, although it is given its own particular Jamesian cast associating it with social position and economics. Expressing one’s identity, although in quite different ways, is an important concern for Kate, Densher, and Milly, and the agency that comes with such expressions forms a central spine of the novel’s narrative.

Despite these similarities, and their potential attractions for the contemporary film-maker, as well as its clear melodramatic qualities, the difficulties of handling *Wings*
as a traditional film melodrama are significant. One of those difficulties is in its comparatively uncertain ending. In Milly’s case, while the forgiveness by the heroine of an impure society and then her death are standard melodramatic fare, the impact of her bequest in separating Kate and Densher forever has been read by several critics as a conscious striking back at them, making of Milly something less pure than the sacrifice-driven heroine characteristic of death-ending melodramas. In the case of Kate and Densher, we at first seem to have a standard melodramatic set-up, the loving couple prevented by society from being united. When those melodramas don’t end in the death of the couple (such as in Griffith’s Broken Blossoms), however, they usually end up in a happy union between them (such as in Griffith’s Way Down East). Clearly, however, neither Kate nor Densher is happy, much less united with the other; indeed, to the extent that melodrama usually ends with a return to a state of innocence (even if in death), the novel’s last line, given to Kate, is “‘We shall never be again as we were!’” (403). Thus, there is neither the acceptance of their situation and a relatively pleasant parting (as in a more modern tear-jerker, such as Pollack’s The Way We Were), nor an acceptance of each other even with the inevitable flaws (as in James’s last novel, The Golden Bowl).

The particular characters James creates in Wings are also more difficult to characterize than those in Portrait, with which it is frequently compared. Such a comparison is based on the presence of a scheming couple (Madame Merle and Osmond, Kate and Densher) out to create a sham marriage in order to benefit from the money of a victimized woman. However, the structural similarity of the situations hardly corresponds to the experience of encountering the characters. As Robin Wood rightly notes, “The Portrait of a Lady is still firmly grounded in the nineteenth century: however
complex the characters, James pretends to know them, and to communicate his knowledge of them to the reader; by *The Golden Bowl* (and via *The Wings of the Dove*) all confidence in such an undertaking has dissolved beyond the possibility of restoration” (18). Thus, Osmond is a much more straightforward melodramatic villain than Densher; while virtually everyone close to Isabel, except for Madame Merle, warns Isabel not to marry Osmond, knowing or intuiting that he is a cad, Densher finds himself in the odd position of being encouraged by everyone who cares about Milly to at least passively engage himself to her. Indeed, even Susie Stringham, who is aware of Kate and Densher’s secret alliance, pleads with Densher to deny Lord Mark’s revelation, saying to Densher, “‘I promise to believe you down to the ground if, to save her life, you consent to a denial’” (344). Kate repeats much the same point to Densher when she tells him, “‘She never wanted the truth . . . She wanted you. She would have taken from you what you could give her and been glad of it, even if she had known it false’” (361). Susie’s willingness to believe Densher’s lie, and Kate’s assertion that Milly herself would have believed it, set forth the issues of truth and falsity, reality and appearance, in a much different light than they are set forth in *Portrait*.

Indeed, *Wings* would seem to be far more about, to use the title of William Gass’s essay on *Portrait*, the high brutality of good intentions than the earlier work. Madame Merle’s good intentions are not directed to Isabel, whom she uses merely to insure a comfortable future for Pansy; and Osmond’s interest in Isabel is purely financial. By contrast, everyone in *Wings* wants the best for Milly. The central conflict at the end of the novel arises out of differing views about what is best for Milly, and it is expressed almost entirely in a gender-specific framework. Despite all his own financial reasons for
wanting Milly, Lord Mark in fact reveals a truth to her that the reader is well aware of; had the truth of Pansy’s parentage been made known to Isabel prior to her marriage to Osmond, it’s quite possible she would have understood immediately that Osmond’s interest in her was thoroughly driven by her money. Densher’s allegiance to the truth is expressed in a slightly different way: He can continue to consider himself honest as long as he doesn’t directly lie to Milly. In Portrait, then, deception is the evil; in Wings, the failure to deceive is the evil, to the extent that it is failure to deceive that causes Milly’s death.

Such a dynamic reverses the polarity of traditional film melodrama, in which it is the uncovering of the deception (if deception is an issue) that saves the day, just as it was in Portrait. There, the Countess Gemini’s revelation to Isabel of Pansy’s parentage is the enabling condition for Isabel’s journey to Ralph’s deathbed; likewise, Isabel’s own recognition, confirmed by Ralph, that Osmond “... wouldn’t have married me if I had been poor” (478) allows her to return to Rome armed with the truth, to do with what she likes, or rather, what each reader would like her to do. Truth thus functions as a dynamic activator, a necessary condition for meaningful agency. Quite in contrast, truth in Wings impedes meaningful agency at every turn: Initially, if Kate and Densher make the truth of their engagement known, they risk the loss of Aunt Maud’s patronage; later, if Milly acknowledges the brutal truth of her disease, she will cease to live; later still, if either Kate or Densher acknowledges to Milly the truth of their engagement, they risk losing both her life and her wealth. In Wings, then, meaningful agency is possible only through deception.
It is in this sense at least that *Wings* may actually be considered a post-modern melodrama. While I do not want to suggest any hard and fast categorizations of modernist and post-modernist works, it seems that the modernist work, such as *Portrait* and *Mrs. Dalloway*, may hide the truth, fragment the truth, and even suggest that no complete or essential truth can be known; the post-modernist work, such as *Orlando* or *Wings*, presents a world in which the recuperative value of the truth has been shattered, a world in which appearance positively matters, while reality negatively matters, a world in which the value of the exterior, the image, the representation, rules, versus the value of the interior, the word, the essence, which are reduced not just to nothing, as they sometimes are in the modernist work, but more importantly to a negative value. In this sense, then, *Wings* can be understood as a conflict between the modernist values of Densher and Lord Mark, who value truth in relation to the external world, and the post-modernist values of Kate, Milly, Maud, Susie, and Luke Strett, who value appearance in relation to the external world. Against the apparently intractable truth of a fatal disease, Milly will continue to live only if the world presents a false but convincing appearance to her. The structural importance of the world is in the same position as in traditional melodrama, but melodrama's traditional conflating of good and truth has been disrupted.

Such a reading of *Wings* serves in several ways as a bridge to post-modernism. As Steven Shaviro notes, "... postmodernism dissolves any notion of fixed personal identity or of an integral and self-contained subject..." (viii). James, writing at the cusp of the emergence of literary modernism, but, more narrowly, at the cusp of the outbreak of the war between essentialism and existentialism, accurately sensed the coming battle between the power of the word and the power of the image. In refusing to give a word to
Milly's illness, and in urging Milly "to live," Sir Luke both acknowledges the power of the word, and also announces what can undermine that power, namely the image. If the name of death remains unspoken, and if Milly continues to be the image of life, she will continue to live; thus, as Marcia Ian notes, although at a different point in the novel, "the sudden virulence of her symptoms was the effect of a way of speaking about them literally" (228, emphasis added). And, until the name of Kate and Densher's relationship is spoken by Lord Mark, Milly does indeed live. Once he does so, however, the only hope for Milly to continue living, as both Susie and Kate agree, is for Densher to counter Lord Mark's naming by his own counter-naming, his own denial. His refusal to do so, despite Susie's plea to him, should not be seen as the novel's endorsement of the word, but as Densher's own inability to break out of the essentialism represented by the authority of the word. Thus, the novel sets up a very contemporary and complex relationship between the word and the image. As Densher tells Kate, had he directly denied their engagement, "I wouldn't have made my denial, in such conditions, only to take it back afterwards" (360). Not at all surprisingly, then, Densher not only obeys Milly's words that he should leave Venice, but enshrines in his mind not his last image of her, but her last words, literally embodied in the letter to him announcing the bequest that Kate tosses into the fire. Densher remains from beginning to end a slave to the word, although enthralled by the image.

In the previous three chapters, I argued that each adaptation maintained a delicate, dynamic balance between melodrama, on the one side, and some other equally weighted mode. That is not the case with The Wings of the Dove, which clearly tilts, especially in its ending, toward melodrama, and perhaps that is why Iain Softley's adaptation, from a
screenplay by Hossein Amini, was the most commercially and critically (as judged by prestigious award nominations) successful of all four adaptations discussed here, taking in nearly as much U.S. domestic box office in its initial run as the other three films combined, and being nominated for four, and winning one, Academy Awards (Best Actress, Helena Bonham Carter; Best Cinematography, Eduardo Serra; Best Costume Design, Sandy Powell, who won the Oscar; and Best Adapted Screenplay, Amini). Its production history is not as well-documented as the three earlier works, but some interesting comparisons and contrasts are immediately evident. Softley is the only male director among the four, and he came to the project with an uncontroversial and unremarkable past, his two previous films having been Backbeat, the story of Peter Best, the fifth Beatle, and Hackers. Although he did not write the screenplay, as Potter did, he claims to have “worked closely with” Amini (O’Leary); however, like Gorris, and unlike both Potter and Campion, he had no prior history with the book, saying that he and Amini didn’t do the film “... because we were in love with the book” and indeed that their first response to it “... was that it was rather inappropriate to the screen” (O’Leary). Amini, the only male screenwriter of the four, is also unlike them in that he had no particular involvement with James or this particular novel; and unlike them as well, he had to his credit already a relatively well-respected adapted screenplay for Jude, from Hardy’s Jude the Obscure. Powell, whose costume work on Orlando was equally symbolic, and also nominated for an Oscar, justly won for her work on Wings. And, like Mrs. Dalloway, but unlike Orlando and Portrait, the film’s cast was anchored by an actress, Bonham Carter, with significant name recognition and some (if admittedly lesser) star power, but a reputation made almost entirely in the context of costume adaptations of fin de siecle...
works. Interestingly, Bonham Carter has said that the cast members "... were all avoiding the subject of the book and then we realized that none of us read it!" (Pride), and Linus Roache, who plays Densher, has confirmed that he at least did not read the novel (King).

Although a variety of other interesting production facts are available, such as that Milly’s Palazzo in the film is actually the one where James wrote a good part of the novel, my point in raising those noted above is to emphasize the greater distance from any allegiance to either the novel or the author that differentiates this cast and crew from the others discussed here. As we’ve seen, each of the other productions was dominated by a pair of core enthusiasts (Potter-Swenson, Campion-Kidman, and Redgrave-Atkins) who not only were devotees of the novel/author, but who were also largely responsible for the projects ultimately being filmed, unlike this one, where Softley has said that he and Amini "... were asked to look at the book" (O’Leary). *Wings*, that is, seems to have been a project undertaken in a primarily commercial or industrial spirit, rather than as an emotionally invested one. Ironically, perhaps, the commercial spirit at least in terms of the significance of money is far more powerful in this novel than it is in the other three (even *Portrait*), and perhaps that factor is why the James scholar Alan Nadel, after criticizing the film’s lack of fidelity to James’s novel, is forced to admit, grudgingly, that “The film succeeds on its own terms by helping the spectator overcome the murky and partial elements that comprise its [the novel’s] diegesis...” (285).

Indeed, as Wood correctly argues, “... not one single scene in the film has a close counterpart in the novel” (21), and there is absolutely no question that of the four films considered here, *Wings* makes the least attempt to reproduce its source’s scenes. Perhaps
it is the very distance from which Softley and Amini looked at the novel that resulted in
their using its central characters and general plot without, however, attempting to
transcribe its scenes. For Wood, “... everything has been fully dramatised—or better,
cinematised—with objective correlatives found, wherever possible, for internal states”
(22). In his view, “... the particular distinction of _The Wings of the Dove_ lies in its
respect for the novel’s melodramatic basis combined with the ability to find cinematic
equivalents for something of James’s subtlety, complexity, and ambiguity” (10). This is
a judgment with which I agree, and a closer look at just what the film does do will show
why.

A core group of changes in characters, circumstances, and events makes the film a
more sharply melodramatic narrative than its source. The first of these changes centers
on Kate’s initial position in the novel. Absent is the option of living, sordid as it might
be, with her sister, who is not present in the film. Also absent is the revelation of Kate’s
small inheritance from her mother, effectively closing out any possibility of Kate’s
establishing a household of her own or with her father. Her father, in fact, is a far more
debauched, although simultaneously more pitiable, character in the film. Here, he is
presented as an alcohol- and opium-addicted sot whose drug habits Kate must support by
giving the gifts Maud gives her to the proprietors of the opium den. As Wood rightly
notes of this change, “The film converts the vagueness [of the novel] into the explicitness
and excess of melodrama” (23). In addition, at the same stroke Croy himself is depicted
as a victim of a debauched society that not only tolerates his drug abuse, but legitimizes it
through its legalization. Any possibility of he and Kate sharing a household is
immediately defeated both by his addiction and by the scene in his flat, which in the
novel is simply "vulgar," but in the film is a true hovel; as Richard Kaye rightly notes, "The film depicts Kate as again and again returning to the debauched, Dickensian world of saloons and opium dens inhabited by her father and by Merton's Grub Street realm of journalistic diatribes and fierce political debate" (249).

To further highlight the melodramatic aspects of Kate's initial situation, Maud's character is almost entirely altered in the film. In the novel, she is a narrow, conservative, but not unkind representative of the nouveau riche commercial class, whose wealth serves to activate class prejudice. There, she actually rather likes Densher, and he rather likes her; she does not forbid Kate's relationship with him, nor even, expressly, their marriage, and she promotes his relationship with Milly. In the film, by contrast, she is as Walter Kendrick notes, "... a wicked stepmother" (54) whose interest in Kate is entirely as a property to be auctioned to the highest aristocratic bidder. In the novel, Maud seems to sincerely, if mistakenly, believe that for Kate, marriage to a working class man, even an educated, literate one, will inevitably lead to unhappiness; in the film, Kate exists merely as a reflection of Maud's own status consciousness, as indicated when she gives Kate an expensive necklace so that Kate won't appear to be Milly's servant while they are together in Venice.

The result of all these early alterations is to make Kate's initial circumstances far more melodramatic than they are in the novel by eliminating options that exist for her there. In the film, she has no inheritance, making an independent life impossible; the socially honorable but sordid life with her sister is entirely elided; forming a household with her father is out of the question; and an indefinite stay under Maud's roof is equally untenable because the Maud of the film is a far worse monster than the Maud of the
novel. Characteristically for melodrama, the film presents Kate's options as limited by external factors, entirely submerging the novel's complications introduced by her own unwillingness either to be part of her sister's household or to exist indefinitely in the comfortable limbo of Maud's.

The one option left to Kate in both versions is one that the film chooses to explore in more detail than the novel, which is for Kate to marry Densher as they are. In the novel, the narrator says, "His [Densher's] want of means—of means sufficient for anyone but himself—was really the great ugliness, and was moreover at no time more ugly for him than when it rose there..." (54). As he is presented there, then, Densher either himself realizes, or is pictured by the narrator, as admittedly having insufficient means to support Kate. Yet it is at this exact point, quite early on, that the novel suffers from that "murky diegesis": Kate has already offered to her penniless father to make a household with him and Densher, a household whose means would be based, presumably, on half of Kate's inheritance from her mother and Densher's income; the novel simply ignores the paradox of why the inclusion of Croy would legitimize a penurious household of the three of them, and why their marriage alone would not legitimize a necessarily less penurious household of Kate and Densher. It indicates here, at best, that Kate's desire for the finer things in life that only wealth can buy prevents such an arrangement; yet its having Kate suggest the Kate-Croy-Densher household simultaneously seriously undermines such a reading. The film, by contrast, clarifies the novel's confusion by eliminating Kate's independent income, making of her father not just a no-contributor but a positive drag because of the cost of his addiction, and showing Densher's flat as a cramped two-room affair in which one person, much less two, would barely have room to
Finally, as Wood notes, the film's Croy makes the explicit connection between money and marriage, clearly indicating to Kate that "... without money, a life with Merton Densher might well repeat the disintegration and misery of her parents' marriage" (23). Different as the film's treatment of Kate's initial situation is, it both more strongly focuses on the melodramatic thematics of the situation and eliminates the novel's logical instabilities, its "murky and partial elements."

The film also makes of Densher a more melodramatic character by associating his work with a liberal political agenda favoring the working class and other victimized groups. In the novel, the journalism Densher practices is associated with observing and reporting on society, but there is no indication that it is characterized by a strongly liberal bias, nor does Densher ever have a particularly political thought. The film, by contrast, gives Densher's journalism a clear political and liberal thrust; he is early on seen and heard arguing with other newspapermen about whether the upper class will ever change of their own accord (Densher thinks not); and the one story he is working on that he shares with Kate is of a shady physician who performs surgeries on young prostitutes that, as John Carlos Rowe notes, is a method of "... increasing their sexual capital" (203). Thus, the Densher of the novel, who works at journalism merely to support himself, is here presented as a man with a cause, a liberal agenda associated with the rights of the poor and underprivileged. In addition, the contrast between Densher and Lord Mark, which is initially minimal in the novel, is presented much more sharply here, increased first by the presentation of Densher, and second by Lord Mark's characterization as an effete alcoholic wastrel whose only interest in Milly is her fortune.
Finally, to complete this much more melodramatic opening situation, Maud actually forbids Kate to see Densher. In the context of the film’s elision of any alternative to life with Maud, such a move makes perfect sense, and is yet another example of the theme of the metaphorical imprisonment of the body characteristic of the domestic melodrama. In the novel, Kate and Densher’s separation was because of Densher’s three-month assignment to America, and they pledge before he leaves to remain true to each other. Here, however, Kate is faced with no alternative except a life in Densher’s cramped flat; even more, she tells him in the scene in his flat that “One day you’ll get tired of me.” One can read this line in at least two ways, both of which have strong melodramatic overtones. First, Kate could mean that Densher will ultimately tire of a relationship which has been already depicted as motivated in large part by sexual attraction, in which case the film is grafting onto its story a thematics typified by the erotically charged domestic melodrama of Tess. Second, it might also be read as an interesting reversal of Tess, meaning here that Kate partly attributes Densher’s interest in her as motivated by their class difference. However one reads her comment, Maud’s prohibition is preceded by the film’s depiction of two physically romantic encounters between Kate and Densher, and can be read, as Rowe argues, as part of the film’s examination of “...how to control and rechannel sexual desire, which otherwise contributes to a general modern tendency toward disorder” (202). True as that may be, the narrative dynamics at this stage are almost purely melodramatic, as Kate follows orders and sorrowfully but dutifully has Densher turned away from Maud’s door in a set-piece tableau of society forbidding love, as the film then pictures Kate lying sobbing in her bed.
At this point, much like the novel, Milly's introduction shifts the narrative focus to her. Surprisingly, given the film's far more sharply melodramatic opening treatment of Kate, it chooses not to emphasize Milly's status as an orphan, and entirely discards the novel's own perhaps over-determined introduction of Milly perched on a steep promontory in the Alps. Instead, her illness is much more emphasized here, as she is soon pictured being examined by the complicated instruments of a radiologist, and then, a scene later, Lord Mark flatly tells Kate that Milly is very ill and everyone in New York knows about it. Later, after Milly, Kate and Susie have removed to Venice, Milly's late-night coughing fit prompts Kate to write Densher; and one of their days of sight-seeing ends when Milly faints, and is taken to the hospital. Although I disagree with Ian's analysis that "... the film never gives Milly a chance" (222) to live, there is no question that its handling of Milly's illness is far more material and far less existential than the novel's. The effect is once again to move the film to a more familiar melodramatic space than the novel, a space where the heroine is doomed, and away from what Ian rightly characterizes as "... the novel's romantic insistence—its fantasy—that Milly is 'living by option, by volition' ..." (222).

While the more certainly-doomed heroine is consistent with a more melodramatic than romantic approach, however, Ian's reading of the film as essentially "obliterating" (222) Milly's chance for life does not seem to me so accurate, however. Ian's analysis relies strongly on the spoken word, first of Lord Mark to Kate, and then, later, of Kate to Densher, and the examination, coughing and fainting spells are certainly present. However, beyond those brief scenes, Alison Elliot's Milly looks the picture of life. Indeed, in the novel, once Milly reaches Venice, she never sets foot outside of the
Palazzo Leporelli after she settles in; she receives only individuals and her small group of followers, the one exception being her party, and even for that she must miss the dinner to rest. By contrast, the film entirely liberates Milly from the Palazzo, with only a few scenes being set there. Milly traverses the city at will, twice running up steep flights of stairs in church towers, walking, even dancing with Densher. Indeed, it is Densher's letter to Kate saying that Milly is more alive than ever that prompts the film’s denouement.

The difficulty in Ian’s reading of both the novel and film on this matter seems to me a central one in adaptation study: the over-valuing of the word and the under-valuing of the image. While it is certainly true that the novel won’t allow Milly’s illness to be directly spoken of, it also chooses to imprison Milly in the Palazzo; her resulting status is as a prisoner upon whom sentence has not been pronounced, and it is certainly a status with more than a little ambiguity of its own. Indeed, James’s treatment is weighted with his typical irony: For Milly, the limit of what “to live” means is shutting herself up in the Palazzo and receiving visitors a few hours a day, in a city that itself is suggestive of death-in-life. The film’s ambiguity lies in a different place, that is, on the one hand Lord Mark’s and Kate’s words and the three scenes depicting Milly as ill, contrasted by the far larger number of scenes showing a very active and free (and increasingly sexual, one might add) Milly, and Alison Elliot’s appearance of perfect health. Thus, the novel’s romantic fantasy of a Milly who can live is undercut by her more melodramatic imprisonment in the Palazzo; the film’s melodramatic presentation of Milly as doomed by disease is equally undercut by a romantic fantasy activated by a physically active and quite healthy-looking Milly. With respect to its presentation of Milly, then, Wood is
exactly right when he argues that "Alison Elliott’s amazing performance brings her to vivid and concrete life . . . The pallid phantom of the book becomes a young woman of flesh and blood, passionately, physically in love with life . . . " (25). It is no coincidence, of course, that Wood, primarily a film critic, places at least as high a value on the power of Elliott’s vibrantly imaged Milly as on the words of the film’s characters, a value entirely appropriate to the nature of film as an art form.

Both versions, however, agree that, as Ian notes, what kills Milly is words, in particular the words of Lord Mark that Kate and Densher are secretly engaged. The episode is handled rather differently in the film, however. The most obvious difference is that, while in the novel Lord Mark apparently guesses at Kate and Densher’s engagement, and tells Milly on his own volition, in the film, Kate receives Densher’s letter about Milly’s being more alive than ever, then goes to Lord Mark, and then Lord Mark tells Milly. Here again, the result of the change is that the film offers a far more traditionally melodramatic motivation for the revelation—simply put, Kate’s jealousy. But while this change fits in perfectly with the more melodramatic thematics of the film, its motivation through Kate’s jealousy is, unfortunately in my view, part of what Rowe has called the film’s quality of “. . . recycling modernist anxieties regarding the anarchic feminine . . . ” (208), a quality that is part of its more general conservative ideology, which will be discussed in more detail subsequently.

For the present, it is the different roles Lord Mark plays that I want to explore. In the novel, it is never entirely clear what Lord Mark’s motivation is for telling Milly about the secret engagement. He delivers the news to Milly in an elided scene, is then seen by Densher in a cafe, and then is present a few times in London in the company of Maud,
with whom he is staying. Kate speculates to Densher that Lord Mark guessed at their engagement because of Kate's continuing lack of interest in him; indeed, from the beginning of the novel he has had an insight into their true relationship. The obvious reading would be that Lord Mark is the novel's archetypal melodramatic villain, who tells Milly about the engagement both out of vengeance for having his own proposal turned down by her and because he realizes that Densher will inherit Milly's wealth, which will allow Kate and Densher to marry. Yet the Lord Mark of the novel, unlike the Lord Mark of the film, hardly seems capable of that level of vengeance. The novel's Lord Mark is not the drunken sot of the film, he is more acutely aware of Milly's illness, and he surely realizes that the news of the secret engagement will be a serious, if not fatal, blow to her.

It is tempting to read James's version as another play on or reversal of the techniques of the conventional melodrama. In Portrait, for the point of comparison, Isabel is trapped into an ultimately loveless and stifling marriage by Madame Merle and Osmond's deception, but such a condition is at best a metaphorical death. As earlier noted, here it is the revelation of truth, already a reversal of melodramatic conventions, that is the crucial point; but the result is hardly metaphorical, rather Milly's actual physical death. The impact of Lord Mark's revelation is thus fully melodramatic: Milly sickens and dies. But Lord Mark himself as James has created his character hardly seems to be a character correlative with the moustache-twirling villain of melodrama. It is as if, by contrast, Osmond had paid an assassin to kill Ned Rozier, that is, an over-determined melodramatic action committed by someone unequal to that level of villainy.

Here again, then, the film sharpens the melodramatic aspects versus the novel's presentation. Softley's version of Lord Mark is a drunken sot, who is in love with Kate,
and any insight into character he might have, except into external social relations, is entirely lacking. He has already tearfully told Kate that he will have to marry Milly for her money, even though he loves Kate, and the news that Milly is falling for Densher would thus alarm him. Since he has not already been to Venice and seen Densher there, as he has in the novel, he would have no reason to suspect that Densher might be wooing Milly, and indeed his much more limited presence in the film has given him no opportunity to see Milly and Densher together at all. Although he is aware that she is mortally ill, he is presented as too literal, or perhaps simply too stupid, to himself think that the news of the secret engagement could possibly have a physical impact on Milly. That the film chooses to send Lord Mark home as quickly as the novel, rather than to stay himself, ready to pick up the pieces, is entirely consistent both with his having no expectation that this news will kill Milly and with his utter selfishness.

To finish this analysis of the film’s far more melodramatic mode, we turn to its denouement. First, unlike the novel, the scene of Milly’s forgiving Densher is presented, in another purely conventional melodramatic set piece of the deceived heroine forgiving those around her who are less pure than she is. Rowe quite rightly describes this scene as “. . . yet another element in Softley’s aesthetic composition of Milly as one of those luminous figures of femininity in John Singer Sargent’s idealised portraits . . .” (207); although Milly is apparently near death, the luminous quality of the heroine in her Christ-like moment of forgiveness is once again a melodramatic staple, with only the glow of a halo around her head absent, perhaps as a token to the viewer who longs for some slight departure from convention. Next, Densher does what the forgiven melodramatic hero should do, stays in Venice through Milly’s funeral, although, like the novel, viewers are
spared any death scenes. The film then eliminates the several months that pass with Densher back in London, and moves directly to the novel’s last scene in Densher’s flat, about which more will be said shortly; suffice to say here that, like the novel, and quite consistent again with the conventions of melodrama, the fallen but redeemed-by-forgiveness Densher cannot return to Kate.

This is not, however, the last scene of the film. That is reserved for a shot of Densher back in Venice, unloading his suitcases from a gondola and standing on the shore, with a voice-over of the words Milly had spoken to him earlier in the film, assuring him that “. . . everything’s gonna happen for you . . .” and that she believes in him. What the film is referencing is the redemptive melodrama, in contrast to the novel, which in its ending references the un-redemptive melodrama of a work such as *Jude the Obscure*. Similarly, Densher’s devotion to, if not fetishization of, the memory of Milly operates quite as it does in the novel despite the change in locale—perhaps even more effectively for that. But, while Densher’s return to Venice to close the film makes perfect sense in the melodramatic context of the final adoration of the too-pure-to-live melodramatic heroine, we are right to ask, indeed invited to by the voice over, as Ian says, “To what do they [the words] refer?” (216). Ian here (as elsewhere in her discussion of the film) sharply criticizes it for leaving the lines “. . . left to float referent-free at the end of the film . . .” (216), ultimately concluding that “. . . her speech itself becomes the ‘everything’ that was ‘gonna happen for’ him, while the viewer is expected to believe that somehow this ‘good feeling’ represents redemption, the pearl of great price” (218). I would argue, as Rowe does, rather differently: The film does indeed depict Densher as redeemed at the end, saved from what Rowe calls “. . . the force of the
threatening New Woman, Kate, who is associated with our worst modern tendencies” (202). Wood agrees with this reading, noting that the film’s ending is “... a sentimental cliche ... Worse, it also tends to redeem Merton at Kate’s expense, adding to the conventionally sexist implication that ‘it was all the woman’s fault’” (29). However, while Rowe, Wood, and I all agree about the effect of the ending, Rowe’s argument far too easily reduces the film’s ideology to the rejection of the supposedly chaotic New Woman. To examine Rowe’s assertion more closely, however, we must examine the film’s far more overt presentation of sexuality and other modern tendencies.

Commentators on the novel have long and rightly recognized its comparatively more overt sexual aspects than James’s other major novels until Wings, a quality which it shares with The Golden Bowl. The novel’s focus on descriptions of Kate’s physical beauty and general appearance are extremely frequent versus similar descriptions of, for example, Isabel Archer, and among the other frustrations that the novel’s Densher feels is that Kate thinks it inappropriate, as a single woman of marriageable age, to visit his flat. Ultimately, of course, Densher will continue with the scheme only if Kate visits him in his rooms in Venice, and, although the scene is characteristically elided, there is no question as to what happens there. Even late in the novel, after Densher has returned to London, passages such as “When she [Kate] had come nearer to him, when, putting her hand upon him, she made him sink with her, as she leaned to him, into their old pair of chairs, she prevented irresistibly, she forestalled, the waste of his passion. She had an advantage with his passion now” (374) invite interpretation as very thinly veiled references to a quite actual sexual activity between the two. And, more recently,
commentary on the homoerotic dynamics of the Kate-Milly relationship has appeared with some frequency in critical discussions of the novel (Larson, Kaye, et. al.).

Given the novel’s own invitations, a contemporary audience for the film, and an on-going reassessment of actual versus nostalgic views of Victorian sexual practices, it is hardly surprising that the film elevates sexual activity to a dominant aspect of its action. Its first scene is of Densher offering his seat in the underground to Kate; they leave the train, and, alone together in an elevator, they kiss, and Densher proceeds to grope Kate through her clothing, an advance which she ends by saying, “Merton, no!” Whether or not this segment is Kate’s fantasy, as Rowe reads it, to put the sexual weight entirely on Kate’s side seems quite reductive, unless one reads engaging in a passionate kiss as automatically authorizing further activity, a stance which cannot be maintained. Kate may be a New Woman, but her command to stop illustrates the complex negotiations that the New Woman faced regarding sexual activity and how to regulate it. A few scenes later, Kate and Densher are out boating, then get caught in a downpour; here Kate makes her promise to Densher, and, when he asks for proof, she seals her commitment with a kiss, but nothing more. Two scenes later, Kate shows up at Merton’s flat, pronounces that “It’s much nicer here than I thought it would be,” then enters his bedroom and lies, briefly, on the bed. While all these scenes are far more overt than any in the novel, reading them, as Rowe does, as illustrating “. . . the immorality of sexual desire . . .” (203) surely stretches interpretation quite far, given the 1910 setting of the film, unless one simply conflates a passionate kiss into intercourse, which a contemporary audience is surely unlikely to do.
After Milly is introduced, three later scenes also raise sexual issues quite strongly. In the first, Kate catches sight of Milly in the streets, follows her into a bookstore, where she discovers her reading Tennyson, and then drags her over to the erotica section, causing the several older men there to flee like frightened chickens. While one could read Kate here, as Rowe does, as indeed the threatening New Woman seeking the freedom to possess and enjoy pornography herself, one can also see her as exposing a hypocritical double-standard that allows men such access, but not women; not coincidentally, she and Milly laugh over the picture, making of the pornography an object of humor rather than an object that arouses lustful feelings. Wood reads this scene quite differently, noting that the photograph pictures “. . . two women sharing one man, combining lesbian and heterosexual relations. A fantasy of how things might, ideally, be worked out among the three central characters . . .” (36-37). That the relation depicted might be, as Rowe argues, associated with the New Woman is clear; however, as Wood notes, Milly takes “. . . quite unselfconscious pleasure in the image, she and Kate joining in a laughter that seems at once satirical and complicit . . .” (37). Far more is going on here, in short, than Rowe gives the presentation credit for.

In the following scene, Kate and Milly are at a party, and Densher, escorting an older woman, enters. Kate lures Densher up to the billiard room, kisses him, and then says, “I want you to go back and kiss her with that mouth. You came with her.” As Rowe reads it, “Even this cinematically added dialogue is derived from pornographic films, in which figures in menage a trois swap kisses and bodily fluids” (202). Perhaps; however, it is also the act of a woman of melodrama who has been forbidden to see her lover, who perhaps wishes that he had not so easily given up his desire for her, who has
just seen him on the arm of another woman, and whose friend Milly has already expressed an interest in him. Indeed, her “You came with her” suggests not just jealousy, but also that Kate would have preferred that Densher play the role of the melodramatic lover who is pining away for her, even at the cost of not attending the party in order to see her. While there is little question, then, that Kate is here using her sexuality to try to control Densher, it is surely not the case that only the New Woman has employed this strategy. Finally, the situation is structurally similar to the previous one, in which a man is shared by two women; rather than read the scene as indicative of a sexually aggressive, but possessive and controlling New Woman, as Rowe does, it might well be taken as placing the man in the position of the exchange between the women.

Three scenes later, Milly is caught in a sudden downpour and seeks shelter in an art museum, in which she discovers Kate and Densher. Already taking the opportunity to get Milly and Densher together, Kate leaves them looking at Gustav Klimt’s Danae, about which Rowe dismissively says, “Great art, it seems, has been degraded by Kate’s lewd intention to match her lover and her friend” (203). Walter Kendrick provides a much more useful analysis, noting that the presence of the painting “… bristles with enough ambiguities to satisfy any Jamesian” (54). Most obviously, Milly can be construed as the goddess from whose loins gold will spring, and, as Kendrick notes, “Visually its colors suit her, and it makes explicit the bond between money and sex that permeates the film” (54) and that, one might add, permeates the novel as well. However, one might also argue, as Kendrick does, that the painting’s figure is “… more evocative of Kate, whom Milly’s gold will enable to marry Densher” (54). In addition, the scene must also be read in light of the earlier scene in the bookstore, putting it into the context
of the public negotiations of the era over what constituted pornography. The line between the bookstore images and what Kendrick describes as what for its time was an "aggressively erotic painting..." (54) is not so easy to draw, and mirrors the line in the private sphere between a too-aggressive, threatening sexuality, and a too-passive, angel-in-the-house mode that Kate has so far been attempting to negotiate.

From this point until much later in the film, its interventions in terms of sexual issues reveal what Richard Kaye correctly calls a "Sapphic rapport between Kate and Milly that is delicate but unmistakable" (249). Here again, the intervention is notable only because it is overt, since any careful reading of the novel is also highly suggestive. Thus, within just a few weeks of meeting Kate, Milly thinks to herself, "She had lived with Kate Croy for several days in a state of intimacy as deep as it had been sudden, and they had clearly, in talk, in many directions, proceeded to various extremities" (120). Characteristically for James's prose style, the comma between "talk" and "in" suggests a reading that includes "extremities" of "intimacy" beyond the conversational; later, in the novel's scene in which Kate tries to warn Milly of the danger of the company she's fallen into, Milly objects that "And yet without Susie I shouldn't have had you," and a few moments later Milly feels "the touch of her companion's [Kate's] lips..." (171). Kaye's description of such scenes in the novel as suggesting a "Sapphic rapport" seems to me quite apt, and once again to suggest a difficult negotiation about, in this case, woman to woman relationships, a negotiation that in hindsight is widely recognized as characteristic of the late Victorian era. Similarly, in the film's handling, Kate crawls into bed with Milly the night that they stay at Lord Mark's, after Lord Mark has revealed to Kate that Milly is very ill and that he intends to marry her for her money, and the two
snuggle comfortably together. Rowe rightly characterizes this as looking like an "... innocent cuddle with Milly, their heads posed in Pre-Raphaelite manner" (204), but, inexplicably in terms of the context of the film, argues that Kate's lie that her room is cold "contaminates" this otherwise serene scene. Apparently, Kate should have rushed in and said, "I've just heard that you're very ill—is it true?" Clearly the film's Kate is motivated here by a desire to protect Milly, if not from her illness, then from the clutches of Lord Mark. Two scenes later, Densher himself raises the Sapphic connotations during the scene in which Kate tries to convince him to accept Milly's invitation to travel to Venice with them. Here, Densher asserts, "Well, she [Milly] wants to be with you on her own," and Kate later says, "I think she's the most beautiful woman I've ever met." Once the three women reach Venice, and explore the Palazzo, Kate marvels to Milly, "Is this all yours," to which Milly responds, "It's all ours." Indeed, in the conversation between Kate and Densher and the scenes with the three of them in Venice, the film opens up what Kaye acknowledges as a "bisexual subtext" (249), with Kate having said to Densher that she wouldn't be jealous of his feeling for Milly. Similarly, Wood notes that in the first scene in which Kate and Milly appear together, they exchange significant glances even before any words are said, and that those glances become the beginning of "The basis of the mutual attraction, with its muted lesbian undertones which subsequent scenes will subtly develop ..." (34). From the very start, then, the attraction of the film's characters is not just along a Kate-Densher axis, but also along a Kate-Milly axis.

Unlike the novel, however, in the film Kate is more clearly unable to continue the pursuit of a more inclusive sexuality, and it is an inability registered in both, on the surface at least, in sex. But there is a world of difference in how that inability is
registered in the two versions. In the novel, just before Milly’s party, Kate says to Densher, “You *are* in love with her, you know’” (291), and at Milly’s party, Densher is tantalizingly close to perhaps actually falling in love with Milly when he for the first time appreciates her more than Kate: “... he noted that Kate was somehow—for Kate—wanting in lustre. As a striking young presence she [Kate] was practically superseded [by Milly]” (303). Later, however, Kate agrees to the tryst in Densher’s rooms as his price for continuing with his part of their scheme. Afterwards, he is haunted by the memory of their love-making, which “... within his walls lingered there as an obsession importunate to all his senses ... it made everything but itself irrelevant and tasteless” (312). Although he visits Milly quite dutifully, “... he couldn’t for his life, he felt, have opened his door to a third person” (313). Indeed, when Milly suggests that she and Susie visit his rooms for tea, Densher questions whether Milly is well enough for the visit, and, as Ian rightly argues, it is quite possible to defend that moment as the beginning of Milly’s decline. For my purposes, however, the point is that, in the novel, it is the memory of Kate’s coming “... that once, to stay, as people called it ...” (312) that makes Densher unable, literally and figuratively, to open his doors to Milly. There is a tremendous irony, then, in Ian’s sharp criticism of the film’s materiality; although the novel of course elides Kate and Densher’s tryst, it is the memory of Kate’s quite material presence that initiates Milly’s descent.

The film, by contrast, is just as material, but in substantially different ways. Instead of a tryst in Densher’s rooms, the four (including Susie) attend the carnival. Kate is in a toreador outfit, sporting a false moustache, although only carrying her mask, suggesting quite literally levels of bisexuality and gender as performance. Milly, in
contrast, is dressed in a flowing, excessively feminine gown, and, as she dances with Densher, who is dressed as a picador, she kisses him romantically. Kate cuts in, pulls Densher away, and runs off with him into the darkly lit back streets, their bodies press together as they lean against a building, and then, after he says, "Show me how you love," does so in a gondola. While Rowe reads this episode as the eruption of the chaotic sexuality of the New Woman, a chaotic sexuality ultimately defeated by the rest of the film, there is surely nothing chaotic about it, nor is it definitive of the New Woman unless one defines the New Woman exclusively by reference to her being aggressively sexual. Rather, one can view the dynamics as quite straight-forwardly grounded in an older tradition to which Kate reverts: Seeing that Milly is finally succeeding in arousing Densher's passion, she counters by herself arousing his passion; that Milly is in an excessively feminine costume and that Kate is in a costume suggesting androgyny is in this case to overstate the value of this single image of Kate in the context of the film as a whole, since Kate, up until this point costumed in feminine garb herself, has succeeded quite well throughout the film in arousing Densher's passion.

Wood's reading of this scene, and my own, is quite different than Rowe's, then. Far from the chaotic New Woman's sexuality being the cause of the situation, it is Merton's clearly faltering sexual loyalty that prompts Kate to pull him away from Milly. In what is one of the truly magnificent moments of the film, it is Kate's inability to fully become the New Woman that prompts her action; quite similarly, early on she is torn between her desire to marry Merton for love and her understanding that, in her society and her time, money still counts for much in terms of happiness. Here again, in the film Kate is presented as a young woman who is struggling to negotiate changes, not as one
who has mastered those changes. This is highlighted by the film’s giving Merton the line, “Show me how you love, then.” As Wood rightly argues, “As for Merton, this man of high principles is now reduced to forcing sex upon a woman who doesn’t want it” (71). As in the film’s first scene, it is Merton who is the aggressor; here, however, Kate realizes that Merton can equally well choose to satisfy his desires with Milly, a more than willing partner, and one who has little to lose.

When Kate returns to the Palazzo later that night, she announces to Milly that she will be leaving for London in the morning, and directly lies to Milly in saying that she has no interest in Densher. Of course, it is her inability to control her physical desire for Densher that makes Kate realize she must absent herself from Venice in order for her plan to succeed. While Rowe argues that Kate’s now disheveled toreador’s outfit amounts to a further “... expression of her loose morals” (206), it is worth recalling that the Kate of the novel, in agreeing to stay with Densher, has done much the same thing as the Kate of the film, although her action is motivated quite differently. In the novel, Kate’s going to Densher is a purely commercial transaction intended to seal what amounts to their business arrangement, a motivation which I would argue is far more representative of the modern, and perhaps bankrupt, sensibility than the jealousy that undermines the Kate of the film. And, once again, intense passion is the mode of the melodramatic, a mode which is generally cast as substantially at odds with the mode of modernity.

However, Rowe is quite correct in arguing that, from the time Kate leaves Venice, the film goes on by “Dramatically revising James’s novel...” (207). Milly has shown no further signs of her illness since her fainting spell, and, as noted earlier, she and
Densher actively cavort through Venice. Early on, a slightly drunk Milly offers to go to Densher’s rooms with him; later, after her second ascension of a church tower, she initiates a romantic kiss. Rowe reads the sexuality here as in stark contrast to the Kate-Merton relationship, with Milly’s “charmingly drunk and playfully aggressive” (207) advances and the religious imagery serving “. . . to counter the vulgarity of Kate and Merton’s public coupling and the more general obscenity of their relationship” (206-207). The contrast is certainly unquestionable; but Rowe’s argument misses, however, two important aspects of the film. First, as Wood notes, Milly is certainly not innocent; when Merton declares that Milly is drunk, she quite clearly says, “Not as drunk as I'm pretending to be.” She recognizes that she is acting a part in order to appear to him more innocent than she is, and, as always in the film, it is Merton who has been unable to grasp the situation. In terms of Rowe’s argument, Merton is attempting to excuse Milly’s advances by attributing to her the typical motivation of the Old Woman, which Milly explicitly denies. Second, the film’s deep implication of Densher himself in that “general obscenity” is remarkable, as has already been noted. Indeed, if we recall the early scenes between Kate and Densher, it is he who is the sexual aggressor, and Kate’s remark to him that he will tire of her proves quite true. In this sense, Rowe is right when he argues that Milly is depicted as offering “. . . an elusive alternative to the sexual perversions and moral corruptions of the modern age” (206); what he fails to appreciate, however, is that, first, it is Densher who has pressed the physical relationship with Kate early on, and, second, that the alternative the film offers is achieved only by escaping—as Densher ultimately does in the film—from any connection with the material world, an escape that Milly’s wealth is the enabling condition for.
In the final powerful scene between Kate and Densher in Densher’s flat, then, it is entirely appropriate that Kate tries to recapture Densher using the only means that he has allowed her, her body; she herself seems aware that the attempt is doomed to fail before it even begins. Significantly, however, in the film it has become clear that Densher has fallen in love not just with Milly’s memory, but with the quite real, quite active, even if spiritualized, quite alive Milly. As Rowe again rightly notes, Milly succeeds in “... teach[ing] and disciplin[ing] Merton regarding the dangers of unsublimated sexual desire” (207), but those desires are quite as much his own as Kate’s. Indeed, there is very much the sense in the film that Densher is the quintessentially stereotypical male figure, always fascinated more by the woman he cannot have than the woman whom he has had. Rather than reading Densher’s return to Venice, as Rowe does, as the film’s endorsement of a conservative aesthetic based on “... recycling modernist anxieties regarding the anarchic feminine ...” (208), we can also read it more narrowly as a negative commentary on men such as the film’s Densher. He sees women as primarily sexual objects, and espouses a liberal politics, but then admits to Milly that “I don’t believe in any of the things I write about.” Ultimately, he thinks, adolescently, that haunting the life-in-death city of Venice in the company of Milly’s memory is something more than a romantic illusion. Surprisingly, Rowe does not explore the meaning of Densher’s being costumed as a picador during the carnival scene, yet the point seems clear: Much as he is in the novel, the film’s Densher is never able to act, but is forever in the passive position, unable to say to Milly in their interview that he has indeed fallen in love with her. As Kaye rightly observes, “... Roache’s Merton is a figure of stunned passivity ...” (249), just as he is in the novel. Commentators on the film are quick to point out that it changes
the dynamics of the end of the novel; as Wood rightly notes, "In James’s time decency (even when characterised by passivity) and integrity (even when it takes the negative form of refusing to be ‘vulgar’) were more readily accepted as positive values than they would be today" (48). I would go somewhat farther, and argue that the film, effectively strips away what in the novel amounts to Densher’s long progress towards a self-indulgent moral forgiveness of himself on the basis that he did not lie to Milly. None of that moral sleight-of-mind occurs in the film, and viewers are encouraged to see Densher as the hollow man; his return to Venice to devote himself to Milly’s memory is just as empty and meaningless a commitment as was his commitment to liberal politics.

Of course, melodrama and sex (overt, repressed or otherwise) have a long history of being bedfellows, as Chapter 2 noted, and the use of the sexual in the film focuses a text that even James himself admitted was filled with “supersubtleties” and “arch-refinements,” a text in which he became “…conscious of overstepping my space without having brought the full quantity to light” (16). That the “full quantity to light” might include a nude Kate, as it does in the film’s final scene between Kate and Densher, would have been in James’s time impossible, yet for a contemporary, general audience the text’s supersubtle negotiations of changing sexual mores would more than likely have been seen as hopelessly quaint. Indeed, as Kendrick notes, “…there is some evidence that, in The Wings of the Dove, [James] archrefined his technique in order to shield himself from the very power of the story he claimed to be telling” (56), and unleashing the story’s obvious melodramatic qualities and barely repressed erotic aspects ends up making the film quite coherent on its own terms. When we turn to the novel’s central structural characteristic, its interiority, we find a similar focusing that suggests, as
Kendrick has noted, a critique of the novel on the basis “… that its convolutions of technique are not merely unfilmable, they also don’t work on the printed page” (56).

The convolutions Kendrick refers to center on James’s use of multiple narrative consciousnesses, and thus in certain ways reflect those that Mrs. Dalloway raises, but they are complicated well beyond Dalloway because of the absence of any stable reference points beyond the reader’s own. While this quality has been read in the context of its affinity with a postmodern approach to narrative in which the text always already has an unstable meaning, and is thus inevitably constructed by the reader, and thus inevitably individual, it results in less happy consequences. These unhappy consequences are apparent when one considers how to respond to what would seem to be a straightforward question: Who is the central character in Wings? From a purely structuralist point of view of whose perspective the novel is dominated by, the answer is Densher, as it is his consciousness that dominates Books Second, Sixth, Eighth, Ninth, and Tenth, or half of the novel’s ten books. Kate’s consciousness dominates Book First; Susie’s Book Third; and Milly’s Books Fourth, Fifth, and Seventh. There is, on the one hand, a certain symmetry in that half the book is dominated by a male consciousness, and half by a female consciousness, but the female consciousness is divided into three different consciousnesses. Kate, who is certainly the primary activator of the overt plot, is given only Book First as the primary consciousness; and Densher’s consciousness, despite his passivity in terms of action, is given great weight in the second half of the novel. Yet if Densher is meant to represent the center of the novel, it is surely the last two books that undermine, even bankrupt, any narrative authority he has, since he is exposed as not only emotionally insensitive, but also morally self-indulgent.
Beyond the problem with Densher's consciousness in the final two books, the novel's approach also makes reading Milly a difficult task. Indeed, as many commentators have noted, Milly is very much a mysterious enigma, seen by other characters in quite different ways: by Susie as a princess, by Densher as a little American girl, by Kate as a dove. And, although she appears to decide to take on Kate's view of herself when she says "She [Milly] should have to be clear as to how a dove would act" (172), her initial response to Kate's image of her reveals that Milly is not entirely comfortable with such a characterization, as she thinks, "That was what was the matter with her. She was a dove. Oh wasn't she? . . ." (171). Indeed, Milly's conscious decision to don the mantle of the dove persona makes a reader wonder whether that is the authentic Milly any more than Densher's little American girl is the authentic one. On a metacritical level, however, Wings's difficulties here can be usefully compared to later literary experiments with point of view. For example, Ford's The Good Soldier, published just a dozen years after Wings, appropriates Wings's potential that individual narrators are unreliable, but subsumes the viewpoints into just one point of view that, by the end of the novel, is shown to have been potentially unreliable from the start, although it is left to the reader to decide at which specific points the narrator is unreliable. Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury and As I Lay Dying use a similar approach as Wings, in which one person's 'story' is told by several others—just as here Milly is seen by others in different ways—but, in stabilizing the temporal narrative to the same events as seen through different points of view, achieves a different coherence than Wings. In this respect, and to his credit, James was trying out an experiment with point of view that later novelists would explore in perhaps more effective ways; as it stands, however, James's
Wings seems to yearn for a stable perspective—Densher’s, one might think—while simultaneously undercutting that perspective, while later experiments with point-of-view have less yearning for the romantic unity that Wings aspires to but cannot quite seem to achieve.

Not surprisingly, James significantly narrowed the points of view of The Ambassadors and The Golden Bowl to one primary consciousness, Strether and Maggie Verver respectively, and thus there is no question in those two novels as to whom the main focal character—more or less knowledgeable, as the case may be—is. Film’s gravitation towards a third-person narrative in this case focuses a source that poses difficult point of view questions. Standing outside any of the characters, viewers are encouraged from the start to reach their own conclusions. But while it eliminates the point of view complexities of its source, however, Softley’s film actually re-introduces that same issue. Milly is introduced much earlier, comparatively, than in the novel, and, with the elimination of the scenes of Densher back in London after her death, and its minimization of both Susie and Maud as characters, the film makes of Kate, Milly and Densher far more equal partners in the narrative than does the novel. In an ironic twist, the novel’s point that others can be known only incompletely is given full reign, but here the viewers are allowed their own vision of Milly, and not limited by those of Kate and Densher. Although Densher’s triumphant return to Venice is given the place of privilege as the film’s final scene, its clearly empty, nostalgic-only significance emphasizes his dislocation from any meaningful engagement with the world.

In the film’s rendering, then, Milly offers Densher the opportunity to redeem himself by engaging with her on her terms, even if, as Rowe argues, those terms are that
he devote himself to being “... the worshipful and contrite Densher ... a devotee of the arts, the cult of beauty and their tacit ethical dimension” (207). He can do so, the film clearly states, only after Milly is dead. The powerful contrast between Milly and Densher’s kiss in the church and the final scene between Kate and Densher in which Kate offers herself physically to Densher in the drab London here and now, and he emotionally rejects that offer, tells us that Densher cannot exist in the modern world either. In the film, then, Densher ends up existing, as Alan Nadel terms it, in an “imaginary ‘elsewhere’” (279); in the novel, by contrast, he has flummoxed himself, and perhaps even the reader, into believing that he has maintained his allegiance to some code of honor that must be maintained even when the stakes are Milly’s life or death.

Giving the viewer stronger control over the point of view is also a significant aspect in the other major structural change the film effects, which is to dramatize both the sexual encounter between Kate and Densher at the carnival and Milly and Densher’s final interview. As we saw with Portrait, James has a tendency to elide what would have been considered by others to be important narrative moments, and Wings’s narrative includes nearly as many elisions as Portrait’s does. In the case of Kate and Densher’s tryst in the novel, while it is certainly correct, as Ian has pointed out, that it is Densher’s memory of their love-making that is crucial, that memory is given an extraordinary narrative burden to bear, since, as noted earlier, Densher’s memory of their night together is responsible for his closing the door to Milly. The film, by contrast, uses Kate’s seduction of the equally willing Densher as a powerful contrast, as Rowe rightly notes, to Milly’s far more gentle seduction of him. Contemporary viewers, I would argue, are extremely unlikely to be convinced by the novel’s premise that it is entirely Milly’s Christ-like forgiveness of
Densher that converts him into her acolyte, even when the narrative retains its turn-of-the-century setting. More importantly, the dramatization of the Milly-Densher interview allows viewers to see for themselves that Milly forgives Densher, while in the novel there is a significant invitation to see the already self-justifying Densher of the last two books as engaging in nothing more than another self-deception. However, the film takes Milly’s forgiveness a step further, since she forgives both Kate and Densher, an inclusive forgiveness that would seem to clearly authorize, morally, Kate and Densher’s future relationship. In this respect, then, Densher’s return to Venice and the memory of Milly is on solidly material grounds, rather than the more self-indulgent moral grounds that the novel is left on.

We turn next to a consideration of how Softley’s Wings uses the medium itself to advance its narrative, focusing on four particular aspects of the film: the settings, the costuming and casting, the use of the camera, and the imagery. In contrast to the other three films, Wings’s use of the medium is more conventional, for the most part eschewing any of the on-going or even individual stylistic flourishes characteristic of the other three. This does not indicate, of course, that the medium does not mean here, rather that it does so in less obviously formalist ways. Indeed, the quality of the production values is quite evident, and, as noted earlier, Sandy Powell’s costume design won an Academy Award and Eduardo Serra’s cinematography was nominated for one. In terms of the film’s use of settings, a central and centrally altered aspect is its presentation of London and Venice, which here exist in a very marked dialogue or tension that reflect confinement versus freedom. In contrast to the novel, which could be said to give us London imaginatively through Kate and Densher’s walks, its variety of locales, and Milly’s walk and carriage
rides, the film’s London is indistinguishable from any other large metropolitan city of its era (or, at least, those with an underground). The scenes of the characters outside are few and generally short: Kate and Densher’s frolic in the boat and Kate’s tending to her mother’s grave are the only scenes set completely outside, although characters are occasionally seen in the streets. Instead, most of the significant scenes in the London section of the film are set in inside spaces, many of which, such as the underground and lift, and Croy’s and Densher’s flats, are physically restrictive, while others, such as the two parties, are thronged with people crowding the spaces. Even when the scenes are set outside, the shots are never panoramic, consistently refusing to show the viewer anything that would be beyond the focus of a character. The result is a sense of restriction, a restriction that parallels the restrictions in Kate’s life that emanate from her father, her class, her romance, her poverty, all of which are the visual analogue of Kate’s melodramatic confinement.

When the film moves to Venice, however, the inside-outside dynamic is completely reversed, with far more of the scenes occurring in whole or in part outside, reflecting a new freedom for all of the characters. After the two early episodes in which Milly’s illness is apparent, she is presented as more and more active, becoming, on the surface, freer and freer of her illness. Kate is free of the restrictions imposed on her by all the factors that served to confine her, and Densher for the first time in the film seems to lose a depressive quality that had been just below the surface in London. Even the scenes at night, such as a gondola ride, the carnival, and Milly’s tipsy seduction, are handled with a light, lyrical, at times almost magical touch. Although the words are never spoken in the film, it’s as if Softley took seriously Sir Luke’s directions to Milly
“... to get out of London” and “live” (151), although James himself didn’t. Indeed, James’s use of space in the novel seems to serve an ironic purpose: Although the characters walk all over London, their physical mobility is in contrast to their social confinement. When they remove to Venice, however, they become far more physically imprisoned, but with no concomitant easing of their social confinement. In this sense, the film seems to me to employ a far clearer, if more conventional, use of its setting as it is interwoven with the narrative.

A second powerful contrast the film establishes between London and Venice that is not present in the novel is that between London’s debauched modernity and Venice’s Old World health. The film’s London has the modern conveniences of the underground, the lift, motorbuses and cars, and Sir Luke’s odd medical equipment; yet these modern elements are paired with Croy’s opium den; the elegant but empty people at Maud’s party, and, later, a clearly Bohemian-style party; the pornographic section of the bookstore and the avant garde painting exhibition; and the contemptible characters of Lord Mark and Maud. In Venice, by contrast, virtually nothing associated with the modern world is presented, and neither is any sense of on-going debauchery at the larger social level. Milly’s fainting episode is prompted by the grotesqueries of the fish market, which we can explain not by reference to debauchery, but by her protected-from-the-world-status; even the implications of Kate’s toreador costume and her sexual aggression with Densher are carefully bracketed in the context of the carnival, which is now typically interpreted as one of the Old World’s methods of regulating deviation through allowing it expression in a sanctioned, temporally restricted manner.
In this reading of the film's treatment of London and Venice, then, I come very close to Rowe's reading of the film itself as yearning for a nostalgic past here represented by a more serene, purer Venice. However, with the exception of the scene in the fish market, the film also fully detaches Kate, Milly, Susie and Densher from the actual fabric of Venice's everyday life. Indeed, their detachment is raised to a level of exaggeration in that they are depicted as speaking to Italians only a few times. They exist in Venice only as wealthy tourists, and what both they and the viewers see is exactly the Venice that wealthy tourists of the time would have been guided to see. For this viewer, and I would hope others as well, it is the film's over-determined presentation of an impossibly idealized, romanticized Venice that is a key component in its own ironic vision of a Densher who returns to an entirely imaginary space. The modern world may be a debauched one, but it is still a real one, and Densher's return to Venice at the film's end should be read not as its endorsement of his return as a real solution, but as his continued inability to negotiate with anything other than the imaginary.

Powell's costume design, and in a larger sense the casting of Bonham Carter and Elliott, also contributes strongly to the film's effect. Whether historically accurate or not, the women's costumes are free of the typical Victorian elaborations of bustles, trains, and so forth, giving them a far more modern look than the women's costumes in Portrait, for example. Much like the opening scene in the underground, and the later ones with motorbuses and cars, the costumes in this case serve to de-emphasize the difference between the temporal setting of the film and its viewers. However, the costumes are also used in more symbolic ways as well. In the London scenes, Kate and Milly are generally costumed in a more restrictive, less imaginative manner; when they remove to Venice,
however, their costumes become more diaphanous and free-flowing, reflecting their lack of confinement. Pointedly, however, Densher's costume undergoes no such change, another indication that for Densher, it is less the social context that restricts him and more his own personality traits.

Perhaps the most symbolic use of the costuming, however, is to separate Kate and Milly. While Kate generally wears dark clothing occasionally accented by rich colors and is never costumed in white, Milly's costumes show more variety, favoring earth tones, and she is frequently dressed in white or off-white colors. Rather than raising a simplistic good-evil dynamic, however, the difference is more complicated, suggesting Kate's connections to a dark domestic past versus Milly's status as a figure unencumbered by any such past. Kate, then, remains tied to her father and his addictions, and is pictured visiting and tending to her mother's grave; by contrast, the film references Milly's family past only when Lord Mark says to Kate that Milly is "The world's richest orphan." Here again, it seems to me crucial to read the film's complete presentation of the characters, not just their sexual/erotic aspects; in the sense that she is clearly tied to her family past, Kate is once again presented as a character who is attempting to engage in a complicated negotiation with the world of the present and the past, while Milly exists only in the romantic present and future. Thus, in this case the film actually presents Kate as the woman who remains tied, literally, to the past and the old world it represents, while Milly is set free from the past to exist in the purely imaginary space and time of the new world.

The casting of Bonham Carter and Elliott furthers this association and is another important factor in the film, and not only in the obvious physical contrast between the
two. As Dianne Sadoff points out, Bonham Carter is "... an image recognizable as herself and thus bearing more aura than the character she plays. She represents a type of Merchant-and-Ivory good-girl sexpot seeking to discover her erotic potential ..." (294). Sadoff's larger point that stars bring pre-established auras into film is of course absolutely accurate; viewers familiar with Bonham Carter's performances in works such as *A Room with a View* and *Howards End* will be far less likely than Rowe is to read her as the "anarchic feminine" because of this pre-existing aura. But it is equally important to note that these roles also have established Bonham Carter as a figure whose character is in constant negotiation with a changing world, not, as Rowe reads her, a one-dimensional figure representing the threat of some volcanic feminine sexuality that must be thwarted or punished. The casting of Elliott, who brings no pre-established aura to the role of Milly, works to further the film's presentation of a Milly who is essentially free of all temporal ties and associations, existing, unlike Kate/Bonham Carter, not in an "imaginary elsewhere," as Nadel would have it, but in an imaginary else-when.

If the costuming and casting raise the inevitable comparisons with the Merchant-Ivory productions, *Wings*’s cinematography, while more conventional than the other three works discussed here, is far less conventional than the Merchant-Ivory fare. What it shares with those films is, especially in the day-time scenes, a certain lush, unbearable brightness of being that serves to visually bracket the film from the ordinary visual experience of reality, and thus place the narrative in a space that is recognizably imaginary. This quality is nowhere more prominent than in three rain shower scenes, one in London, the other two later in Venice, in which sudden downpours occur in what seems to be the lighting of full sun. However, the film also works in significant ways to
undercut the Merchant-Ivory look. When the action moves to Venice, for example, a number of scenes occur at night time, and the heavy shadows of Venice’s dark byways, while never threatening, as they are in a work such as Roeg’s *Don’t Look Now*, undermine the contrasting brightness of the day scenes. In addition, several bird’s eye view shots alternate with what might be called ‘worm’s eye view shots’ and disrupt, because of their extreme angles, the more conventional eye-level shots of less cinematically interesting period adaptations. The result of both techniques is once again to create an on-going dynamic of visual tension, a dynamic that remains unresolved even by the narrative closure. Indeed, the film’s final scene of Densher’s return to Venice, coupled with aspects of the previous scene, serves to visually unravel any entirely pat rendering of the conclusion. As Kate and Densher have sex, Densher flashes back to an image of the beautiful, smiling Milly alone, then to the evening gondola ride the three of them took together, reminding all of us of its particularly lyrical, romantic visual quality. When he arrives in Venice, however, only Milly’s words are left to him, and the Venice that is pictured is both deserted, except for the two gondoliers who hand Densher his luggage, and suddenly quite drab in comparison to its previous images. If Densher is indeed returning, as Rowe argues, to the aesthetic of “...the beautiful and the spiritual” (206), the images of both are quite prominently absent on any visual level in the scene of his return to Venice.

That absence of imagery is magnified because of the film’s powerful imagery in the last two scenes of Milly with Densher and in the last scene between Kate and Densher. In the first of the scenes between Milly and Densher, Milly goes up the scaffolding steps in the tower of the Church of Santa Maria della Salute; Densher
follows, and, when he reaches her, Milly kisses him, and he ultimately responds passionately. Rowe remarks of this scene that "The passion between Milly and Merton is decidedly erotic, especially in the church, because it is meant to counter the vulgarity of Kate and Merton's public coupling and the more general obscenity of their relationship" (206-207), and there is no doubt that the setting in the church and the angels implicitly visible in the fresco behind Milly and Densher are in stark contrast to the imagery associated with Kate and Densher's tryst, in which they first kiss against the wall of an anonymous building, and then couple on the floor of a gondola. The final scene between Milly and Densher combines both domestic and religious imagery as Milly, dressed in white, reposes on a long couch, and Densher, now forgiven, ultimately kneels on the floor by her side and places his head on her breast. And, in the final scene between Kate and Densher in Densher's flat, Kate's/Bonham Carter's naked body itself becomes the dominant image in a drab, even cold setting. Given the strong use of imagery in these scenes leading up to Densher's return to Venice, it is surprising that the scene of return is so emptied of noticeable imagery that might serve to guide the viewer to associate Densher's return with "the beautiful and the spiritual."

The difficulty with Rowe's reading of the film as "... purging the force of the threatening New Woman, Kate, who is associated with our worst modern tendencies" (202) is that it is not supported by the film's imagery—indeed, Rowe himself admits that the film "... introduces an undeveloped religious thematic..." (204), but he proceeds to rely on that imagery. Rather than build an argument on an undeveloped thematic, it is more useful to look at the film's two uses of imagery; beyond costuming, that are fully developed. The first, as we have noted, is the imagery of the modern world versus the
old world as it is seen in the presentation of London versus Venice. The single element in the Venice scenes that suggests the modern world is Milly's camera, which is shown briefly in one scene. On this level, then, the film's fully developed imagery suggests that Densher is not rejecting the New Woman as much as he is rejecting the modern world in its entirety; the primary symbol of that modern world is not Kate, but London itself. However, a second level of fully developed imagery succeeds in complicating that view considerably, specifically the film's use of the traditionally Gothic element of ascending/descending imagery.

The ascending/descending imagery is present immediately and shows up over and over again in the film in both literal character movement and in the dynamic between the many bird's eye view and worm's eye view shots. In terms of literal character movement, it is almost always ascent that is pictured rather than descent: Kate and Densher begin the film by going up in the lift; Densher, following Kate, runs up the stairs at the Bohemian party; Densher looks up at Kate high above him in a circular stairwell, before she descends to him; Milly, Kate and Susie go up the stairway into the palazzo; Milly, Kate and Densher go up the stairway to his Venice rooms; Milly, followed by Susie, goes up the stairs of a Venetian church where she then looks out over the city; and Milly's last church ascent, with Densher following. Although the effect is undoubtedly on the subconscious level in a casual viewing of the film, the pattern of Densher either going up to the woman who is already on a higher level than he, or ascending in company with women, but not on his own, is unmistakable. To the extent that ascending imagery is associated with moving to a higher plane of existence, the film's imagery makes abundantly clear that Densher is incapable of ascent on his own, but must be activated by
the presence of a woman. The effect of the physical movement is reinforced by the use of the camera angles; when high camera angles are used, Densher is the character who is most frequently being pictured as looked down upon, and, when low angles are used, they are more often associated with his character’s point of view than with the other characters’ points of view.

Not surprisingly, then, it now becomes possible to reinterpret Kate and Densher’s tryst in the gondola in quite a different way. Milly’s romantic attraction to Densher is authorized to be expressed through the activity of the carnival; Kate’s response is equally old world, and she leads Densher off and kisses him, in eye-level shots, against the wall of the building. It is Densher, however, just as he does in the novel, who forces the tryst by saying to Kate, “Show me how you love, then.” The next shot is a bird’s eye view shot of Densher on top of Kate in the gondola, emphasizing that it is Densher’s desire for coupling that has forced Kate into the ground. Once Kate has left Venice, it is, as she has told him earlier, only a matter of time before he will tire of her, and the activation of his desire for Milly comes, predictably, after he has followed her up the stairs of the scaffolding. Thus it is less the undeveloped religious imagery that we should be reading in that scene, and instead the continuing ascending/descending imagery it evokes. Quite rightly, Rowe notes that even here Milly “. . . is a beautiful mystery, a work of art, to be contemplated but never used, consumed, or penetrated” (206). In literally penetrating Kate, Densher has removed any mystery she held for him, and that mystery inevitably is transferred to the unpenetrable Milly.

Indeed, if Milly represents an aesthetic in the film at all, she represents not the aesthetic of the beautiful and spiritual, but the aesthetic of, as Densher calls her before the
film moves to Venice, the princess. After Kate leaves, and Milly and Densher wander at leisure throughout Venice, their status as unconcerned with any aspect of a potentially real social world dominates the film. In ultimately rejecting Kate, Densher is not rejecting the New Woman, but rejecting the real woman, the woman who tends her dead mother's grave, attempts to help her cocaine-addicted father, attempts to carve out, using the only tools she has, a viable economic space to exist in, and negotiates with the age's changing sexual mores. If melodrama is partly the mode of excess, Densher's return to Venice is surely melodramatic, and yet, unlike the classic melodramatic ending that emphasizes simultaneous sacrifice and redemption, Densher's sacrifice here is nonexistent. In the film's thematics, he has given up a real, albeit modern, world in which he had no faith for the world of an impossible princess, and is thus cast as another version of the impossible dreamer.

Finally, *Wings*'s relationship to the heritage film tradition is perhaps more complex than the other adaptations discussed here. In those, a past—Orlando's earlier years, Isabel's relationship with Ralph, Clarissa's early womanhood—was indeed pictured, and a return to it shown to be not a nostalgia for an earlier, simpler and more satisfying era, but either actively negative, as in *Orlando*, or simply impossible, as in *Portrait* and *Mrs. Dalloway*. In *Wings*, by contrast, the past is represented only, if at all, by Milly's representation of it. If one takes Rowe's point of view, that Kate in the film represents the turn-of-the-century New Woman and Milly the traditional woman, then the film becomes of a piece with traditional heritage films. However, as I have attempted to demonstrate here, the film can also be read as an ironic commentary that undermines any reading of Densher as a strong character, so that privileging his return to Venice and the
memory of Milly is not the act of a character who is rejecting an impossible present, but rather the act of a character unable to accept the complexities of that world. Orlando’s knowing smile after her conversation with the publisher, Isabel’s unstable position at the end of Portrait, and the separation of Clarissa’s past and present selves, played by different actresses, all signify that regaining the past is either undesirable or simply impossible. In contrast, Densher opens his arms to the past and to the dead Milly, with the words of her prediction of his bright future echoing on the soundtrack and in his mind. Yet in presenting him as a passive, uncommitted, easily manipulated character, the film’s returning him to a dying city and an already dead Milly is far less a glorification of the past than an acknowledgement of his Merton’s deficiencies. As Wood rightly notes of the ending, “It seems possible to read them [the changes in the ending] as Merton’s collapse into sentimentality rather than the film’s—his own personal evasion of guilt by indulging a morbid fantasy, anticipated by the false memory-shot of Milly” (88).

As Wood acknowledges, and as I readily would as well, “. . . much in the interpretation I have attempted is open to argument” (89), and that is particularly true when it comes to the presentation of the characters in both the novel and the film. In film, characters must be represented, and, as Wood rightly notes, James’s Kate “. . . strikes me more as a young Sigourney Weaver. Bonham Carter, as well as seeming very young, brings a nervous vulnerability to the role that ultimately makes her scarcely more James’s Kate than Alison Elliott is James’s Milly” (88-89). Like Wood, I sense this same vulnerability in Bonham Carter, a vulnerability that encourages me to read her not as a chaotic, threatening New Woman, as Rowe sees her, but as a woman who is attempting a difficult negotiation in a world that is undergoing on the one hand changes in mores, but
that on the other still positions women of Kate’s type in a very disadvantaged way economically. Ultimately, one of the most significant values of adaptation study is that subtleties such as this in casting and acting work not only to create meaning in the adaptation, but may also reveal new ones in its source.
CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION: MELODRAMA, DESIRE, AND THE WOMAN’S FILM

As the close readings have indicated, then, melodrama, both as a mode and as a set of narrative concerns and strategies, did not disappear with the arrival, in literature, of realism and then modernism, nor has its manifestation in film been limited to the contemporaneously-set woman’s films of the 1930s through the 1950s. Rather than proclaiming melodrama to be the core mode of mainstream film, as Linda Williams does, and rather than seeing melodrama as a debased form in literature, my argument here has been that melodrama has been appropriated in these works, both sources and adaptations, to exist in a central dynamic tension with another mode and/or set of strategies, the latter varying by the particular work—comedy in Orlando, realism in Portrait, the modernist aesthetic technique in Mrs. Dalloway, and realism again in Wings. Within the framework of this larger dynamic, the traits of melodrama that have been focused on also are frequently in tension with their own oppositional traits: To trace one, for example, the unexpected reversals of Orlando’s gender change, Isabel’s realization that her marriage was a sham, Septimus’s suicide, and Densher’s ultimate rejection of Kate, are all strongly foreshadowed, so that they are on the one hand unexpected reversals for the characters, but on the other much less so for readers/spectators.
That these tensions exist, both on the larger level of mode and the narrower level of narrative concerns and strategies, is a central element in what makes both the novels and the adaptations modernist works. That characterization of the novels, of course, is widely accepted; as applied to the films, however, it must be understood with reference both to the narrative mode of the classic woman’s film and the conventions of the Griffith-inspired style of conventional mainstream film, to which these stand in sharp contrast. Perhaps the most crucial difference between these films and the classic and even more contemporary weepies is that they quite purposely do not inspire tears. Strong feelings and emotions, tears and anger, may be displayed on the screen, but they are not meant to arouse in spectators those same strong feelings and emotions.

That the adaptations are in this way faithful to their sources seems to me far less important than that they choose not to be faithful to a film tradition that encourages viewer identification, whether that identification be in the form of sharing Stella Dallas’s tears as she walks away from her daughter’s wedding, or in sharing Willam Munny’s sense of just vengeance after he guns down Little Bill and the deputies in Unforgiven. Surely the temptation to encourage the melodramatic response on the spectators’ part must have been extremely tempting, especially in the cases of Portrait, Mrs. Dalloway, and Wings. In using a term such as ‘new melodrama’ to describe the films, or ‘modernist melodrama’ to describe the novels, I am suggesting that, although all rely on crucial melodramatic components, those components are balanced with other modes and strategies, the result of which is to leave readers and spectators in a suspended position, rather than in the emotionally invested state characteristic of pure melodrama.
But if these films deny, or at least do not encourage, strong emotional responses on the part of spectators, they do share with the classic Hollywood woman’s film its core aspect: the transgressively desiring woman. As Mary Ann Doane rightly characterized such films in *The Desire to Desire*, “. . . the woman’s film insistently and sometimes obsessively attempts to trace the contours of female subjectivity and desire . . .” (13). At every turn, the female (or, in the case of *Orlando*, the male-female) protagonists of these films seek to assert their transgressive desires against the mores of their times. *Orlando* desires Sasha, then later takes Shelmerdine without the benefit of marriage; Isabel Archer insists on making her own marriage choice, ill-advised as it may be, and both the fantasy scene of her on the bed with her suitors, and, later, the ending of the world-tour sequence privilege in particular her sexual desires. Clarissa Dalloway’s desire for Sally, although relegated to the past, is not only emphasized by the film’s successful interpenetration of the past and the present, but also by the reprise of the kiss near the end of the film; and Kate Croy’s desire to have Merton on her own terms, not his, and the film’s clear subtext of bisexuality is as transgressive as Clarissa and Sally’s kiss.

In the best of the Hollywood woman’s films, however, it is never *merely* sexual desire alone that serves as the transgressive element, and this factor is what separates the more and the less interesting examples of both classic and contemporary woman’s films. In the classic versions, such as *Stella Dallas*, *Mildred Pierce*, and *All That Heaven Allows*, a second transgressive element is as important as the sexually desiring woman, and that element is typically class. Stella and Mildred aspire to rise above their classes, while Cary wants to ignore both her class difference and her age difference with Ron. Indeed, quite often it is not primarily the presence of the sexually desiring woman that
leads to ruin, but rather the additional transgressive desire that results in an unhappy
denouement. Stella Dallas can’t (or won’t) break out of her class-based mannerisms;
Mildred Pierce subsumes all to her allegiance to her daughter; and Cary’s conflicts are
substantially increased because of Ron’s status as a gardener.

Similarly, all of these films complicate the trajectory of desire in significant ways.
As a man, Orlando transgresses not just in his desire for Sasha, but in his desire for a
foreigner; later, he embraces the garb of the natives, and refuses to see the wounded man
as merely a wounded enemy. As a woman, Orlando continues to transgress, first through
her interaction with the writers, then in rejecting Harry’s proposal. Isabel transgresses
not just because her marriage choice is guided by her own sexual desire, but also because
she turns down the immense wealth that a union with Warburton would bring to her, and
again when she supports Rosier’s pursuit of Pansy as against Warburton’s. The young
Clarissa’s transgression is more subtly presented; in choosing Richard over Peter, she
chooses the more feminized, less aggressive suitor over the more masculinized, more
aggressive one. And both Kate’s and Milly’s desire for Densher is the desire of women
of the higher class for a working man.

These transgressions in the films are in general accordance with the transgressions
of the sources. As Robin Wood accurately notes of James, “Novel after novel, tale after
tale, reveals itself as centrally preoccupied with the position of women in a patriarchal
culture, their oppression and subordination, their manipulation by men, the male drive to
control and possess them, the women’s resistance and (occasional) transgression of the
patriarchal laws” (9), and the same could be said about much of Woolf’s work, including
both Orlando and Mrs. Dalloway. It is crucial to remember, however, particularly in
studies that focus on adaptation, that films frequently are received less in light of their relation to their literary sources, and more in light of their relations to a variety of cinematic elements, including other film genres or cycles, such as the woman’s film or heritage film in these cases; their director’s pre-existing body of work; and even the pre-existing body of work of stars. As Wood justifiably says, “One wonders how many people . . . find the time or the patience to read James’s late novels” (21); although the answer will never be certain, it must surely be far less in the case of both James and Woolf than the number of people who have seen woman’s films, heritage films, films directed by Jane Campion, or films starring Vanessa Redgrave or Helena Bonham Carter. As I argued in Chapter 1, a polysemic approach to adaptation study is far more appropriate because of this wide variety of sources that a given film will by necessity draw from and be understood in the context of, a context which in the case of many or even most spectators will not include the literary source.

Thus, as Wood rightly argues, James’s works “… can be seen to relate in a number of cases to the thematic concerns of what we have come to call the Hollywood ‘woman’s picture’ . . . ” (9), and the transgressions that these films focus on, whether similar to or different from their literary sources, must be read in light of that pre-existing genre or cycle. Beyond the presence of the transgressive woman, Doane also accurately notes that the presentation of such women in the classic Hollywood woman’s film takes place “… within the traditional forms and conventions of Hollywood narrative—forms which cannot sustain such an exploration . . . ” (13). The conflict or tension between the film’s attempt to represent female subjectivity and transgressive desires and the “traditional forms and conventions” frequently, although not always, results, as Annette
Kuhn rightly observes, in the “... woman character [who] may be restored to the family by falling in love, by ‘getting her man’, by getting married, or otherwise accepting a ‘normative’ female role. If not, she may be directly punished for her narrative and social transgression by exclusion, outlawing, or even death” (34). The narrative of such films, then, ultimately re-encloses the transgressive female protagonist in an acceptable female role, or casts her out, much as the femme fatale of noir is re-enclosed or cast out, a connection that many have noted. This re-enclosure or casting out strategy, however, is by no means limited to the high-water period of the woman’s film or film noir (the late 1930s to the late 1950s); rather, it continues to be the conventional narrative ending even of more recent films that make a more or less stronger effort to portray female subjectivity and transgression. Thus, as Christine Gledhill argues, in a later noir such as *Klute* (Pakula 1971), Bree “... is relocated in far less threatening terms, her image reduced and brought under control at far less cost to the male psyche than happens [even] in the noir thriller” (115); and in *Thelma and Louise* (Scott 1991), the patriarchal world leaves open to the transgressive protagonists only a leap into the Grand Canyon.

Given that three of the film-makers represented here came to these projects with very strong backgrounds as feminist directors, and given also that virtually all of their previous films featured transgressive female protagonists in conflict with patriarchal cultures, and given, finally, the conventional narrative strategy of the large bulk of woman’s films to re-enclose or cast out the transgressive protagonist, it is a natural question to conclude by examining whether and if so how these narratives significantly depart from the narrative conventions of the woman’s film. The first way in which all four films begin to depart from those conventions is in their more fluid presentations of
sexual desire and orientation, coupled with a presentation of the significance of performance, both of gender and social roles. Second, in both Potter's *Orlando* and Campion's *Portrait*, the narratives clearly eschew re-enclosure, and thus they are films that, compared to their generic group, begin to inscribe what might be termed a less patriarchal (or more feminist?) narrative aesthetic onto their genre. In contrast, Gorris's *Dalloway* is more, if not wholly, typical in its narrative enclosure, while Softley's *Wings* ends up by vacating the issue entirely.

As the close readings indicated, each of these films, in more or less direct ways, depicts the potential or the yearning for female-to-female romantic relationships, a characteristic typically absent from conventional woman's films. To the extent that the latter portrayed female-to-female love, it was typically in the normalised context of mother-daughter relationships, as in *Stella Dallas* or *Mildred Pierce*, or in relationships that were unmistakably marked as friendships, such as that between Lora and Annie in Sirk's *Imitation of Life*. In many cases, in fact, it is the female protagonist's transgressive desire for an 'unsuitable' man—one who is not her husband, as in *Beyond the Forest*, or who is removed from her by class, as in *All That Heaven Allows*—that is the only significant romantic relationship depicted. But simply depicting the potential for female-to-female romantic relationships, however, although a departure from the generic conventions, is only the surface issue. The deeper question becomes whether the women in such relationships, which are transgressive to the patriarchal structure, are then re-enclosed or cast out, in which case the essential principles of the genre would still be operating in the same way.
The answer to this question varies by the film. Orlando seems at the end of the film to be entirely freed from the patriarchal culture at all levels, sexual or otherwise. Isabel Archer is at film’s end literally pictured as cast out; she refuses the intensely physical patriarchal (if more positively meant) advances of Goodwood, and also refuses the differently-motivated patriarchal structure represented by Osmond. Yet the film refuses finally to turn her into the pure outcast—inevitably symbolized, from Anna Karenina to Thelma and Louise, by suicide. In Mrs. Dalloway, that gesture is reserved for Septimus, who is clearly driven to suicide by the patriarchy, but the film’s excising of almost all of his memories of Evans, which are more extensive in the novel, makes his punishment less a result of same-sex love than of failure to take war ‘like a man.’ Clarissa, meanwhile, is less punished by the patriarchy for her love for Sally than forced to find a way to accommodate herself to it, which she does in choosing Richard versus Peter. Wings is an extremely complex case; the attraction between Kate and Milly in the film is almost palpable, and one wishes that they would both forget about Merton and get on with loving each other, but, apparently, their ultimate allegiance to the heterosexual norm prevents such a union.

Despite these differences, however, the films share a common central component on this level as against the conventional woman’s film, which is that none clearly presents same-sex love as the transgressive element which must then be ‘treated’ with either re-enclosure or casting out, although Dalloway comes quite close. Coupled with their more open presentation of sexual desire and orientation is an emphasis on gender as performative rather than essential. This of course is most obvious in Orlando, a film that, as Kuhn rightly notes, “... points to the fluid, the performative, nature of gender
identity" (235). In Portrait, it is less gender identity itself that is the overt issue, but rather what Kuhn calls “... being socially defined as a woman ...” (236) that is the core performance issue. In refusing both Warburton and Goodwood and accepting Osmond, Isabel attempts to escape from the role of the ‘woman chosen’ in marriage, and to step instead into the role of the ‘woman who chooses.’ Similarly, in supporting Rosier as against Warburton for Pansy’s hand, Isabel supports Pansy’s desire to marry for love as against Osmond’s desire for Pansy to marry for property. Mrs. Dalloway likewise focuses on the social construction of gender; unable to actualize her desire for Sally, Clarissa chooses the suitor who is the much more feminized of the two. Wings is ultimately all about performance, although perhaps only the carnival scene strongly suggests the performance of gender; in an almost literal sense, Milly’s life is dependent on the performances of Kate and Merton.

Beyond the presentation of a larger scope of sexual desire and orientation and a stronger depiction of the significance of performativity, the narrative closures in these four films either dismantle or at least disrupt the re-inscription of the patriarchy typical of the woman’s film. Orlando is rather happily un-moored at the end of the film, neither married nor the possessor of her estate (as she is in the novel), and the mother not of a son, but a daughter. Isabel is equally suspended, although less happily, having rejected the patriarchal as represented by both Osmond and Goodwood; surely Campion must have realized that the freeze-frame ending would suggest the ending of a film such as Thelma and Louise, but she has so entirely, and brilliantly, altered the circumstances that it is impossible to read death, or even re-enclosure, into the ending. While it is tempting to read Clarissa as having been re-enclosed, my reading of the ending suggests that it is
she, and not Peter Walsh as in the novel, who is the true subject of the film’s ending, and
the film’s final freeze-frame of the young Clarissa, Sally, and Peter at Bourton surely
indicates that some moment in time previous to entry into the patriarchy is preferable.
And *Wings’s* ending, although it may be unsatisfactory in certain ways, can be read as
suggesting that in returning to Venice, Merton is rejecting the patriarchal society and
restrictions of England and escaping to a less restrictive, indeed far more beautiful,
locale.

Unlike the classic Hollywood woman’s films, then, which could present certain
fractures in the patriarchal system but then would use their endings to ‘operate’ on those
fractures (or amputate, as it were), we see in these films either a rejection of treatment
itself, as in *Orlando* and *Portrait*, or a resort to alternative medicine, as in *Mrs. Dalloway*
and *Wings*. Read in light of both classic and more contemporary woman’s films, the
ultimate message of these feminist film-makers (and perhaps even of Softley) is clearly
that mainstream woman’s films can be liberated to explore same-sex romance,
performativity, and the inscription of a non-patriarchal narrative closure. In choosing
canonical literary works of the last fin de siecle to adapt, unlike most Hollywood
woman’s films, the films achieve a resonance and depth across both time and mode that
gives them a far stronger sense of universality than is common in the genre. Although
Campion’s opening credit sequence in *Portrait* has aroused controversy, it fairly sums up
Kenneth Burke’s approach to literature, which is that it is “Equipment for living” (512).
This spanning of time and mode provides what Burke lauds as the “... aim to discern the
‘general behind the particular’” (516), so that neither Isabel Archer’s particular story nor
her particular originary mode are of much value if they are exclusively associated with an
1881 novel. Rather, as Burke says of the best of literature, these adaptations dismantle "... the barriers erected about literature as a specialized pursuit" (516) and instead emphasize the narratives' "... active nature. Here is no 'realism for its own sake.' Here is realism for promise, admonition, solace, vengeance, foretelling, instruction, charting, all for the direct bearing that such acts have upon matters of welfare" (513-514). Like the best of adaptations, these four eschew 'fidelity for its own sake' and instead offer contemporary audiences promise, admonition, solace, and instruction in matters of welfare in the contemporary world.
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