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"A Womb with a View" — Approaches to Classic-Novel Adaptation in Recent British Films

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Introduction: "A Womb with a View"

A Cock and Bull Story, Michael Winterbottom's 2005 adaptation of Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, includes a striking scene: Steve Coogan, impersonating himself as the actor playing Tristram and Walter Shandy in this metafilm on the possibilities and limitations of novel adaptation to the screen, is hung upside down into a gigantic artificial womb during a rehearsal. To make shots of the actor possible, one side of the model womb consists of transparent plastic foil, which inspires crew members to call it "a womb with a view" (00:29:40-00:29:44). Feeling claustrophobic and uncomfortable, the actor suggests that the scene should be shot in the normal position and then reversed. To this the others raise objections on grounds of realism. The otherwise fully dressed Coogan – missing nothing but his hat, wig and overcoat from his period costume – gives a somewhat upset retort: "He [the director] wants realism? I'm a grown man, talking to the camera in a fucking womb" (00:30:55).

Both the film in general and this scene in particular are emblematic of at least three dilemmas that novel adaptations in British cinema have to face. First and foremost, as a novel adaptation, the film inevitably enters the critical discourse about the literary or even novelistic nature of British cinema[1]. The invented scene featuring Coogan/Tristram Shandy talking to the viewers (cf. "talking to the camera" above) is first of all a visualisation of the absurd narrative situation in the first four books of Sterne's novel: not managing to tell the story of his birth before that, the grown-up Tristram Shandy enlarges on events related to his prenatal life. After the rehearsal the status of the image remains ambiguous: it features in Coogan's dream about the shooting of a sexually charged scene between the Widow Wadman and Toby Shandy,

[1] One of the most prestigious critics to voice his premonitions about the novelistic nature of British cinema is Brian McFarlane. While comparing the American and the British cinema from this respect, he points out that it is not the huge number of adaptations that makes British cinema novelistic, but its lack of enterprise in the treatment of its literary sources. Instead of its awestruck and "decorous, dogged fidelity" McFarlane seems to demand a "radical approach" to and a "critical scrutiny" of literary texts as a prerequisite for more filmic adaptations ("A Literary Cinema?" 120). He adds, however, that adaptations are prone to remain "novelistic" if they do "not know how to display [their] narrative in visually effective terms" (ibid. 141).

therefore the audience cannot be sure whether the scene is actually included in the film that is being shot in *A Cock and Bull Story*. In the dream a miniature Coogan appears – this time naked – in the life-size artificial flower-like womb in the garden of Shandy Hall, trying to shout his story to the other actors, who cannot hear his puny voice properly, so they only look down on him and laugh[2]. Assuming that this repetition of the scene *is* a part of the novel adaptation, it adds a second shade of meaning to "the womb with a view": it comes to represent one of the central issues in *Tristram Shandy*, the main character-narrator's inability to tell his own life-story, a linguistic impotence connected with the sexual one throughout the novel. It is thus one of those instances when adaptation proper can be clearly differentiated from the transfer of novelistic elements onto the screen[3]. The rehearsal scene has a crucial function in highlighting that "the womb with a view" is a trick that only the technical devices of cinema can produce and it is a visual image characteristic for the medium; consequently, it underscores the essentially non-novelistic nature of the present adaptation.

Second, *A Cock and Bull Story* is based on a classic novel, and therefore belongs to the group of adaptations[4] which – as opposed to films based on second-rate or practically unknown novels – are viewed by the audience primarily *as adaptations*[5]. This fact, at worst, raises issues of fidelity or faithfulness to the source text – a sense of claustrophobic confinement clearly visualised by the actor's untenable situation in the restraints of the womb. At best, it refers the viewer to Sterne's novel as a prioritised intertext[6] of which

[2] The scene is thus also an organic element of the metafilmic frame-story: using the dream as a classic device for representing unconscious fears, it is a perfect visualisation of Coogan's jealousy of the rival actor's success – he feels helpless, ridiculous and impotent.

[3] Relying on Roland Barthes's narratological approach, McFarlane differentiates "*transfer*" and "*adaptation* proper". The former can be applied to the elements of the literary text which are not specific of its medium – e.g. "pure information" – while the latter is necessitated by the inherent qualities of writing itself ("Reading Film and Literature" 19).

[4] I apply the term classic novel in a similarly wide sense as Sarah Cardwell does when she specifies the term classic-novel adaptation to be used later on in this article as well: it includes "well-known literature" (the canon) from the eighteenth to the early twentieth century (183).

[5] McFarlane, arguing for an intertextual approach to film adaptations, points out that "the anterior novel or play or poem is only one element of the film's intertextuality, an element of varying importance to viewers depending on how well or little they know or care about the precursor text" ("Reading Film and Literature" 27). One must realise, however, that because classic novels are usually well-known – in fact, they formulate the core of compulsory readings in elementary and secondary schools – it is in the case of classic-novel adaptations that viewers are most likely to have a first-hand reading experience of the precursor text and therefore to view such films *as adaptations*. Classic-novel adaptations are also highly problematic because of the often overwhelming power of the literary source. As McFarlane emphasises elsewhere, "it has become a cliché that films derived from second-rate fiction are more likely to be successful *as films* than those derived from classics" ("A Literary Cinema?" 124). Cf. (Cartmell and Whelehan 8).

[6] Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan associate this liberating intertextual approach to film adaptations with Robert Stam's name. They clearly contrast it with critical approaches centring on fidelity, according to which novelistic "picture books" probably would excel among all novel adaptations (3). Cf. also (Stam 201-212) and (McFarlane, "Reading Film and Literature" 27).

Winterbottom's film is an interpretation. In this sense, the two texts should be read together, each opening up potentially new readings – views – of the other.

Last but not least, Winterbottom's solutions of classic-novel adaptation do not exist in a void: if Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* is one of its intertexts, clearly other classic-novel adaptations are equally so. The pun on James Ivory's *A Room with a View* (1985) highlights heritage film – with its notorious insistence on period detail and (false?) realism – as one of the factors against which Coogan (and ultimately Winterbottom) defines himself. Of course, the polemic with realism also evokes the previous outstanding generation of British cinema[7], the social realists of the 1960s. Winterbottom's film is also a tribute to Tony Richardson's daring 1963 adaptation of *Tom Jones*[8] – to a director whose name hallmarked British New Wave (cf. Győri).

Interpreted as a summary view on issues of novel adaptation, the scene above also marks out the scope of the present study. I focus on recent classic-novel adaptations as a representative segment[9] of novel adaptations in British cinema and attempt to give a survey of the approaches they take: Hollywood-style adaptations rooted in the prestige film, heritage-style adaptations on TV (mini-series), fusion adaptations[10], heritage films proper in the cinema and post-heritage. Viewed from the theoretical standpoint of intertextuality these approaches give strikingly different readings of the source texts. The liberties that Hollywood-style adaptations take with plot, setting and character often lead to very clearly articulated, but also rather shallow and restrictive readings: they have a strongly romanticising and melodramatic tendency. In contrast, heritage-style TV adaptations and heritage films, though often characterised as unimaginative and unadventurous, by sometimes transferring almost everything from the novel onto the screen, leave much more room for the audience to formulate a reading of their own. While fusion films try to combine authenticity and fidelity with cinematic inventiveness, they attempt to give a strong reading of the literary source with varying success. Post-heritage films are characterised by a similar combination of devices, but also by a much more formalistic and symbolical approach, which usually results in fairly complex and sophisticated readings of the literary source.

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[7] In a study published in 1986, during the growing popularity of the much-debated heritage films, McFarlane could still quite characteristically write about the years between the social realist period (1959-63) and his contemporaries: "Since then the British cinema has been in a continuing crisis" ("A Literary Cinema?" 140).

[8] It is one of the few adaptations McFarlane praises for its courage and invention ("A Literary Cinema?" 140).

[9] Cf. note 3 on the reception of classic-novel adaptations as adaptations and on their problematic relationship with the source text.

[10] Here and in the rest of my study from the many existing adaptation theories I use Linda V. Troost's categories for classifying the adaptations of nineteenth-century classics. Apart from the Hollywood-style, heritage-style and fusion adaptations she also mentions the "imitation", which "uses a novel's plot and characters but updates the setting to focus on a modern-day highly structured society" (75–76).

Drawing the demarcation lines: nineteenth-century women writers, Hollywood, BBC and the rise of heritage films

The emergence of heritage films is usually connected with three precursors: the historical costume dramas of the 1940s (Váró), the Hollywood prestige films and classic-novel adaptations on British TV. These latter two also represented the two major approaches to classic-novel adaptations until the middle of the 1990s, when the two kinds fused with each other (Troost 82).

This fusion is not so surprising if one, like Timothy Corrigan, takes into consideration the close affinity between the Hollywood prestige film of the late 1930s and the British heritage film: both are fascinated with the adaptation of classical novels, which "offer psychologically and socially complex stories" with a "canonical status" (36). It is not to be ignored, either, that British theatre-trained actor stars – like Laurence Olivier, for example – were often invited to feature in Hollywood adaptations, which were later also shown in European countries. Some of them – like William Wyler's *Wuthering Heights* (1939) – made, in my opinion, an unquestionable impact on British film. However, there is a remarkable difference between the handling of the literary source in Hollywood-style and heritage-style adaptations. Hollywood films changed the plot and setting of classic novels sometimes almost beyond recognition, often in the interests of "showcasing [a beautiful] star" (Troost 76–78). In contrast, heritage-style TV-adaptations[11] are famous for their fidelity to the literary source[12]: "priding themselves on their historical authenticity" they take full advantage of the longer playing time that their medium affords and retain most of the plot elements and dialogues. As a result, they are usually slow-paced and rather "dialogue-heavy" (Troost 78). Furthermore, they characteristically include "high production values; 'authentic,' detailed costumes and sets: 'great British actors'; light classical music; [...], steady, often symmetrical framing; an interest in landscapes, buildings and interiors as well as characters; [and] strong, gradually developed protagonists accompanied by entertaining cameo roles" (Cardwell 189). Consequently, the products often lack inspiration and adventurousness, they are clearly novelistic and uninteresting as films (Troost 79). It seems to be a matter of critical consensus that the appearance of the first heritage films at the very end of the 1970s was the result of the application of

[11] The contrast might be intentional. Even before the heritage boom in British cinema, McFarlane – quoting Alan Lovell – spoke of the decorous qualities of British films as "the British cinema's 'negative reactions' to the more dangerously flamboyant and vigorous aspects of Hollywood" ("A Literary Cinema?" 121).

[12] Opinions concerning the notion of fidelity in TV serials seem to vary. Troost claims that the fusion of Hollywood-style and heritage-style adaptation equaled doing away with any notion of fidelity whatsoever in the middle of the 1990s (82). Cardwell, on the other hand, speaks about a change in the meaning of the term: "fidelity has been reconfigured and adaptors have become more concerned with conveying the 'spirit' of the source text. […] the affiliation to the source text remains, but it is possibly better conceptualised as a desire to show *respect* to that text, rather than to be *faithful* to it" (193).

these "standards and methods" to cinematic production (Troost 79–80)[13]. Heritage films have been heavily criticised since then, mostly because historical authenticity can lead to the fact that "the objects and possessions can become disproportionately important, displacing characters or ideas" (Troost 80).

While Troost insists that pure Hollywood-style and heritage-style adaptations gave place to fusion films in the 1990s, one must also notice that during the 1970s and 1980s British TV and cinema seem to have drawn the demarcation lines between their territories, largely pointed out by the technical givens of the two media. Accordingly, the eventful and often rather bulky nineteenth-century novels seem to be more suitable for the slow-paced heritage-style and later fusion adaptations on TV[14], usually as mini-series. What with their "focus on domestic issues" and "appeal to mature, feminine audiences" (cf. footnote 13), women writers seem to be the record-breakers among them. For example, Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* was turned into a BBC mini-series both in 1967 and 1978, apart from numerous other TV adaptations. Even more astonishingly, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* can both pride themselves on at least five BBC adaptations since the 1950s (IMDb). In contrast, cinema, restrained by the time limits of average films, renders these novels into fusion or Hollywood-style adaptations – or does not dare to film them at all. For instance, both *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre* were adapted to the cinema several times even in the silent period – when filmmakers tried to adapt anything, regardless of its suitability for the large screen. Both had – just like *Pride and Prejudice* – a "definitive" cinema adaptation made in Hollywood: William Wyler's *Wuthering Heights*, *Jane Eyre* (1944) with Orson Welles, and *Pride and Prejudice* (1940) with Laurence Olivier again (IMDb). All of these cinema adaptations seem to have cast a long shadow: no major filmmaker – and especially not a British filmmaker – adapted these texts to the cinema again for more than fifty (*Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*– IMDb) or sixty years (*Pride and Prejudice* – IMDb).

As opposed to the dominance of Jane Austen and the lengthy Victorian novels on TV, during the most recent boom of high-quality adaptations to the cinema in the 1980s and 1990s, heritage film seems to have found a totally new field of interest. It adapted either the elegantly slim volumes of Jane Austen and the Late Victorian (and equally short) texts of Henry James and E. M. Forster, or

[13] This idea can be brought home quite easily if one compares the above-mentioned features of heritage-style TV-adaptations with Eckart Voigts-Virchow's collection of the characteristic features of heritage films at the cinema at the heyday of the genre. It includes "a small to medium budget, with a clear dependence on the classic TV serial and other heritage and history formats on TV"; "an appeal to relatively mature, feminine, or gay middle-class audiences"; "a reference to traditional quality (decorum, moderation, harmony)"; "the implicit values of a literary canon, authorship, and (British, theatre-trained) quality acting"; "the showcasing of landscapes […] and costume props"; "the adherence to conventional generic formulas and stylistic means" and "a focus on domestic issues" (128–9).

[14] Cf. Cardwell's opinion, according to which "television produces some of the strongest, most sensitive adaptations of lengthy and/or complex novels" (Cardwell 192).

the densely modernist and rather long late novels of the two latter writers – whose plot can be easily pared down to the minimum, because most of the written text is concerned with thought processes[15]. As far as James and Forster are concerned, in many cases the heritage-style cinema adaptation is the first adaptation ever of their novels (IMDb).

Let me focus here on the three above-mentioned nineteenth-century novels – all of them classics by women writers – and some of their numerous adaptations to highlight the reading strategies of Hollywood-style and fusion adaptations.[16] Both seem to have a penchant for romantic or romanticising readings. Nevertheless, Hollywood-style adaptations are characterised by extremes: they often seem to verge on melodrama, while they shun the naturalistic or crudely realistic elements of the novels. In contrast, fusion adaptations try to balance respect to the spirit of the source text with cinematic inventiveness and the need to fulfil the expectations of audiences "conditioned" on Hollywood films – and therefore to come up with interpretations which are successful not only artistically but also financially. Since the reception history of the novels themselves has been dramatically changed by the appearance of strong feminist and even postcolonial readings in the last decades, the less marked readings of the fusion adaptations often seem refreshingly flexible and complex in comparison with the dated romanticising of the Hollywood versions.

William Wyler's *Wuthering Heights* is a classical Hollywood adaptation, a prestige film. What makes it so? First and foremost, it arbitrarily changes the setting – the time – of the story, and accordingly the costumes and props, though it does not even bother to be consistent about them. A title card sets the story's present in 1839 – "a hundred years ago" (00:01:11) – and the flashbacks, that is, Cathy and Heathcliff's childhood and youth, approximately between 1807 and 1821. Taking that as a starting point, the costumes are at least fifty years out of period, let alone the obvious anachronism of the virtuoso music and musical instrument in the ball scene (01:12:06). Secondly, the typical Hollywood feature of showcasing the star can be clearly observed[17]. Both features play a

[15] Cf. Kata Váró's list of major heritage films: apart from the Late Victorian writers Jane Austen is the only nineteenth-century writer to appear in it with more than one novel. All the bulky Victorian novels, apart from Dickens's *Little Dorrit,* are absent. Martin Halliwell also highlights the fascination with Austen, James and Forster in heritage film, though he interprets it as an unease to deal with modernist texts proper (94). Taking into consideration the fact that James' late novels rival if not beat high modernist texts in their linguistic complexity, density of implications and intricate symbolism, I cannot fully accept this approach.

[16] Heritage-style TV-adaptations become dated quite quickly and are impossible to find among the output of the last two decades; therefore, I have neglected them in this section. The more so, because I devote a separate section to heritage and post-heritage film in the cinema.

[17] Luckily, in this case it means an actor star, Laurence Olivier, and the exotically beautiful Merle Oberon. One of the ironies of the film is that the camera obviously favours Oberon: many of the close-ups show her in the full-front position or in a quarter turn, with the dominant contrast on her face, while Olivier is often shown in profile or three-quarter-turn position, or even with his back to the camera. Oberon's dynamic acting also sharply contrasts Olivier's mostly restrained and low-key performance. An exemplary scene is Cathy and Heathcliff's peeping through the

fundamental role in shaping the reading of Brontë's novel that this film seems to have established on screen with its focus on the romantically tragic love story of Cathy and Heathcliff, and with its neglect of the "inferior" and "insignificant" second generation.

First of all, shifting the time of the story highlights the general reading strategy of the novel: the main events of the story take place in the Romantic period to further the Gothic/Romantic reading of *Wuthering Heights* embodied in the film. The Gothic elements are emphasised from the very beginning: even the title card mentions Wuthering Heights as a "bleak" house and the opening shots work with low key lighting or high contrast – light effects to emphasise the mysterious and often melodramatic nature of the story. Wuthering Heights is shown as the classic Gothic mansion: dark and fearful, its labyrinthine spaces threaten the visitor's security – both physical and mental. However, the most important feature that emphasises a Romantic/melodramatic reading is the tendentious cutting out of half the plot and characters: the second generation – and therefore the very Victorian compromise with society and culture that Emily Brontë offers through the modified repetition of the tragic Cathy-Heathcliff love story in Catherine and Hareton's marriage – is eliminated from this film version. On the one hand, in the case of *Wuthering Heights* this reading reflects a major critical debate: the story of the second generation is often viewed as inferior and redundant in comparison with the powerful story of Cathy and Heathcliff. On the other hand, one is tempted to think that the prime factor for presenting this kind of reading is not a critical approach to the literary text but the general Hollywood tendency for romanticising stories. It also surfaces in a third feature, in the film's strong preference for romantic and nostalgic contrast: the idyllic past of the Earnshaw children and Heathcliff before Mr Earnshaw's death is shot in high key, dynamic images (00:10:36), as opposed to the bleak, low key and static present. Similarly, Thrushcross Grange is associated with high key, bright images and the ballroom – something one does not find in the novel, which emphasises the ambiguity of both locations instead of their clear-cut contrast. Granted that, the film stops short in front of the often Gothic excesses of the novel: the bloody wild scenes of hysteria and family violence are carefully expurgated from the film, just like the implications of mental breakdown and anorexia – the focal points of contemporary feminist readings. Maybe as a compensation for them, the film introduces a number of highly effective invented scenes which support the Romantic reading, on the one hand, and supply a strong rhythm and well-built dramatic structure for the plot, on the other. Such scenes include Cathy and Heathcliff's repeated meetings at Peniston Crag (e.g. 00:33:22, cf. with the closing scene – 01:43:10); the somewhat melodramatic but powerful synchronising of the storm and Cathy's "I am Heathcliff" soliloquy (00:43:10-00:45:57); the symbolic destructions of Cathy's dress by the weather (00:47:30) or by herself (00:32:47), which clearly

window of Thrushcross Grange before the famous dog-biting scene (00: 26:29). Nevertheless, it was Olivier who was nominated for the Academy Award for the film (IMDb).

foreshadow her self-destructive behaviour; and the scenes focusing on Heathcliff's "dirty hands" (00:39:40) – hands he wants to get rid of by cutting them up with the broken window pane (00:41:10).

Apart from the above-mentioned changes in plot and setting, a major and very influential shift in Heathcliff's interpretation and even in the chronology of the novel's events seems to be rooted in the Hollywood star-system. On the one hand, Olivier's interpretation of Heathcliff's character has had lasting influences on subsequent adaptations. While the Heathcliff of the novel is a Gothic villain whose only saving grace is his love for Cathy, Olivier and the Heathcliffs on screen after him are often Romantic rebels and outcasts, who are also highly attractive sexually. Apart from the expurgation of the most violent scenes in the novel, and the addition of some melodramatic tirades (cf. Heathcliff's curse on the Lintons before he leaves the house after the dog-biting scene 00:28:04), showcasing Olivier's physical qualities has a major role in realising this shift. One of the best examples is the scene when he has to give Hindley a hand-up to help him mount his horse (00:21:33). The symbolism of the scene is clear: it is a perfect expression of the two men's relationship – Hindley wants to humiliate, whereas Heathcliff, the powerless victim, has to restrain his passion. What the shot focuses on, however, is Olivier's innocent-looking, "pure" and beautiful face: it is hard to believe he can have anything evil on his mind – now or ever. On the other hand, the focus on the star, combined with the practical difficulties of finding good child and adolescent actors, led to the establishment of a tradition in filming *Wuthering Heights* which has rather disturbing effects: usually only two sets of actors – child and adult – are involved. It means that some of the adolescent scenes – most notably the dog-biting scene, which takes place when Cathy is about twelve or thirteen – are usually acted out by the adult actors, just like in this film. The effect is disastrous: the scenes lose the symbolic meaning they have in the novel in Cathy's (failed) sexual development and maturation, a central aspect of the novel that feminist readings focus on.

Peter Kosminsky's *Wuthering Heights* (1992) – a British and American joint venture – is a fusion adaptation, which is sensitive to many of the ambiguities inherent in the novel and thereby reflects a much more complex reading of Brontë's classic. It is characterised by much more historical authenticity than the Hollywood version: the present of the film is set approximately in the year of the novel's publication, 1847 – it is represented by the appearance of the narrator-author in Wuthering Heights – in comparison with which most of the events take place in the distant past, during the last three decades of the 18th century. The film uses period costumes but the hairdos give away the fusion adaptation: all the major characters have modern hairstyle most of the time during the film. As a sharp critique of the earlier Hollywood adaptation, it retains most of the plot elements and many of the dialogues of Brontë's text. What is more, it actually emphasises the repetitive nature of the plot and the redemptive quality in the story of the second generation by casting Juliette Binoche both as Cathy and Catherine. As opposed to the romantic

contrasts dominating Wyler's film, it works with ambiguous images and characters: the scenes on the moors take place in murky, cloudy weather (e.g. 00:15:36) – in fact, the sky seems to be permanently overcast in the film, whether the events take place in Thrushcross Grange or Wuthering Heights. Some of the violent scenes in the novel are filmed with gritty realism, for instance Hindley and Heathcliff's (00:24:06), and later Heathcliff and Edgar's fighting scenes, or the traces that reveal Heathcliff physical aggression against Isabella after their elopement. This and other naturalistic details – Heathcliff's greasy hair, his rather disgusting eating and his fighting scenes with Catherine Linton – are clear attempts to revise Olivier's romantic and "gentlemanly" Heathcliff figure. Though two European stars are cast in the leading roles, the film relies on their superb acting skills rather than on showcasing them as stars for effect. A comparison of Juliette Binoche's "I am Heathcliff" scene (starting at 00:32:28) with Merle Oberon's is a case in point here: she is subdued, restrained, almost choked by her emotions, shown in close-up instead of full shot – the scene is powerful without any of the highly melodramatic special effects of the earlier Hollywood film. All in all, the film reads Brontë's novel as a strange mixture of historical Romanticism and the Gothic (Cathy's ghost appears at the beginning and end of the film as a natural course of events) and realistic Victorian fiction, with a willingness to work out a compromise between the two tendencies.

From the many TV adaptations of *Wuthering Heights* let me chose a recent one, shot in 2009, to demonstrate a tendency in British TV serials to move from heritage to fusion and Hollywood style adaptations in their attempt to say something new about a novel that has been adapted a dozen times and to please American audiences which they are targeted at. The film actually more clearly reads the earlier adaptations than the novel: it tries to get rid of Heathcliff's idealised image just as well as to rehabilitate the second generation by completely restructuring narration. Nevertheless, the result is rather confusion than a changed vision of the story. The title urges a Gothic reading – up to 00:01:13 the camera suggests the point of view of a ghost approaching Wuthering Heights in supernatural pace and manner. This Gothic reading, however, is not sustained in the rest of the film. In fact, the title is immediately followed by the first, very short flashback (00:01:13-00:01:27), which is extremely confusing, if one does not know the novel. Then it picks up the line of the story at the moment when Linton Heathcliff is separated from Catherine Linton and forced to move into Wuthering Heights. The viewer's first reaction is probably the feeling that s/he has missed out the first part of the series or started to watch a film from the middle by mistake. The long flashback which involves Cathy and Heathcliff's story starts when Catherine Linton is imprisoned in Wuthering Heights to be married to Linton Heathcliff (00:18:17). It is not an oral narrative this time – both Wyler's and Kosminsky's adaptations retain some kind of reference to Brontë's specific narrative technique based on the linking of emphatically oral narratives – but a visualisation of Heathcliff's memories,

which are triggered off by the sight of Catherine in a window of Wuthering Heights. After this the story is narrated chronologically, but the viewer still has to face a number of minor shocks: the childhood and adolescent years include several invented scenes which heap improbability upon improbability in a pulp fiction style. For example, the adolescent Heathcliff and Cathy are already played by the adult actors, but to erase inconsistencies Mr Earnshaw also lives to see Cathy and Heathcliff grow up. The casting of the film is very unfortunate: Cathy looks like a doll or a model, while the bulky Tom Hardy as sixteen-year-old Heathcliff evokes the bad guy of second-rate horror movies. This is also furthered by the greatest inconsistencies in period details: the odd mixture of authenticity and modern elements resembles quasi-historical adventure stories, where period costumes of all ages are used most extravagantly – if they are showy enough. The film also tries to be modern by including overtly sexual scenes (01:12:49) – one keeps wondering why. The major plot change of Heathcliff's actual suicide – he puts a bullet through his head – is equally unmotivated. In conclusion, the film presents a reading of Brontë's classic in the style and at the level of cheap romances.

The other Brontë sister's classical text, *Jane Eyre* has fared only slightly better lately. After the many BBC adaptations, Franco Zeffirelli adapted it to the cinema again in 1996 and the BBC produced yet another mini-series in 2006. Their contrast is a classic example of how a conventional-looking TV series can sometimes be more satisfactory as an adaptation for a literary-minded viewer than a somewhat shallow Hollywood film, made by an ever so renowned director.

Another joint European and American venture, Zeffirelli's *Jane Eyre* shows striking similarities with Wyler's *Wuthering Heights*: it simplifies a cult book and a key text of both Victorian literature and feminist literary criticism into a Romantic love story. The central factors contributing to this effect are the usual ones: cutting out if not half, then at least a large portion of the plot, taking liberties with characters in harmony with the plot changes, manipulating the setting, and asserting the priorities of the star as opposed to the interests of subtlety in interpretation. Zeffirelli's version brings Rochester and Jane Eyre's romantic love story into sharp focus by cutting out both the Marsh End and the Ferndean sections of the novel entirely, and cutting the Gateshead scenes to a minimum. Whatever is left, requires a dramatic rewriting of some novelistic characters. Thus, Miss Temple's role is totally changed: on the one hand, she is not the head-mistress of Lowood and therefore is totally powerless to give Jane and Helen Burns any material help, on the other hand, for some mysterious reason she is denied marriage in the film (00:26:07) – which, in turn, deprives Jane of her major motivation for leaving Lowood. Combined with the suppression of the Rivers sisters' role, it also means the loss of any positive role models for Jane Eyre in her Bildung. Eliminating the Marsh End section results in St. John Rivers's turning into the rector of Gateshead – a charming young man whose amiability and sense of humour is demonstrated in a scene where he

chases his wind-blown hat rather playfully and laughing at himself. This change is problematic for at least three reasons. First, it means that after the failed wedding Jane Eyre does not really take any risks when she leaves Rochester – she simply goes "home" to his friends at Gateshead. Second, Rivers's marriage proposal is represented without any preliminaries, as a very brief scene, therefore one cannot take him seriously as a rival and counterpoint to Rochester. Third, the hat-chasing jolly fellow has nothing to do with the novelistic ruthless missionary of God who does not scruple to use emotional blackmail and psychological terror to further his heavenly father's – and his own – interests.

Though Zeffirelli's reading is romantic, it is definitely not Gothic: it carefully eliminates not only Mr Reed's ghost from the story, but also the Gothic implications of Thornfield itself – a classic Gothic castle in Brontë's novel. Together with much of the mystery, Jane's childhood mental breakdown and premarital nightmares must also go: the result is a very subdued presentation of the story, which relies mostly on masterly acting to imply the hidden emotional turmoil behind the smooth Victorian surfaces. And indeed, the person of the star is brought to the foreground, even if it blurs culturally coded metaphorical contents: William Hurt is naturally fair-haired and remains so in the film, not only to contradict the archetypal outlook of the dark Byronic hero Rochester is, but also to attract a blonde belle (Blanche Ingram) to match his natural colours. This wipes out the logic that connects all the dark-haired, sexually attractive and therefore powerful and dangerous women in the novel: Bertha Mason, Adéle Varens and her mother, Blanche Ingram and, last but not least, Jane Eyre. In general, though since the publication of *Madwoman in the Attic* in the 1970s *Jane Eyre* has drawn much critical attention as a key text from a feminist perspective, Zeffirelli's film is not only untouched by such notions, but eliminates the central scenes such readings are based on. No one would think of interpreting Jane Eyre and Bertha as doubles on the basis of the film version. Similarly, though the red-room scene is highlighted by its position in front of the title, its implications are not brought out in the film. A nicely shot movie including brilliant actors and actresses, Zeffirelli's *Jane Eyre* is just another Hollywood love story – a prefabricated fantasy made by *men* for women.

The BBC mini-series based on *Jane Eyre* seems to be a very conventional venture – a fusion adaptation with strong links to heritage. It takes some time to realise that almost all the major scenes of the film involve some kind of rewriting in comparison with the novel – those of plot, setting, dialogue, or simply the rearrangement of chronology – or introduce an invented element. The combined effect of these subtle changes, however, is a very consistent narrative which in many ways keeps a critical distance from Brontë's text and reinterprets it. The most conspicuous of these reinterpreting strategies is connected to Bertha's figure: the film consistently builds up a metaphorical sequence of red clothes–heat–fire–blood–passion–love–desire–destruction, which it connects with both Jane and Bertha's portrayal. The way it happens suggests a reading of *Jane Eyre* that has been probably informed by feminist and postcolonial readings

or such crucial rewritings of Brontë's novel as Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The very title, similarly to the opening chapters of the novel, establishes this metaphorical chain built on the colour red: it features undulating blood-red drapery, evoking notions of passion and sexuality just as well as violence. The opening scene (one of the invented scenes of the film) immediately connects red with Jane and her passionate nature: she is shown in the desert, wearing a red skirt and red shawl – the latter trailing behind her in the sand (00:01:07-00:02:14). The scene later turns out to be the child's daydreaming and thus an expression of not only her desire to escape from Gateshead, but also of her romantic fascination with the exotic. By implication, Jane features in the daydream as a colonial woman – a notion that clearly connects her with Bertha Mason even without the carefully repeated motif of the red scarf/shawl, associated with both of them. The red skirt and shawl also evoke Bertha/Antoinette Cosway's red dress in *Wide Sargasso Sea* – the only symbolic object Rochester's mad wife insists on keeping as an embodiment of her sexual identity and transgressive female desire. It is this novel that gives a fundamental critique of the colonial subject's representation in Brontë's text – an approach clearly adopted by the BBC mini-series in Bertha's portrayal. As opposed to her novelistic beastlike and vampiric representation, in this film Bertha Mason is an alluring, exotically beautiful and sexually attractive woman even in the moment of her suicide. Though her madness and aggression are obvious, in the lyrical scene of her fatal jump from the battlements of Thornfield Hall the image of the flying bird dominates: the motif of a beautiful white owl interprets Bertha's death as a flight from her imprisonment in Imperial Britain, in Thornfield and in marriage. In comparison with Zeffirelli's romanticised reading, the BBC adaptation actually proves to be more thought-provoking and informed by contemporary critical discourse related to the literary text it is based on.

Pride and Prejudice is also one of those novels that have been serialised so many times and so successfully that cinema did not "dare" to approach them for decades. Troost associates its 1980 BBC version with the "start of 'heritage drama' even though it was only following established BBC methods with regard to period style" (Troost 80). It is the 1995 mini-series – a fusion version (Troost 84) – that has become a definitive adaptation of the novel: a restrained satirical take on early nineteenth-century society (and husband-hunting), which, however, portrays Elizabeth Bennet, a heroine far from infallibility but capable of development and representing an ironic point of view, with much sympathy. So much so that six years later the film adaptation of *Bridget Jones's Diary*, a modern-day rewriting of *Pride and Prejudice,* was still able to trade on the "darcymania" surrounding Colin Firth.

Thus, the makers of the 2005 cinema version of *Pride and Prejudice* probably found themselves in a very difficult situation: the BBC mini-series obviously could not be beaten on its own ground. Troost reads Joe Wright's solution for this problem as another fusion film, marked by realistic tendencies (86-87), but on closer inspection it is hard to accept this opinion. On the one

hand, the film has too many of the Hollywood accessories: not only a "young photogenic star" (Troost 87), who giggles herself through the first half of the story, but also an overflowing sentimentalism and an annoying number of highly improbable scenes in highly improbable circumstances – including worn-out cliché-like Hollywood conventions. First of all, the film has a framed structure: the opening image is that of a landscape at dawn, with an implication of the rising sun off frame (00:00:48), which returns when the lovers declare their feelings for each other at the end of the film, this time with the rays of the rising sun transpiring from behind the lovers kissing each other (01:49:19-1:50:21). The fact that Elizabeth and Darcy – presumably in 1797 – reach this point after marching towards each other at the break of dawn in their night-dress and shirt, respectively, does not help to relieve a feeling of artificiality and sentimentality in the viewer. Second, some of the indoors scenes are transferred into the open air – among them Darcy's first proposal – preferably in moments of pouring rain as if to satisfy Lizzy's and Darcy's penchant for experiencing all their emotional turmoil soaking wet. On the other hand, it is possible to puzzle together from the film a consistent reading of Austen's novel in terms of historical Romanticism. Exactly the scenes mentioned above are totally consistent with the excesses and imagery of Romantic literature. A further example to be mentioned is the representation of the sublime through the traditionally Romantic image of the lonely figure standing on the edge of the precipice, at the top of a rugged mountain or cliff – this time, though, unconventionally with a female character, Lizzy featuring as the viewer of the sublime romantic landscape potentially inspiring a transcendental experience (01:16:38-01:17:14). To complicate matters further, the film includes a number of non-realistic – and highly successful – scenes at crucial moments. Such scenes include the turning of Lizzy and Darcy's dance into a solitary duel by suddenly placing them into an empty room (00:39:25) and the representation of Lizzy's need to re-establish her shattered identity and also of her inability to understand Darcy by a highly formalistic mirror-scene (01:10:49-1:12:09) after the first proposal. While the Romantic reading of Austen's story simply goes against the grain – it is a matter of critical consensus that her novels can be interpreted in the context of the eighteenth-century satirical tradition and not Romanticism – these latter instances of adaptation proper might indicate a way out from the dead end of the so "perfect" BBC versions.

Modern classics: heritage and beyond

Since a great majority of heritage films were classic-novel adaptations, it is probably impossible to avoid the term when speaking about recent film adaptations. Heritage film, a highly ideological construct[18] associated with

[18] Eckart Voigts-Virchow emphasises the utopistic nature of heritage films: they reconstruct a past that never really existed to convey an imaginary cultural identity to the members of the community (128).

Thatcherism and conservatism, inherited most of its distinguishing features from the BBC classic-novel adaptations, including its respectful attitude to its literary source. However, these features did not remain totally unchanged, as Voigts-Virchow – among others – clearly argues. It is possible to differentiate two phases in the development of the heritage film: David Lean's films and the Merchant Ivory productions of the 1980s – "catering to an individual, nostalgic desire to be part of a non-organic, indirect community" – belong to the first one, while the "revisionist" heritage or post-heritage films of the 1990s to the second. These latter characteristically show a critical approach to the conventions of heritage itself (Voigts-Virchow 128-9). In my opinion, heritage and post-heritage films differ both in their choice of novels for adaptation and in their treatment of the literary precursor.

The earlier heritage films seem to prefer novels which are relatively simple as far as narrative technique is concerned and they work with "faithfully" transferring as much of the novel onto screen as possible. E. M. Foster's little jewel of a book, *A Room with a View* is an extreme case in point here. A short novel based on terse and very ironic narration, witty dialogues, the character development of a charming young heroine and a number of mythological and cultural references, one feels that it was not adapted but bodily lifted onto the screen by James Ivory in 1985 – to make one of the most successful heritage films with the public. Even the apparently very filmic title cards interpreting the scenes of the film and representing the ironic narratorial standpoint are actually nothing else but the chapter titles of the novel. There are altogether two invented scenes in the film: George Emerson's hilarious shouting match with God, which ends in the breaking of the tree-branch he is standing on, and consequently in his downfall (00:30:25-00:31:16), and Charlotte Bartlett's dialogue with Mr Emerson and subsequent overt intervention into the course of action towards the end of the film (starting at 01:39:05). The former does not belie the "spirit" of the source text – in fact, the naked bathing scene which originally *is* in the novel, is a much more daring element – while the latter simply makes an implication overt: both George and Lucy surmise at the end of the novel that Charlotte Bartlett had a hand in the happy end of their love story. If there is a way to speak about James Ivory's interpretation of Forster's novel, it must take into consideration rather the very fact of the adaptation than the kind of adaptation the director produced: focusing on the enclosed nature of English rural environment, community and society on the one hand, and an individual interpretation of the European cultural heritage as distinctly non-English, on the other, the film offers "a view" – an imperative to enjoy life, fulfil desires and ultimately to find one's happiness within the enclosed space of the domestic circle.

The case of David Lean's *A Passage to India*[19] is somewhat more complicated. An exceptionally slow-paced film, it visualises much of the

[19] McFarlane sees Lean's adaptations as the best examples of "novelistic cinema" that work "heritage" on a very high level ("A Literary Cinema?" 135).

symbolism characteristic for Forster's text, nevertheless it still reads the novel primarily as a social satire on Britain's role in India, on the one hand, and as Adela Quested's Bildungsroman, on the other. Try as it might to capture them, the dense metaphysical implications of the modernist text, however, seem to escape the film.

Approximately the first eighteen minutes of the film play a crucial role in these shifts of emphasis in comparison with the novel. The scenes included in this section do not feature in the novel: they focus on Adela and Mrs Moore's journey to India and the power demonstrations of the British they see on the way. Though heritage film is often criticised for showcasing the landscape – or, in this case, the parades of the British Army (00:04:00-00:04:56) and the Indian scenery – from the perspective of viewing Lean's film as an adaptation, it is perfectly justifiable. By the time Adela and Mrs Moore arrive in Chandrapore, the viewer has the strong impression that in the India of the film even the smallest gesture is politically tinted – or tainted? – and that the two newcomers are totally out of the colonial discourse that governs the other characters' behaviour. Therefore, the first important function of these invented scenes is to establish the perspective which involves the necessary distance needed for a critical, ironical, often satirical representation.

Secondly, the opening shots of the film, featuring Adela as she is buying her ticket to India in pouring rain (00:02:18-00:04:00), form a perfect frame for the whole film with the closing image of the girl as she is looking out of her window – *without* a view – in the rainy London again. Such framing suggests that *A Passage to India* is fundamentally Adela's story – an impression that the novel's often-quoted closing scene, with Fielding and Aziz riding in the jungle and even their horses deciding that times are not yet ripe for real friendship between an Englishman and an Indian, obviously does not convey. This emphasis on Adela is further strengthened by one of the rare invented scenes in the main action of the film: her visit to a forsaken Indian temple complete with sculptures of love-making gods and goddesses (00:47:52-00:52:16) – an experience that makes her realise her own sexuality, accept the possibility of marriage with Ronny as desirable (00:53:25-00:53:30) and an experience that comes to haunt her at night (00:55:58-00:56:25). The scene underscores the psychoanalytical interpretation of Adela's cave experience – she has to face her own repressed desires which transgress the racial taboos of colonial India and therefore cannot be admitted.

Forster's novel, however, also has very strong metaphysical implications inherent in the symbolical qualities and intertextual connection of the description of the caves. Though Lean's adaptation carefully transfers onto the screen the novel's imagery – both visual and auditory – related to the caves (cf. 01:15:18-01:17:41), it fails to evoke metaphysical connotations, probably because it is pushed into the background by the turmoil of events and because some of the symbolic elements establishing the context for a metaphysical reading – such as Godbole's song about god – are missing. A very sensitive adaptation, Lean's

film fails exactly at moments when real adaptation is needed to imply the complexity of the literary text.

Voigts-Virchow refers to Iain Softley's *The Wings of the Dove* (1997) as one of the significant post-heritage films (128-9), and if one compares its choice of source, its approach to it and its style to those of earlier heritage films, its differentiation from such adaptations as *A Room with a View* seems to be well-justified. For a start, while Forster's work is an enchantingly simple novel, this late-Jamesian text is a masterpiece of symbols, circumlocutions, silences and points of view – a bulky novel in which hardly anything happens, and the major events seem to take place in the characters' heads and convoluted, (self)deceptive dialogues. The scriptwriter Hossein Amini did not only have to pare down the plot to the essentials, but also had to bring many implications onto the surface and concretise many mysteries which pass in the enigmatic novel as part of the characters' often romantic self-deception, but not in the cinematic version. Thus, Milly's mysterious illness turns out to be cancer of the lungs, Mr Croy's mysterious sin that makes him impossible in high society and urges him to "sell" his daughter is opium addiction, and the major factor that makes Densher Merton ineligible for Kate is not that he is a penniless journalist, but that he is also a socialist. These – and other – revelations naturally imply many invented scenes.

A seemingly unmotivated change, however, includes shifting the time of the novel, which was originally published in 1902, to 1910 – if anyone should miss it, there is a title card announcing it at the beginning of the film. McFarlane argues that it happens "in the interests of highlighting the sexual imperative underlying the novel's main action" ("Reading Film and Literature" 24), which might as well be the case. It does not exclude, however, the possibility that the shift is necessary to facilitate the creation of a consciously and consistently formulated, highly artistic visual world, which involves the characters, setting and some of the events of the novel.

This visual world is modelled on artefacts (paintings): an approach that is inspired by James's novel but is not realised in the same manner and on the same artistic material. In the novel Milly Theale is compared to a Late-Renaissance painting, a Bronzino – according to the critical consensus it is the portrait of Lucrezia Panciatichi, completed around 1545. The comparison brings into play a number of metaphorical connotations – a central one of these is that the painting is dead (doubly, since the model died long ago and has been turned into an object, which is by definition dead), whereas Milly, though dying, wants to live desperately. This comparison also has a very practical effect: readers familiar with the painting visualise Milly Theale as a red-haired, white-skinned angelic Renaissance beauty. The film plays the same card, only with a different painting – Klimt's *Danae*, which appears in the film in an invented museum scene (00:27:54-29:56). It was, however, painted in 1907–08 (*The Klimt Collection*), so historical accuracy actually required the updating of the setting if the painting was to feature in the film.

Why should a scriptwriter go out of his way just to make the inclusion of one painting historically credible? Viewers soon come to realise that it is not the inclusion of one picture that is at stake here – far from it. They are immediately struck by Milly's resemblance to the painting, just as by the fact that the other Klimt painting featuring in the film, *The Kiss* (*The Klimt Collection*), is not only a perfect representation of the stuffy, sexually charged atmosphere of the film, but also an exquisite counterpoint to one of its climactic scenes – Densher and Milly's kiss. Then one starts to realise that the beautiful period costumes are also inspired by the visual world of Klimt's paintings – the world of art nouveau and Viennese Secession. In hindsight even the opening scene of the film, in which her aunt is making up Kate's face (00:03:23-00:04:06), is strongly reminiscent of Klimt's female portraits, *Judith I* (*The Klimt Collection*) in particular – which has also been associated with Salome. Both dangerous, fatally attractive women figures can serve as parallels for Kate's character in the film. Interpreted in this context, the lengthy carnival scene in Venice (00:52:50-1:01:50) is far from being just another case of showcasing cultural heritage: it is a realised metaphor, an adaptation to the screen of the central metaphors of deceit, masking and unmasking, dominating the Venice section of the novel. The choice of this motif is in perfect harmony with the visual world of art nouveau not only because carnival is a favourite thematic motif of the style, but also because its art – just like Mannerism – is associated with assembling artefacts from surprising raw materials and often deceiving the viewer about the real nature of the objects.

The Wings of the Dove, therefore, creates a visual world with the methods of heritage film but these methods are used creatively – the film is inspired by James's text, but not overpowered by it. Softley's adaptation gives a very strong reading of James's novel as a story of (self)-deception and desire, but it does so by creating a visual world of its own.

Instead of a conclusion – *A Cock and Bull Story*

Heritage and post-heritage do not represent the only approach to classic-novel adaptation. It is enough to think of Sally Potter's *Orlando*, a 1992 Neo-Baroque film (Váró) based on Virginia Woolf's novel to remember that experimentation does not necessarily take place in mainstream films. They belong, however, to the 1980s and 1990s, so one cannot avoid the question of what comes next. Or is the recent history of classic-novel adaptations just another "cock and bull story" that turns on itself? The questions Winterbottom's metafilm poses about the possibilities of classic-novel adaptation imply that after the boom – and decline – of heritage films filmmakers are not much better off than they were in the 1970s.

Though the "womb with a view" scene implies a constant critical debate with heritage film, it is not the only approach to classic-novel adaptation that *A Cock and Bull Story* evokes and presents as problematic. The discussion about the battle scene the film is supposed to include (00:51:40-00:51:50) is an

emblematic case in point. Though it is a low budget film, the crew has to face three options. First, they can follow the heritage tradition and mount a historically authentic battle – but the costumes are unfortunately fifty years out of period, a fact that makes the weeping costume designer in the background rather desperate. Second, they can aim at a Hollywood-style monumental affair – *Braveheart* is the catchword for this approach in the film – but it is too expensive. Third, they can end up with a "comedy battle" – maybe a tribute to Richardson's *Tom Jones* – which, however, is not true to the spirit of the novel. The dilemma is solved by a fourth option – an obvious parody of the Hollywood-style adaptation as a star vehicle: to hide the insufficiencies of the battle scene, the director invites Gillian Anderson to play the role of the Widow Wadman. The sequence reaches its comic height when the final product is played for the crew, and Anderson is shocked to realise that most of her scenes have been cut out from the film. Further options are also implied by filmic allusions. Thus, the shadow of earlier auteurs also looms large above *Tristram Shandy*: Nino Rota's music written for Fellini's *8 ½* is one of its leitmotifs, while Jenny, a most spirited and somewhat idealistic assistant is a great fan of Fassbinder and keeps referring to his works (01:11:35-01:11:50). Last but not least, the film is also reminiscent of Karel Reisz's adaptation of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1984), which similarly adapts to the screen a metanarrative by turning it into a metafilm about the shooting of a period film and writing a modern frame-story which parallels the adapted story's plot.

Apart from the question of how *Tristram Shandy* should be filmed, *A Cock and Bull Story* also openly thematises the other central issue of all novel adaptations: what should be transferred and adapted to the screen from the rich literary resource. Winterbottom's film poses it as a question of interpretation: apparently all the members of the crew have their own reading of the novel and would focus accordingly on different elements in the film version. For example, Coogan, father of a young baby but otherwise a hopeless womaniser, emphasises how Walter Shandy could be made human and how all his stupid theoretising could be forgiven if he was filmed with his baby in his hands (00:57:21-00:57:31)[20]. For Jenny the story is about parental self-sacrifice that still – and always – goes wrong, like in her own mother's case. For Tony Wilson TV-reporter (featuring as himself) the novel is fundamentally a romantic comedy with the Widow Wadman and Uncle Toby in the centre. The two most highbrow readings of the novel – utterly discouraging for any attempt at adaptation – are verbalised by Steve Coogan and the imaginary Curator of Shandy House. Coogan's terse remark reflects the critical consensus about the novel and is part of his interview with Tony Wilson:

[20] Of course, Coogan here is trying to redeem himself – the fact that he neglects both his girlfriend and son because of his work – and it is emphasised by a scene that takes place outside the shooting: he holds the baby playing baby Tristram Shandy in his arms for quite a long time and is really humanised by this act (01:20:14-01:20:28).

> Wilson: "Why Tristram Shandy? This is the book that many people say is unfilmable."
> Coogan: "I think that's the attraction. Tristram Shandy was a post-modern classic written before there was any modernism to be post about." (00:35:47-00:36:05)

The Curator, on the other hand, identifies the theme of *Tristram Shandy* in one crucial sentence of despair: "Life is too full, too rich to be captured by art" (00:58:20-00:58:29).

If *Tristram Shandy* is a piece of metaficion about the unwritability of the novel, than certainly a metafilm about the unfilmability of *Tristram Shandy* in its totality does justice to it as a film adaptation. What next? A cock and bull story.

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