Narrative in Fiction and Film

An Introduction

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~~textual form and content and the reader's vital role in the understanding of narrative.~~

Narrative fiction as film

With reference to narrative texts in general I have so far outlined the major characteristics of narrative fiction. In the case of literary fiction we usually think of short stories, novels, and so on. Yet although my central focus is on *verbal* fiction (i.e. written texts), each chapter will also devote some attention to film, which can have an important narrative dimension. Now clearly the narrative aspect is not equally clear in all films (nor, incidentally, in all prose texts), but often the narrative aspect is absolutely crucial both for the way the film functions and for its effect on the audience.

This said, it must be emphasized that literary and screen texts are in many ways very different. The cinema audience is, as the Russian formalist Boris Eikhenbaum stressed as early as 1926,

> placed in completely new conditions of perception, which are to an extent opposite to those of the reading process. Whereas the reader moves from the printed word to visualization of the subject, the viewer goes in the opposite direction: he moves from the subject, from comparison of the moving frames to their comprehension, to naming them; in short, to the construction of internal speech. (Eikhenbaum 1973: 123)

For Eikhenbaum and many later film theorists the transposing of literature to film (often referred to as 'adaptation') involves neither the staging nor illustration of literature but a *translation to film language*. Although film language is essentially different from language in literature, however, the most important components of the definition we have given of a narrative—time, space, and causality—are central concepts in film theory as well. Narrative terms such as plot, repetition, events, characters, and characterization are also important in film—even though the *form* of presentation and the way in which these concepts are actualized vary greatly in these two art forms.

The relationship between narrative prose literature and narrative film thus confirms the point that those narratives which are part of the world around us assume different forms and are expressed in many ways. By linking literature to film this book will examine more closely this central characteristic of narrative. The combination of the enormous appeal films have in themselves and the development of the modern media society is causing film to become a more and more important art form, which to an increasing extent influences the way in which we read and understand literature. In this evolutionary picture narrative theory helps us understand both what ties literature and film together and how they differ.

If the focus of this book is on narrative fiction, the film sections deal primarily with the narrative fiction film. And yet, as David Bordwell and Kristin

Thompson put it, 'not everything shown or implied by a fiction film need be imaginary . . . [and fiction films] often comment on the real world' (Bordwell and Thompson 1997: 45). As in verbal narratives, the borderlines between fictional and documentary films can be blurred, and narrative is crucially important in many films which base themselves on actual events (for example, Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1994) or James Cameron's *Titanic* (1998)).

Narrative theory and analysis

~~The theory on which this book is based can, as has already been shown, be traced back to Russian formalism in the 1920s, and it has since become~~ a truly international phenomenon, inspiring extensive research in many countries. That French theorists have been central to this development is reflected by the status of Genette's *Narrative Discourse* as a major theoretical reference. This standard work in narrative theory has been supplemented by theories and concepts developed by other scholars. Narrative theory has been combined with studies that also refer to film (such as Seymour Chatman's *Coming to Terms* (1990)) and with film theory (such as David Bordwell's *Narration in the Fiction Film* (1985) and Edward Branigan's *Narrative Comprehension and Film* (1992)). The present study is distinguished from these works by the manner in which it relates the filmic aspect to narrative literature, and by the weight it gives to narrative analysis.

This kind of critical emphasis implies that, although my approach is selective in that I refer to (and am indebted to) various theories of narrative, there are also significant contributions I do not use because they investigate forms of narrative not subjected to discussion here. An example of such a study is Monika Fludernik's *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology* (1996). In this important study, Fludernik presents a new paradigm which is explicitly historical and which does not restrict itself to canonical (and fictional) forms of narrative. This is an important area of study, yet the kind of narrative theory we need in order to explore narrative in this wider sense is not unproblematically applicable to the study of, for example, the modern novel. Thus, Fludernik's study is an illustrative example of the diversification of narrative theory on which I commented in the Preface.

Why include analyses in an introductory book on narrative theory? First, brief references to fictional texts are often too short to illustrate the critical possibilities (and problems) of narrative theory. As James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz have observed, 'If the untheorized interpretation is not worth reading, the untested theoretical proclamation is not worth believing' (Phelan and Rabinowitz 1994: 9). Second, narrative theory is primarily understood as a tool for analysis and interpretation—a necessary aid to a better understanding of narrative texts through close reading. In order to exemplify

the theoretical terms presented in Part I, I use prose texts that are central to literary studies (such as Cervantes's *Don Quixote*). To illustrate and test the theory, Part II analyses five texts that are all complex and critically challenging, both narratively and thematically: the biblical parable of the sower in Mark 4, Franz Kafka's *The Trial*, James Joyce's 'The Dead', Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, and Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*. On the basis of these narrative analyses Part II also discusses adaptations of four of these texts: Orson Welles's *The Trial*, John Huston's *The Dead*, Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*, and Colin Gregg's *To the Lighthouse*.

A critical attempt of this kind requires respect for the literary text and a wish to bring the reader of the analysis back to the text. At the same time it is clear that although a narrative commentary will be helpful in different interpretations, it is itself interpretative—among other things through the selective use of critical terms and through the choice of textual extracts on which comments are made. There is no ultimate interpretation of, for example, Kafka's *The Trial*, and I invite the reader of the analyses in Part II to supplement, refine, and problematize the attempts at interpretation I make. In theoretical terms Paul Armstrong formulates this problem as follows:

> Every interpretive approach reveals something only by disguising something else, which a competing method with different assumptions might disclose. Every hermeneutic standpoint has its own dialectic of blindness and insight—a ratio of disguise and disclosure which stems from its presupposition. To accept a method of interpretation is to enter into a wager—to gamble, namely, that the insights made possible by its assumptions will offset the risks of blindness they entail. (Armstrong 1990: 7)

A word on ways of using this book: the theoretical Part I is divided into four chapters. In order that the different narrative theories and concepts can be used to supplement and explain one another, it will be an advantage to read these chapters chronologically. Although Part II is an integral part of the book, one need not read this part sequentially to derive benefit from it in relation to Part I, because although the texts here have been chosen with narrative variation in mind, the analyses are so designed that they can also be read independently of one another.

2
Narrative Communication

That a text is narrative implies that it verbally relates a story. Another term for this story-telling is *narrative communication*, which indicates a process of transmission from the author as addresser to the reader as addressee. A useful point of departure to enable us to discuss and analyse such narrative communication is what we call the *narrative communication model*. After the model has been presented, I shall comment on the different links it illustrates, with examples taken from narrative texts. I shall also relate the model to different narrative variants, to the term 'film narrator', and to central narrative concepts such as distance, perspective, and voice. First, however, some comments on narrative communication in film.

Film communication

From the previous chapter we will recall that the central concepts in the definition we gave of a narrative—time, space, and causality—are also important in the narrative fiction film. It is implicit in the premises of this book that film should be considered as a variant of narrative communication: the fiction film is narrative in the sense that it presents a story, but in contrast to literary fiction it communicates filmically.

What then is film communication? We first note its strikingly visual quality. A film holds us firmly in the optical illusion that images displayed in rapid succession (usually shot and projected at a rate of twenty-four frames per second) come to life. The intensely visualizing force of film is fundamental to the colossal breakthrough this art form has had in our century. If we then ask what film's visualizing force involves, we immediately touch upon a much-discussed topic in film theory. 'The visual is *essentially* pornographic,' claims Fredric Jameson. Films 'ask us to stare at the world as though it were a naked body' (Jameson 1992: 1, original emphasis). The visualizing aspect of film gives it an oddly superficial nature. Film is formally 'light' in a way Philip Kaufman exploits thematically in his adaptation of Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1984); the fiction film shows us an illusory real world that resembles to the point of confusion the world we know ourselves, a world into which we are free to peep for a couple of hours without participating.

Much of film's power to fascinate lies in the manner in which it combines the dimensions of space and time. The spatial dimension of film links it closely

If the text does give such signals, the narrator's authority may be undermined and the narrator becomes *unreliable*. The borderline between reliable and unreliable narrator may be blurred. For instance, even an unreliable narrator can give us necessary information. Yet the fact that he is unreliable will reduce the trust we place in this information (and to an even greater degree the trust we place in the narrator's evaluation of the information). How does a narrator betray the fact that he is unreliable? Let us stick to the notion that as a starting-point he is reliable, that he has the 'artificial authority' the narrative function ascribes to him. Each narrative act has its own features and characteristics, and features that may indicate a narrator's unreliability include:

1   The narrator has limited knowledge of or insight into what he is narrating.
2   The narrator has a strong personal involvement (in a way that makes both his narrative presentation and evaluation strikingly subjective).
3   The narrator appears to represent something that comes into conflict with the system of values that the discourse as a whole presents.

Often these three factors will mutually affect each other. By 'system of values' I mean the text's ideological orientation, i.e. the combination of those viewpoints, priorities, evaluations, and criticisms we can read out of the text as a narrative language system. Such a value system is seldom 'simple' in the sense that it can be summarized in a few sentences. The concept is related to the term *thematics*: the most significant problems and ideas that the text (as fictional discourse) presents and explores. The thematics of the texts analysed in Part II are complex and multi-faceted, and this kind of thematic richness comes not least from the narrative technique through which the fictional content is generated and presented.

The text's value system is linked to what I have called textual intention, a concept related to that of the implied author. When a narrator becomes unreliable, a form of communication is established between the implied reader and the implied author, 'above' the narrator. We can illustrate this in Fig. 2.3. Seymour Chatman, who presents this diagram, comments that 'the broken line indicates the secret ironic message about the narrator's unreliability' (Chatman 1990: 151). Two examples will serve to substantiate these theoretical comments.

I have said that the first three parts of *The Sound and the Fury* are told by
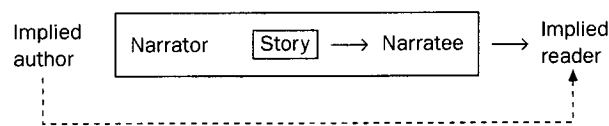

Implied author : Narrator [Story] ⟶ Narratee ⟶ Implied reader

Figure 2.3

three very different narrators, while the narrative position in the fourth and final part is third-person. What becomes apparent as we approach the end of the novel (and becomes even clearer when we read it again) is that the third of the first-person narrators, Jason, is unreliable. Why? The reasons are complicated and can be linked to all three characterizing features of the unreliable narrator. Yet the most important reason why Jason becomes unreliable lies in the contrast that arises between his judgements and views on the one hand, and those we can read out of the novel's fourth part on the other. For in *The Sound and the Fury* this concluding, third-person narrative instalment is instrumental in establishing the text's value system, which—even though it is far from simple—manifests itself as radically different from the system of values for which Jason stands.

If we go from Faulkner to an author whose narrative experiments Faulkner carried further, Joseph Conrad, we meet in the latter's *Under Western Eyes* (1911) a novel which even in its own title announces the limited perspective the narrator has on the events he is to report. The narration in *Under Western Eyes* is first-person, and the narrator's limited perspective signals that his account is potentially unreliable. Conrad presents the whole novel, apart from the title and an accompanying 'motto', as told by an English-language teacher. Working in Switzerland, the teacher comes into contact with a group of Russians, including the novel's main character. What makes us sceptical about this narrator, on whom we are wholly dependent as readers, is that although he proclaims how little he understands of Russia and eastern Europe (both culturally and historically), he narrates, and generalizes, in a manner that presupposes great knowledge and insight. Thus the narration undermines its own authority, while paradoxically presenting themes that are more complex than the narrator realizes. Since the novel's title in this connection appears as an ironic commentary on the novel's narrator, we can relate it to the implied author of *Under Western Eyes*. We can do the same thing with the motto, which is an inaccurate quotation from the novel's own text.

Film narrator

Is the concept of narrator critically productive for film? I believe it is, but I emphasize at once that the film narrator is very different from the literary narrator. From the section on film communication above, we recall that in the 1960s Metz and other film theorists attempted to apply linguistic principles to the study of film. However, as Chatman comments, Metz soon realized that 'film is not a "language" but another kind of semiotic system with "articulations" of its own' (Chatman 1990: 124). Film narration is an economic and effective system. As John Ellis puts it in *Visible Fictions*, film narration balances 'familiar elements of meaning against the unfamiliar, it moves forward by

a succession of events linked in a causal chain' (Ellis 1989: 74). The concept of *film narrator*, as it is used here, refers primarily to David Bordwell's *Narration in the Fiction Film* (1985) and Seymour Chatman's *Coming to Terms* (1990).

Bordwell believes that film has narration but no narrator: 'in watching films, we are seldom aware of being told something by an entitity resembling a human being . . . [Therefore film] narration is better understood as the organization of a set of cues for the construction of a story. This presupposes a perceiver, but not any sender, of a message' (Bordwell 1985: 62). In other words, at the same time as he sees narration as completely central in film communication, Bordwell bases his theory on what the *viewer* does when she or he sees a film. As Chatman has pointed out, Bordwell thus accords priorities and works in a manner reminiscent of reader-response theorists. Bordwell's theory of film narration is also interestingly related to Boris Eikhenbaum's assertion that understanding a film is 'a new kind of intellectual exercise' (Eikhenbaum 1973: 123). Bordwell's viewer is not passive but actively participating: on the basis of an indeterminate number of visual and auditory impressions the viewer first constructs connected and comprehensible images and then a story. There is no doubt that the emphasis Bordwell puts upon the viewer's active role is critically illuminating, and so are his comments on narration. Yet as Edward Branigan has observed in *Narrative Comprehension and Film* (1992: 109–10), since Bordwell, in his discussion of film narration, uses a number of metaphors which can also be attributed to the film narrator, the difference between the two terms is perhaps less obvious than it appears to be at first sight.

'Film', writes William Rothman in *The 'I' of the Camera*, is 'a medium limited to surfaces, to the outer, the visible . . . [And yet film is] a medium of mysterious depths, of the inner, the invisible' (Rothman 1988: p. xv). It is to Bordwell's credit that he has given theoretical grounds for this fundamental paradox in the way in which film functions. From a literary perspective it is interesting that his theory is based on the Russian formalists' distinction between *fabula*, *syuzhet*, and *style*. Even though Bordwell understands these terms in a particular way (partly because he uses them to construct his own theory, partly because he applies them to film), their relevance illustrates an important point of contact between film theory and narrative theory (a point of contact strengthened by Bordwell's use of Genette).

For Bordwell, 'the *fabula* (sometimes translated as "story") . . . embodies the action as a chronological, cause-and-effect chain of events occurring within a given duration and a spatial field . . . The *syuzhet* (usually translated as "plot") is the actual arrangement and presentation of the *fabula* in the film' (Bordwell 1985: 49, 50). Crucial to Bordwell's theory is that the *syuzhet* of film, as he sees it, only presents a small part of the total *fabula*, which is an implicit structure the viewer supports through assumptions and inferences. As the

third component, style refers to the systematic use of cinematic devices. In contrast to *syuzhet*, which for Bordwell is a general characteristic of narrative, style is medium-specific (and, in film, thereby more technical).

By means of these three concepts Bordwell then presents his definition of film narration: '*the process whereby the film's syuzhet and style interact in the course of cueing and channeling the spectator's construction of the fabula*' (Bordwell 1985: 53, original emphasis). This definition activates and builds on all the three elements Bordwell collects from Russian formalism. Yet Chatman finds that

> It is a little unclear how this process occurs, whether it is internal to the viewer—in which case style and *syuzhet* 'interact' only within her perception and cognition—or whether there is some kind of interchange between the screen and the viewer. If the latter, then 'narration' at least partly inhabits the film—in which case, we can legitimately ask why it should not be granted some status as an agent. (Chatman 1990: 126)

Bordwell's theory is remarkably comprehensive and broadly persuasive, yet it is indeed difficult to imagine that a film is 'organized' without being 'sent'. Film as an effective communication system presupposes some form of 'sender' (the fact that this sender is composed of many links and may be impossible to identify is another matter). Therefore it makes more sense to say, as Chatman does, that the viewer reconstructs the film's narrative than to say that he or she 'constructs' it. This does not mean that all viewers reconstruct alike, but it indicates that film narration both lays a foundation for reconstruction and governs it—somewhat in the same way that the narration in verbal prose governs the reading process.

The concept of 'film narrator' becomes critically helpful set against this theoretical background. Understood as a complex form of communication, film, like verbal prose, has a sender. Again, in both media, no matter how different they are, it is useful to differentiate the concept of sender into (implied) author and narrator. For films as for novels,

> we would do well to distinguish between a *presenter* of a story, the narrator (who is a component of the discourse), and the *inventor* of both the story and the discourse (including the narrator): that is, the implied author—not as the original cause, the original biographical person, but rather as the principle within the text to which we assign the inventional tasks. (Chatman 1990: 133, original emphasis)

Chatman illustrates this distinction with Alain Resnais's *Providence* (1977). The first half of this film presents the fantasies of the main character, the ageing author Clive Langham. Gradually it dawns on the viewer that the film's voice-over is in this case in charge of the images passing across the screen. These fragmentary images show more or less hypothetical drafts of the novel Langham is trying to write. The point is that in these fantasies that the film visualizes for us, it is the voice of Langham that determines what we see, not

some impersonal 'narration'. Thus Langham functions here as a kind of first-person narrator, what Chatman with Genette calls a 'homodiegetic' narrator. Later on in the film this narrator disappears, and an 'impersonal' (third-person) narrator takes over the narration. Yet, according to Chatman, both are 'introduced by the overriding intent of the film, the implied author' (Chatman 1990: 13).

Let us summarize the argument so far. Film communication involves a presentation which is primarily visual, but which in addition also exploits other channels of communication. The superordinate 'instance' that presents all the means of communication that film has at its disposal we can call the film narrator. Guiding the viewer's perception of the film, the film narrator is the film-maker's communicative instrument. We will recall that this kind of function is something the literary third-person narrator may have. The great difference is that while the qualities of the third-person narrator are also 'human' in the sense that he communicates verbally (gives information, comments, and generalizes), the film narrator differs in that he is a heterogeneous mechanical and technical instrument, constituted by a large number of different components.

Chatman (1990: 134–5) presents this diagram (Fig. 2.4), which shows 'the multiplexity of the cinematic narrator'. The film narrator is the sum of these and other variables. A number of them (like the camera) are absolutely fundamental to film communication, while others (like off-screen sound) may be more or less important depending upon which film the diagram is related to. (Some of these concepts are so technical that I shall define them: *mise-en-scène* is all the elements—lighting, furniture, costumes, etc.—that are placed in front of the camera to be filmed; 'straight cut' means to move directly over from one framing to another, while 'fade' (or 'dissolve') is to superimpose one filmic image on another, so that the first one gradually disappears while the second comes into focus. For a helpful glossary of film terminology see Bordwell and Thompson 1997: 477–82.)

As this diagram illustrates, it is the *viewer* (not the film) who constructs such a 'narrative synthesis'. Much of the challenge to the film author lies in presenting the various elements that together form the film narrator in such a way that the viewer experiences all of them as necessary and thematically productive. The elements of film communication must be consistent in the sense that they provide the viewer with a foundation on which to construct the film narrator, and thus the film story. 'Voice-over' is one of the many elements that constitute the film narrator: a voice outside the film image. Sarah Kozloff stresses in *Invisible Storytellers* that all three constituents in the term 'voice-over narration' are fully operative. *Voice* determines the medium: we must hear somebody speaking. *Over* applies to the relationship between the sound source and the images on the screen: the viewer cannot see the person speaking at the time of hearing his or her voice. *Narration* is linked to the content
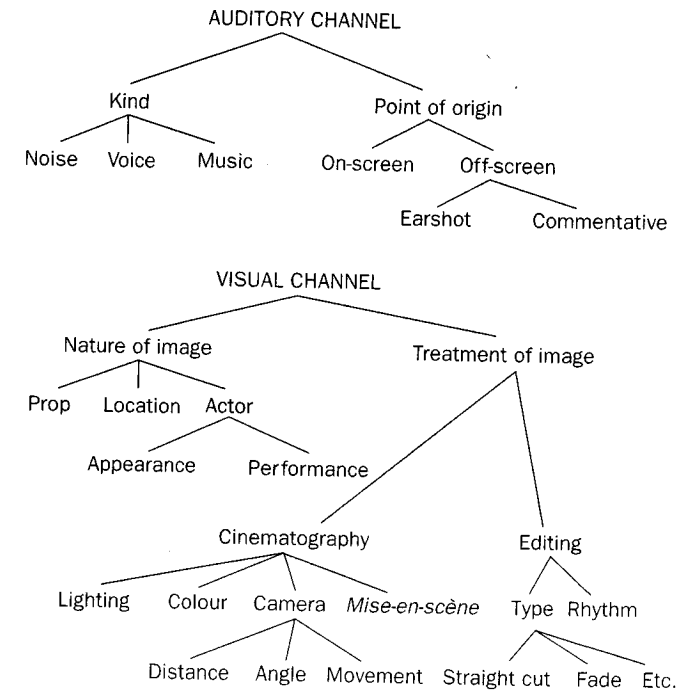
Figure 2.4

of what is said: somebody communicates a story—introduces, supplements, and comments on what is shown visually (Kozloff 1988: 2–3). The female voice-over in Gabriel Axel's *Babette's Feast* illustrates all these three characteristics of voice-over and furthermore exemplifies the narrative distance that may obtain between the voice-over and the action that is shown on screen (see Chapter 4).

Now if the film narrator is as complex and fragmented as Fig. 2.4 shows, who then is the film *author*? While writing a novel is normally something done by a single individual, a narrative fiction film is usually so expensive and so technically complicated that it can only be realized through a complex production process in which many of the links are 'co-creative'—the author of the script, the producer, actors and actresses, photographers, etc. The main reason why the *director* is usually regarded as the film's 'author' is that he or she not only has overall responsibility for according priorities and co-ordinating the activities that are part of the production process, but also functions creatively in relation to the screenplay and the thematics of the film. In keeping with this convention, in Part II I shall consider, for example, John Huston as the 'author' of *The Dead* because he is the film's director and clearly left his creative imprint on it.

it undermines any systematized account. However, this in itself does not render these categories invalid, and the different combinations of narrative time are most interesting precisely *as combinations* of the systematized variants presented here. This means that the concepts which are relevant for use in narrative analysis will vary from text to text. The narrative characteristics and problems in the literary text under consideration will determine what concepts it is fruitful to apply.

Narrative time in film

It follows from what I have said about film communication and the film narrator in the preceding chapter that in a film narrative time is presented rather than narrated. Yet as we will also remember from Chapter 2, I see such film presentation as a variant of narration, and the expression 'film narrator' indicates the complex communication instance for this narration. When Gerald Mast claims that space and time have equal roles in film, it is not least film's unique presentation of time that he has in mind. On the one hand, film presupposes space (a film displays in rapid succession a series of images, and each image is a spatial print); on the other hand, film imposes a temporal vector upon the spatial dimension of the image. Film complicates and changes the image's stable space by setting it in motion and adding sound, and by introducing sequences of images and combinations of events. The result is an extremely complex and captivatingly effective art form, but film does not become less space-'based' or less space-dependent even though it continually destabilizes and complicates the spatial dimension of the image.

These comments touch upon one of the most interesting discussions in film theory: what is often called the 'Eisenstein–Bazin debate'. For Sergei Eisenstein (the Russian director of several classic films, including *The Battleship Potemkin*, which I shall be discussing below) film does not communicate so much by displaying images as through the way in which these images are combined: 'two film pieces of any kind, placed together, inevitably combine into a new concept, a new quality, arising out of that juxtaposition' (Eisenstein 1986: 14). This assertion, which is closely related to Eisenstein's montage technique, is countered by André Bazin, who argues that Eisenstein dubiously breaks up nature (the objective world of reality in which man is placed) into small pieces, both spatially and temporally. For Bazin, the value and human appeal of film lie primarily in presenting (and thus in a sense recreating) nature as 'whole' and 'complete'. Implicit in the arguments Bazin levels at Eisenstein there lies a conception of film as an art form in which space dominates. For Eisenstein it is on the contrary time that is more important, since film images can only be combined sequentially in the projection process.

If we link these views to my introductory comments on the presentation of time in film, both Eisenstein and Bazin seem to have good points. Yet Mast is

the *cumulative* kinetic hypnosis of the *uninterrupted* flow of film and time. Because the art of cinema most closely parallels the operation of time, it imprisons the attention within a hypnotic grip that becomes steadily tighter and stronger (if the work is properly built) as the film progresses and it refuses to let go until it has had its way. (Mast 1983: 113, original emphasis)

Let us briefly look at the presentation of time in a film adaptation, the Russian director Lev Kulidzhanov's *Crime and Punishment* (1970). I shall limit myself to commenting on the way the film ends in relation to the ending of Dostoevsky's novel. In literary fiction as in film, beginnings and endings are extremely important: the beginning to arouse the interest of the reader/viewer, the ending to maximize the total effect of the aesthetic product on the person reading (the book) or seeing/listening to (the film). As readers of Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* will remember, the ending of this novel is designed as an epilogue. That the place for this epilogue is Siberia establishes a sharp spatial contrast with the plot, which takes place in St Petersburg. Siberia is the place for Raskolnikov's new life; there begins 'a new story' (p. 527) which lies outside the novel's universe but which presupposes Raskolnikov's confession of the double murder of the landlady and Lizaveta.

Why does Kulidzhanov omit the epilogue? Since the film version he gives us of the main action is relatively accurate in relation to the novel's plot, and since Georgi Taratorkin (as Raskolnikov) and Innokenti Smoktunovsky (as Porfiry) both bring out essential conflicts and thematic tensions in the novel, it may come as a surprise that he has not attempted to transfer the epilogue to film at all. The most plausible reason is probably that Kulidzhanov, a member of the Communist Party and a loyal 'Soviet artist', found it difficult to reconcile the novel's Christian ideology (which is perhaps most explicitly expressed in the epilogue) with the official Communist one. The relevant point in our context is that, by leaving out the epilogue, Kulidzhanov not only distorts the novel's ideas but radically changes its presentation of time. Put slightly differently: the fact that the adaptation omits the epilogue narrows down the novel's story time in a manner which eliminates an essential spatial contrast (St Petersburg ↔ Siberia) and which furthermore, by toning down the irrational aspect of the discourse, reduces the dialectic in the pressure to confess that both Porfiry and Sonya exert on Raskolnikov.

Narrative repetition

What is told again in a narrative prose text does not for that reason become true, but it probably becomes more important. Narrative repetition, which is closely related to narrative time (but also to other textual elements such as events and characters), is an important constituent aspect of prose fiction. Think again of Bjørnson's 'The Father'. Four times Thord comes to the priest;

years. He was of a robust constitution, spare-bodied, of a meagre visage; a very early riser, and a keen sportsman' (p. 23).

(d) *Milieu*. External (physical/topographic) surroundings may variously contribute to the indirect presentation of a character. Take Raskolnikov's garret in *Crime and Punishment*. The fact that it is small and confined reinforces the main character's depressed and brooding mood. Raskolnikov's bed is not for sleeping and resting but rather functions as a rack of torture: 'He was lying on his back . . . seized with such a violent fit of shivering that his teeth chattered uncontrollably, and every limb shook' (p. 84).

A larger and more complex milieu can also influence characterization, whether it be Dostoevsky's St Petersburg, the Yorkshire moors of the Brontë sisters, or Dickens's London. In *Crime and Punishment* the city reinforces the confined and claustrophobic quality of the room Raskolnikov rents in the tenement. The city on the Neva—with Kamenny Bridge, Sadovaya Street, and the Haymarket—is strangely isolated from the surrounding Russia, while the milieu of the city is contrasted with Siberia in the epilogue.

Various elements of characterization are as a rule combined with one another in the discourse. The total picture we form of a character can be ascribed to many different signals in the text. Not working each on its own, these textual signals influence one another through the ways in which they are combined, and their characterizing effect is enhanced through narrative variation and repetition. Thus, elements of characterization such as those mentioned above are related to other constituent aspects of narrative literature. One such aspect is genre: that *Don Quixote* parodies the chivalric romance is important for the depiction of the main character. In a novel such as *Don Quixote*, characterization is subtly nuanced through a series of textual modulations in which numerous narrative means and devices are combined with one another, with aspects of plot, and with imagery and metaphorical patterns to produce a novel of extraordinary richness.

A crucial point in discussions of Don Quixote concerns the hero's madness—both what 'madness' means here, how 'mad' he is, and the relationship between his madness in the novel's first and second parts. Some critics have found that Don Quixote's pattern of behaviour is characterized by play-acting. His imaginative power is certainly very strong, and may possibly indicate a form of role awareness or role distance. A fundamental problem explored in *Don Quixote* concerns the incongruity between the fictional world of the chivalric romances (into which Don Quixote dreams himself) and Don Quixote's own world (as it is constructed in Cervantes's fiction). That this lack of compatibility results in actions that suggest Don Quixote is mad seems clear. Reasonably clear it is too that the novel's plot (and thus the form of mad-

ness that initiates and complicates it) changes character in the course of the narrative, partly because the surrounding world to a greater degree meets the main character on his own terms and responds to him with various forms of counterplay. On the other hand, *Don Quixote* characteristically calls into question a contrastive pair such as mad/normal. The elements of play-acting in the main character's pattern of speech and action support such a qualifying process, which is shaped through a complicated narrative pattern. In *Don Quixote*, the narrative and thematic complexity of the novel as a genre is reflected in the main character's ever-increasing complexity. This kind of complexity is illuminated by M. M. Bakhtin's concept of *heteroglossia*:

> Heteroglossia, once incorporated into the novel . . . is *another's speech in another's language*, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way. Such speech constitutes a special type of *double-voiced discourse*. It serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author. (Bakhtin 1982: 324; original emphasis)

The concept of heteroglossia is closely connected to Bakhtin's understanding of the novel as a *dialogic* form: a narrative in which different voices, forms of consciousness, and opinions are played out against each other without being united or ranked. For Bakhtin, both these concepts are *relational* since they define consciousness and identity in relation to other characters, values, and priorities (cf. Holquist 1990: 18–19). To read *Don Quixote* dialogically is to respond to its narrative complexity and thematic heterogeneity. This means, for example, becoming more critical of the narrator's categorical statements on the main character. For one dialogic feature of *Don Quixote* is that while the narrator to begin with shows great authority in his evaluation of Don Quixote, this authority is problematized (without the narrator's thereby becoming unreliable) through the hero's incongruous and gradually more complex patterns of speech and action. In all his madness Don Quixote becomes a sort of artist—perhaps even a symbol of the poet.

Events, characters, and characterization in film adaptation

Although all three key words for this chapter are relevant to film, the presentation of events and characters in film is radically different from that in literary fiction. In literary fiction events are shaped through a combination of narrative devices, plot and character components, and metaphorical patterns to which the reader is invited to respond as he or she works through the text. Film's surface character and unusual kinetic force cause filmic events to 'hit' the viewer in a completely different way; film events manifest themselves as definitive even as they are being visually presented to us—and then disappear. Similarly, in film as in fictional prose the concept of character is related to characterization, but the ways in which the characters are presented are

strikingly different in the two media. When it comes to external features, for example, film can *show* them with sovereign conviction. Moreover, film can easily combine external features with characterizing patterns of speech and action—just think of characters such as Chaplin, a typical Western hero, or James Bond. On the other hand, a film cannot convey a character's thoughts, feelings, plans, and so forth in the way fictional literature can—partly because the film narrator's functions are so unlike those of the literary narrator. A systematic discussion of events, characters, and characterization in film is a large venture which cannot be attempted here. Instead I have chosen to link these concepts to a particular adaptation, while also relating them to other relevant concepts introduced above. First, however, I will make some more general comments on film adaptation; these comments will be supplemented in the discussions of four different adaptations in Part II.

To 'transfer' a work of art from one medium to another is in one sense impossible. We speak of 'filming a book' almost as if the characters in a novel could step out of the story and become actors in front of the camera, but this expression simplifies the complicated transformation involved. As Stuart McDougal puts it in *Made into Movies*: 'Every art form has distinctive properties resulting from its medium; a filmmaker must recognize the unique characteristics of each medium before transforming a story into a film' (McDougal 1985: 3). An adaptation makes great demands, even from the very starting-point, on those who perform in it. In addition to media-specific characteristics, other factors further complicate the transformation from one medium to another. One such factor is that since making a film is a technically complicated process, problems confronted during production can distract the film's creators from an aesthetic evaluation of the literary starting-point. This said, many directors (such as Welles, Huston, and Coppola) have created adaptations that demonstrate intimate knowledge of the literary text to which they respond as creative artists.

A young art form, in our century film has developed techniques, structural patterns, and a thematic range that have taken other media—literature, music, dance, the pictorial arts—hundreds of years to work out. For many people, film is the most vital and exciting of artistic media. It is interesting therefore that literature, both through drama and narrative fiction, has made and is still making significant contributions to the development of film. For example, Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* (1951) and *Ran* (1985) are both important films. Yet for many viewers *Ran* is the more engrossing because of the way in which it filmically responds to the plot and thematics of Shakespeare's *King Lear* (1605), transforming Lear's three daughters into sons and transferring the plot's action from England to Japan in the seventeenth century.

Although *Ran* is only one of many examples of films inspired by drama, it is striking how many films (approximately one in three narrative fiction films) take as their starting-point a literary prose text, whether it be a short

story or (more commonly) a novel. In 1926 Boris Eikhenbaum noted that 'the competition of cinema with literature is an undeniable fact of our present culture' (Eikhenbaum 1973: 126). This observation is even more valid today. But Eikhenbaum adds a point which is also still valid. Although, he acknowledges, film has its own methods, 'it needs material. It takes literature and translates it into filmic language.' It needs to be added, though, that since the interest and appeal of the 'material' of literature is in large measure ascribable to literary presentation, the narrative means and devices of a literary text may also influence the adaptation of it. As Eisenstein points out in a classic essay, narrative equivalents to the techniques of film composition are to be found in verbal fiction: 'Perhaps the secret lies in Dickens's (as well as cinema's) creation of an extraordinary plasticity. The observation in the novels is extraordinary—as is their optical quality' (Eisenstein 1992: 396). Adapting a literary text, even a director who believes that filmic techniques are *not* equivalent to literary ones will tend to search for forms of presentation which do justice to, and highlight the artistic quality of, the literary starting-point. We note that this characteristic of adaptation applies whether it be relatively direct (like John Huston's adaptation of Joyce's short story 'The Dead') or more indirect (like Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* in relation to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*). One obvious yet important difference between adapting a short story and adapting a novel, however, is that with a short text as starting-point the adaptation can present the plot of the literary text in greater detail.

In an influential essay on adaptation, Dudley Andrew identifies three basic modes of relation between film and literary text. *Borrowing* means that 'the artist employs, more or less extensively, the material, idea, or form of an earlier, generally successful text' (Andrew 1992: 422). Examples of this mode include numerous adaptations from Shakespeare and, in other art forms, adaptations from literature to music, opera, and painting. A key question here concerns artistic fertility, not the adaptation's 'fidelity' to the original text. *Intersecting* indicates a different attitude to adaptation: 'Here the uniqueness of the original text is preserved to such an extent that it is intentionally left unassimilated in adaptation' (Andrew 1992: 422). In one sense the concept of adaptation does not apply to intersecting, because what the viewer is presented with is rather 'a refraction of the original'. As examples of films in the intersecting mode, Andrew mentions Pier Paolo Pasolini's *The Gospel According to St Matthew* (1964) and *Canterbury Tales* (1972). 'All such works fear or refuse to adapt. Instead they present the otherness and distinctiveness of the original text, initiating a dialectical interplay between the aesthetic forms of one period with the cinematic forms of our own period' (Andrew 1992: 423). The third mode concerns *fidelity and transformation*: 'Here it is assumed that the task of adaptation is the reproduction in cinema of something essential about an original text' (Andrew 1992: 423).

Like André Bazin, who in *What is Cinema?* champions the intersecting mode, Andrew is sceptical about faithful transformations as they tend to 'become a scenario written in typical scenario form' (Andrew 1992: 423). One problem with this kind of tripartite distinction is that the points of transition between the three modes can be blurred, and one and the same adaptation can incorporate elements of more than one mode. Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*, for example, could be seen as an example of borrowing as well as intersecting—it is an adaptation and yet in one sense it is not. Still, Andrew's survey of the range of adaptations is critically helpful, and his classification provides a possible starting-point for further discussion of the phenomenon as well as for analysis of individual films. Andrew rightly notes that we cannot dismiss adaptation since it is a fact of human practice. He follows Christian Metz and Keith Cohen in regarding narrative as the most solid link between verbal and visual languages. As Cohen puts it *Film and Fiction: The Dynamics of Exchange*, 'In both novel and cinema, groups of signs, be they literary or visual signs, are apprehended consecutively through time; and this consecutiveness gives rise to an unfolding structure, the diegetic whole that is never fully *present* in any one group yet always *implied* in each such group' (Cohen 1979: 92, original emphasis). As narrative codes function at the level of implication or connotation, they are 'potentially comparable in a novel and a film . . . The analysis of adaptation then must point to the achievement of equivalent narrative units in the absolutely different semiotic systems of film and language' (Andrew 1992: 426).

This observation can be related to a central point argued in Christian Metz's *Film Language*: 'Film tells us continuous stories; it "says" things that could also be conveyed in the language of words, yet it says them differently. There is a reason for the possibility as well as for the necessity of adaptations' (Metz 1974: 44). There certainly is, and yet we need to remember that the 'dynamics of exchange', as Cohen suggestively calls it, go both ways between fiction and film. There is no doubt that a film such as John Huston's *The Dead* has made many spectators aware of Joyce's *Dubliners*, thus (sometimes if not always) turning a viewer into a reader.

Film-makers' relationships to the literary texts they adapt vary very considerably. For example, while Francis Ford Coppola nowhere in *Apocalypse Now* (1979) records his indebtedness to *Heart of Darkness* (Conrad's novella was not credited until the release of Eleanor Coppola's documentary *Hearts of Darkness* thirteen years later), Robert Altman's *Short Cuts* (1993) emphasizes the connection between the film and the nine short stories and one prose poem by Raymond Carver on which it is based. Carver's name features in the credits for the film, an edition of the stories and the poem has been published under the same title as the film and with an introduction by Altman, and the film's screenplay has been published with an introduction by Carver's widow, the writer Tess Gallagher. Although, presumably, this kind of explicit linking of

film and literature has made many viewers interested in Carver's fiction, it does not follow that Carver is more important for Altman than, say, Conrad is for Coppola. If, employing Andrew's terminology, we ask whether *Short Cuts* is borrowing or intersecting, a tentative response could be that, while aspiring towards intersection, the film actually contains elements of both modes. In his introduction to the book *Short Cuts*, compiled after the film was made, Altman writes that he looks 'at all of Carver's work as just one story, for his stories are all occurrences, all about things that just happen to people and cause their lives to take a turn' (Carver 1995: 7). Thus, the film is based not just on Carver's short fiction but also on Altman's interpretation of Carver; and this interpretation, it could be argued, perhaps underestimates the ways in which Carver's short stories differ from one another structurally and thematically. To make this point, however, is not to suggest that the stories actually chosen by Altman do not provide a good basis for his innovative film. Although the film has been criticized for its tendency to melodrama in some sequences, it is a continually fascinating exploration of a variety of characters who lead ordinary lives and yet seem to be living on the edge, cut off from their social environments and struggling to communicate their emotions. In terms of film form, *Short Cuts* is notable for its extensive cross-cutting between one scene and another, thus activating, repeating, and modulating various facets of the Carver texts used as a vehicle for filmic presentation.

One interesting feature of Altman's *Short Cuts* is the manner in which Altman, ambitiously attempting to make nine separate short stories into one film, adapts not only third-person narratives but also stories in which Carver uses a first-person narrator. The most important of these is 'So Much Water So Close to Home'. If the thematic richness of this key text is generated in large part by the metaphor of water, it also depends on the female narrator's diverse functions. Now there is, as Brian McFarlane observes in *From Novel to Film*, 'only a precarious analogy between the attempts at first-person narration offered by films and the novel's first-person narration' (McFarlane 1996: 15). He finds that such attempts will usually be of two kinds, 'subjective cinema' and 'voice-over'. What Altman does is to explore the possibilities of subjective cinema, especially through cross-cutting and varied uses of camera angle. For example, the shots of the unidentified dead girl lying in the water while the men (including Stuart, the narrator's husband) are fishing activate film's voyeuristic aspect, accentuated by cross-cutting between the naked body and the fishing men. While in Carver's short story the reader's sympathy resides with the first-person narrator, in Altman's film one effect of the subjective camera is to dissociate the viewer's perspective from that of the fishing men, relocating it (unpleasantly but not morbidly) in the image of the dead body. This is a filmic achievement in its own right; it is also a filmic recreation of the short story's movement (on the level of plot as well as metaphor) towards identification of the narrator and the dead woman.

Before turning to Axel's *Babette's Feast* I shall briefly comment on the beginning of Andrzej Wajda's *The Shadow-Line* (1976), a film illustrative of some significant problems of adaptation not observable in Altman's *Short Cuts*. Wajda's film is an adaptation of Joseph Conrad's novella *The Shadow-Line* (1916). That the narrative of this text is first-person is consistent with the protagonist's 'compulsion to narrate' (Stanzel 1986: 93, cf. Lothe 1996a: 221). The narrative and thematic characteristics of the novella's beginning are closely associated with the kind of first-person narrative which Conrad employs. In Wajda's film, the narrator's identity is less clear, and his ontological status is consequently more uncertain. Wajda does, it is true, begin his film by focusing on the protagonist, whose first words are: 'This is not a marriage story. My action, such as it was, had more the quality of divorce, of desertion. For no good reason, I abandoned my ship. It was in an Eastern port, in Singapore.' Actually, the narrator does not (as we watch him on the screen) speak these words aloud, but comments—retrospectively, the viewer infers—on his own situation after having given up his berth. These voice-over comments, which correspond quite well with the relevant textual segment early in the novella, constitute only a small part of the film narration, however. If Conrad the author writes *The Shadow-Line* by making his first-person narrator speak, Wajda's film narrator is a heterogeneous, mechanical, and highly flexible instrument, constituted by a variety of techniques and performing diverse functions. The film narrator therefore needs to be distinguished from the voice-over Wajda uses at the beginning of the adaptation. Though important, such a technique is merely one component in a far more complex narrative communication.

Wajda's adaptation illustrates one of the most distinctive qualities of film: 'that every object that is reproduced appears simultaneously in two entirely different frames of reference, namely the two-dimensional and the three-dimensional, and that as one identical object it fulfills two different functions in the two contexts' (Arnheim 1957: 59). The viewer thus encounters two major frames of reference in film, 'the space and time of a *screen* as well as (a sample of) the space and time of a *story world*' (Branigan 1992: 33, original emphasis). In Wajda's *The Shadow-Line*, the protagonist's opening words (the voice-over commentary quoted above) intitiate the space and time of the story world (i.e. the film's plot), whereas the filmic segments preceding them foreground the frame of reference associated with the screen. It does not follow that there is no connection between these two frames of reference. 'Light and sound create two fundamental systems of space, time, and causal interaction: on screen and within a story world. One of the tasks of narrative is to reconcile these systems' (Branigan 1992: 34). Watching the phenomenal appearances on the screen, the viewer attempts to relate them to possible functions in the story world. This, as Branigan shows, is a complicated process during which major changes can occur; particularly at the beginning of a film, it is often difficult to identify and

interpret the key functions of the story world. The beginning of Wajda's adaptation further complicates this process as the opening shots of the film do not refer to the story world directly but instead present a succession of pictorial frames which photographically reproduce scenes of historical reality: a picture of a sailing ship, another picture of officers and crew on the deck of such a ship, and further shots showing pictures of sailing ships at rest in what appears to be a major nineteenth-century port. Thus while reading that this film by Andrzej Wajda is 'from the novel *The Shadow-Line* by Joseph Conrad', the viewer also watches the photographs over which this information is projected, wondering about their significance and relevance for the story that unfolds. One essential function of the photographs, as it turns out, is to support the film's transition from fictional narrative to autobiography, identifying the first-person narrator as Conrad as he is looking at family photographs sent him from Poland. In no way impairing the film's quality, this kind of generic transition furthers a filmic exploration of the autobiographical elements in Conrad's novella (subtitled *A Confession*).

Gabriel Axel's *Babette's Feast*

One critical asset of Andrew's distinction between three modes of relation between film and literary text is its implicit demonstration that the most 'faithful' adaptation is not necessarily the 'best'. Adaptation is first and foremost *film*; it is not a 'second-hand version' of a literary text. This point also applies to those adaptations that, like *Babette's Feast*, seem unusually accurate in relation to their literary starting-point. A possible story version of this text, taken from the collection *Anecdotes of Destiny* (1958), looks thus:

> In a fishing hamlet in northern Norway lives a Dean with his two daughters Martine and Philippa. While the Dean is still living, his young and beautiful daughters are proposed to by two people 'from the great world outside Berlevaag' (p. 25), Lieutenant Loewenhielm and the singer Papin. Nevertheless they continue to live in the fishing hamlet, where after the death of their father they go on helping the poor and the infirm. Sixteen years later Babette Hersant comes to visit the sisters from Paris. Fourteen years again after this, in 1885, Babette is still living with them as a housekeeper and cook. That year Babette wins a large sum in a French lottery, but instead of going back to Paris she spends the money on arranging a feast to commemorate the priest's hundredth birthday on 15 December. Among the guests is Loewenhielm, now a general.

The fact that this story version is also valid for Axel's adaptation is a first indication that the film version's plot remains close to that of Blixen's text. The adaptation is precise not only in its presentation of the textual events but also in the filmic characterization of the text's main characters. Since the literary text in this case is a short story and not a novel, Axel can more easily transfer the plot's constituent elements to film. In the film as in the short story,

moreover, the structure is symmetrical and the narrative method economical. The short story is in twelve parts or chapters. Combined with the content in each part and the short story's temporal anachronies, the chapter headings contribute to making the text fairy-tale-like and strangely mythical.

The narration in the short story is first-person. Blixen presents the plot through a distanced narrator who does not participate in the action. Omniscient in the sense that she can report the characters' thoughts, the narrator appears to be reliable (the text gives no indication that she is not). Overall, the narrator is soberly and precisely informative rather than critically evaluative.

The concentrated background information in the short story's first part confronts Axel with several challenges as film-maker. One example is the choice of place on Blixen's part. The topography of the small town Berlevaag in northern Norway is important for events, character portrayal, and thematics. As in, for example, Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* (1878), the place lends support to the contrasts between the everyday aspect (the daily routine of life in Berlevaag and among the Dean's parishioners) and the intervention of the other: something unknown, exciting, and potentially threatening from the outside. This 'other' serves, as in many narrative texts, to initiate action. It is primarily linked to Babette, secondarily to Loewenhielm and Papin. It says something about Axel's respect for the literary text (and for Blixen as an author) that he had been planning to do the filming in Berlevaag, but for practical and financial reasons the film's location was instead transferred to West Jutland in Denmark. Thus Berlevaag becomes Nørre Vossborg, the dried cod becomes flatfish, and the snow (which falls on 15 December) turns into rain. Although the first change is probably the most important of these three, we cannot say that it turns out negatively for the film as an adaptation. As Axel portrays Nørre Vossborg in West Jutland, the place and milieu have in the main the same qualities as Berlevaag in the short story. The difference is one of degree which the film can live with as an adaptation, and which the viewer who knows the short story can tolerate.

The greatest challenge with which the beginning of the short story confronts Axel, however, is how to convey the background information that the first-person narrator provides in Blixen's text. Axel chooses to introduce the voice of an anonymous female narrator. Particularly in the opening sequence, but also throughout the film and especially in the transitions between different stages of the plot, this female voice-over (a voice outside the images on the screen) serves as a filmic equivalent to the short story's first-person narrator. As indicated in Chapter 2 above, it illustrates all three characteristics of voice-over identified by Sarah Kozloff in *Invisible Storytellers*.

Axel's use of an informative and commentating narrator in *Babette's Feast* is clearly inspired by literature. This aspect of *Babette's Feast* is reminiscent of several of Francois Truffaut's films—such as *Les Deux Anglaises et le Continent*

(1971) and *Jules et Jim* (1961)—in which the narrator's commentary is both more intrusive and has more diverse functions than in *Babette's Feast*. Some film theorists have tended to be sceptical about such use of a narrator's voice and have considered it to be a foreign element in film. That few have criticized Axel for using this technique is closely connected with the functions voice-over has in *Babette's Feast*: not only giving the viewer necessary information, but also creating an observant 'visual distance' that preserves something of the narrative distance of the short story. This said, it must be stressed that a filmic voice-over cannot be impersonal in the same way as the voice of a third-person narrator: we immediately identify the voice in *Babette's Feast* as female because we *hear* it. Yet paradoxically it may (for the same reason) be difficult to relate filmic voice-over to the different characters' perspectives.

The characterization of the two sisters begins as early as the second paragraph and is elegantly linked with the milieu in which the short story is placed. The naming of the two tends towards direct definition, linking the sisters' lives to the form of Protestant Christianity represented by their father: 'They were christened Martine and Philippa, after Martin Luther and his friend Philip Melanchton' (p. 23). In the film this sentence is uttered by the voice-over. The effect is like the one we experience in Blixen's text, especially if we suppose that the viewer has read the short story. The characterization of Martine and Philippa is carried further through the analepsis that ties together the first and second parts: 'But the true reason for Babette's presence in the two sisters' house was to be found further back in time and deeper down in the domain of human hearts' (p. 24). This analepsis, which takes the action back to 1854 before moving gradually forwards 'until the time of this tale' (p. 35), illustrates the connection between analepsis (as a variant on narrative anachrony) and character portrayal. Chapter 2 of the short story opens thus: 'As young girls, Martine and Philippa had been extraordinarily pretty . . .' (p. 24). How does the adaptation respond to this narrative statement? We note that the film too has a clearly marked analepsis, which Axel opens by combining voice-over (cf. the sentence just quoted) with dissolve. The moment when the two images blend in superimposition seems to transcend mechanical, repetitive time. Is the voice-over inviting us to regard all stages of the sisters' lives as equally significant? The effect of the dissolve is here dependent on the voice-over accompanying and supplementing the successive images—first of the sisters in their fifties, then of the sisters when they were young and so beautiful that 'the young men of Berlevaag went to church to watch them walk up the aisle' (pp. 24–5).

In the adaptation as in the short story, the introduction of Lorens Loewenhielm and Achille Papin extends the characterization of the two sisters. The intensity of their adoration emphasizes how unusually beautiful Martine is and how wonderfully beautifully Philippa sings. When it comes to the filmic presentation of these two parts, we note three interesting variations.

Explaining Lieutenant Loewenhielm's visit to Berlevaag, the short story informs the reader that he 'had led a gay life in his garrison town and had run into debt' (p. 25). An interesting feature of the adaptation is that in order to visualize what in the short story is only *one* sentence, Axel presents a whole scene that gives a rather unflattering picture of the young Loewenhielm at the gaming table. More important, however, is the variation in the filmic presentation of the Dean's hold on his daughters. In the short story, the narrator reports that 'the Dean had declared that to him in his calling his daughters · were his right and left hand. Who could want to bereave him of them?' (p. 25). Note how the last sentence modulates towards free indirect discourse. Axel goes a step further when he makes the Dean utter these words directly, as a refusal to another of Martine's admirers. Axel's adaptation thus advances a more severe criticism of the Dean than does the short story, and the film further distances itself from the Dean through the unmistakable element of *Schadenfreude* in the latter's behaviour just after he has sent the anonymous suitor packing. On the other hand, one could argue that the sentence quoted from the literary text *also* indirectly criticizes the Dean, thus responding indirectly to the power relations that form a significant aspect of the short story's thematics.

The third variation, which comes towards the end of the third chapter, occurs in Axel's presentation of the 'seduction duet' in Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. We note that here too, the adaptation has been *extended* in relation to the literary text. Such an extension—including a textual segment of the opera's libretto, which the literary text does not give us—considerably enriches the adaptation: activating various filmic devices, Axel can *show* us an excerpt from the opera—complete with music, song, and interplay between the two performers. Similarly, more clearly and more convincingly than the short story, the film can show Papin becoming one with the role of Don Juan and kissing Philippa as the conclusion to the duet. As we will recall, this kiss, which is part of a *role* (and which Papin cannot remember afterwards) has an effect he could not have anticipated: 'Philippa went home, told her father that she did not want any more singing lessons and asked him to write and tell Monsieur Papin so' (p. 31). Although this narrative comment in the short story becomes a reply from Philippa to the Dean in the film, the effect is comparable. A more important point, however, is that even if we exclude the filmic visualization, Mozart's *music* brings to life in this part of the adaptation qualities that the literary text can indicate only relatively weakly—most clearly in the tonal visual imagery (of the first two bars of the duet between Don Giovanni and Zerlina) with which Papin many years later concludes his letter to the sisters. Perhaps the reader ought to *play* these two bars to make the text complete?

The main function of the letter, which reopens the action after an ellipsis of sixteen years, is to introduce Babette: the third character from the outside that

the story brings into the sisters' lives in Berlevaag. In the short story this is one of the most obvious variants on third-person narration. The gravity and disappointment apparent in the experiences the letter conveys are reinforced by the fact that Papin himself is the sender. Within the third-person narrative framework he thus functions in a way reminiscent of a first-person narrator, while the sisters for their part become narratees as they are reading the letter. In the film, voice-over presents parts of the letter, accompanied by shots of Papin writing it in Paris (while Babette is waiting in the same room) and cross-cutting to shots of the sisters reading it. The adaptation includes the end of the letter, in which Papin takes comfort in his feeling that

> In paradise I shall hear your voice again. There you will sing, without fears or scruples, as God meant you to sing. There you will be the great artist that God meant you to be. Ah! How you will enchant the angels.
> Babette can cook.
> Deign to receive, my ladies, the humble homage of the friend who was once
>
> Achille Papin
> (p.34)

Since the dialogue in the film is here identical with the text of the short story, the adaptation not only brings out the understatement in the sentence 'Babette can cook'. It also invites us (albeit much more strongly on a second reading/viewing) to follow Philippa and Babette in parallel as great artists. In Axel's adaptation as in Blixen's short story, moreover, the conclusion of the letter anticipates the ending of the plot, thus drawing attention to the loneliness of the artist, the brevity of his career, and the vulnerability of his feelings.

The fourth and fifth chapters advance the plot to the date of the celebration dinner, 15 December 1885. Summary is a central narrative technique in this sequence, and it is most clearly indicated in the transition between the two parts: 'Babette remained in the house of the Dean's daughters for twelve years, until the time of this tale' (p. 35). We note that Blixen makes her third-person narrator limit the 'tale' to one day, Tuesday 15 December. Such a temporal limitation supports the title by marking the celebration dinner as the short story's main event, while also making the events in 'Still life', which constitutes the middle part of the short story, less central by contrasting them with the subsequent climax. Yet the chapter extends the characterization of both Babette and the sisters. That much of this information comes directly via the first-person narrator presents Axel with a challenge as director. His choice seems reasonable: he presents selected, representative events (such as Babette beating down the price of the fish she is buying) and invites the viewer to generalize on the basis of them. An effect of this technique is to make the distance between Babette and the sisters greater in the film's middle sequence than in the corresponding prose passage. One detail that reinforces this impression is that Axel

lets Babette tell the shopkeeper, not the sisters as in the short story, that she gambles in the French lottery.

Axel's presentation of 'Babette's Good Luck' brings out many of the nuances in the literary original. Aspects of symmetrical structure are reinforced when something unexpected and exciting suddenly breaks into the sisters' sequestered and routine existence. Babette's win bursts asunder the limits of their experience. While the sisters' reaction to the win serves to characterize them ('They pressed Babette's hand, their own hands trembling a little', p. 41), the actual win is a kernel event in both the short story and the film. This letter number two, which for the sisters is notification of Babette's journey back to Paris, in a way repeats the first one which brought her to them. The adaptation of the next two chapters is based on selective but central textual passages. One relatively unsuccessful detail may be mentioned: the visualization of the dream Martine has after she has been horrified at the sight of the turtle and suspects Babette of wanting to poison all the guests at the feast. The main reason why the presentation of this dream is thematically unproductive is that the filmic devices employed appear to be at odds with the overall rhythm and considered distance so characteristic of both the short story and the film.

The significant contrast between everyday life and the feast presents a great challenge to Axel as director: would not any adaptation of this fabulous, miracle-like feast necessarily become trivial and simplistic? Nor is it any real alternative to make the dinner less central in the film—it is much too important for that both in the short story and in the adaptation as it reveals itself up to this kernel event. That Axel takes the challenge in his stride not only confirms his respect for Blixen's text, but also illustrates his high estimation of film's potential for adaptation. The director's success is essentially due to three interrelated factors: insightful editing, exceptional performances by the actors involved, and meticulous attention to detail. An example of the latter: the table service for the dinner is Haviland china from Limoges—in other words from France, as is reasonable, but in addition some of the best that can be purchased in Europe. (How the china reached Nørre Vossborg without a scratch is insignificant in this connection.)

The most difficult editing problem with which Axel is confronted becomes clear from the connection, established in the short story's narrative, between its third-person narration and General Loewenhielm's perspective. Earlier in the text, the voice-over has been generally distanced from the characters, sometimes cautiously approximating to the perspectives of the sisters, Lieutenant Loewenhielm, and Papin. In the dinner scene, however, narrative perspective is more clearly and more enduringly linked to the general. As we have seen, Axel also now uses a narrator's voice. Yet as we also have noted, this female voice-over (which in a way is first-person because we can hear it) has the more limited function of providing necessary background information that it is difficult for the film to convey. Thus Axel has to turn the general's

'The *convives* grew lighter in weight and lighter of heart the more they ate and drank' (Karen Blixen, 'Babette's Feast', 57–8).
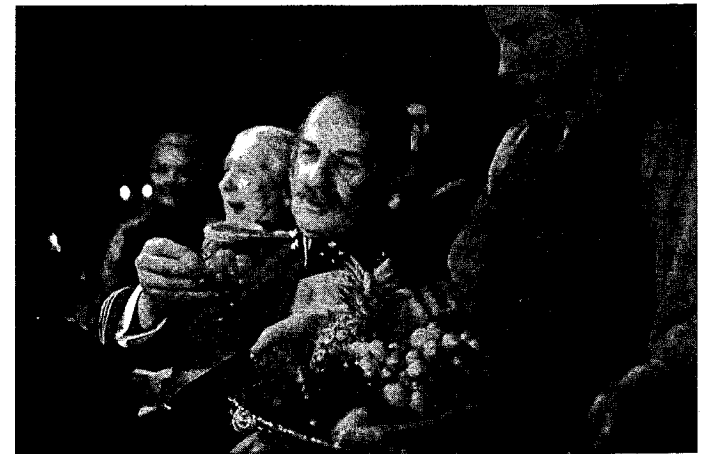
'General Loewenhielm no longer wondered at anything . . . "Beautiful grapes!" ' (Karen Blixen, 'Babette's Feast', 59).

thoughts, which the third-person narrator conveys in the short story, into character utterances. One example is the reflections on the meal at the Café Anglais a long time ago; in the film it becomes a monologue without any particular addressee.

That the general gets little response marks in itself a limit to how much Axel can let him speak without it seeming unnatural. Thus it makes sense that

passages which in the short story relate the third-person narrator's reflections and attitudes to General Loewenhielm's perspective, are left out in the film. Some critics have expressed the view that while in the short story the general is a spokesman for the author, in the film he becomes a catalyst for the miracle. Although this view has something to support it, however, the thematic complexity of 'Babette's Feast' makes it impossible to reduce 'the author's opinion' (which I would regard as synonymous with textual intention) to what one character says and represents (furthermore, the general has a catalytic function in the literary text as well).

The actors in Axel's adaptation are all outstanding; yet the question may be raised whether Jarl Kulle as the general does not give the greatest performance. The way in which he portrays Loewenhielm is just as confidently achieved as it is faithful to Blixen's characterization in the short story. If there are significant aspects of the corresponding literary extract that Kulle does not bring out, this does not come from a lack of acting ability but rather from a limitation of his role in the film as an adaptation. Compensating in part for this limitation, Kulle's speech, which is relatively simple to adapt, has several functions: as the climax during the celebration dinner it is centrally placed in the film's kernel event; in rhetorically elegant form and enunciation it complements the fantastic dishes that are being served; and in content it repeats— mildly ironically through a contrastive character with 'his breast covered with decorations' (p. 60)—the Dean's key expressions on the hundredth anniversary of his birth.

If the general functions as a catalyst for the feast as a kernel event, it is Babette who realizes the kernel. Through Stéphane Audran as Babette, the adaptation makes effective use of cross-cutting to show that the dinner is her doing—and not just the dinner but also the reconciling and explanatory effects it has. The utterance she repeats to the sisters, 'I am a great artist, Mesdames' (p. 67), plays on both these dimensions of the dinner, in addition to establishing Babette more clearly as the main character of film and short story alike.

To these comments on Axel's *Babette's Feast* can be added some concluding points on intertextual patterns observable in the film. When Dudley Andrew introduces the concepts of borrowing and intersecting in order to describe two types of relation between literature and film, he implicitly raises the issue of intertextuality. Yet Andrew appears to suggest a more active (intentional) form of relationship to earlier texts than does Julia Kristeva, who, in an influential essay first published in 1969, defines intertextuality as 'a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another' (Kristeva 1980: 66). Seen thus, intertextuality is linked to different forms of textual change, influence, adapting, and restructuring. It is a complicated and special form of dialogue: 'Intertextual dialogue . . . [is] the phenomenon by

which a given text echoes previous texts' (Eco 1990: 87). In relation to 'Babette's Feast'/*Babette's Feast* (i.e. the short story as well as the film) it is fruitful to link the concept of intertextuality to the Greek word *metamorphosis* and the Latin *transfigurare*, which can both (even if semantically not completely identical) be related to the Bible as the text's most important intertextual point of reference.

The relevance of these concepts is twofold. First, they can all be related to events, characters, and characterization; second, they can be related to both Blixen's story and Axel's adaptation. The feast actualizes three central events in the New Testament: the wedding at Cana in Galilee, at which Jesus turns water into wine (John 2: 1–11), the Last Supper with the twelve apostles just before he is crucified (Matt. 26: 17–29), and the day of Pentecost with the speaking in tongues and 'new' communication (Acts 2: 1–13). Blixen's integration of such different biblical events in one kernel event says in itself a good deal about the dinner scene's thematic complexity. The combination of intertextual echoes also gives the irony in the text a clearer polemical undertone: puncturing pietistic Protestant morality, it is humorous rather than sarcastic. It is a strength of the adaptation that, largely on account of the actors' performances, it succeeds in preserving this balance of attitudes.

The short story has approximately thirty intertextual references to the Bible. They range from direct references or quotations to more indirect echoes that must be brought out by analysis through repeated close reading. Although many of these naturally enough cannot be integrated in the film version, Axel has clearly made an effort to include as many as possible, for example the minor female character who, after having confused the glasses for water and wine, resolutely switches back to the exquisite Amontillado. The Dean and Babette, two *contrastive* characters in the short story as in the adaptation, are both given qualities characteristic of Jesus. While the short story characterizes the Dean as sympathetic, exemplary, and ascetic, Babette is portrayed as proud, unusually gifted, and imaginative. The New Testament relates *all* these qualities to Jesus (albeit in different contexts). The sisters in the short story are directly connected to Mary, and just as explicit is the connection between Martha and Babette: 'the dark Martha in the house of their two fair Marys' (p. 37). When it comes to Papin, it is striking that the prefiguration of Don Juan—in the film as in the short story—takes over and spoils things for Papin: 'Don Giovanni kissed Zerlina, and Achille Papin pays for it! Such is the fate of the artist!' (p. 32).

Now that these intertextual points have been briefly noted, it must be added that prefiguration in 'Babette's Feast' and *Babette's Feast* is predominantly ironic. An ironic function of this kind means that Blixen not only uses but also breaks with the historical intention of the concept of *figura*. Traditionally, 'figural interpretation establishes a connection between two events or

persons, the first of which signifies not only itself but also the second, while the second encompasses or fulfills the first' (Auerbach 1959: 53). The classic example is the figural interpretation which (in the Christian theological tradition) transforms the Old Testament from a legal code and history book about the people of Israel to an integral part of the story of Jesus's salvation of mankind as the New Testament presents it.

As outlined above, Blixen establishes points of contact with this tradition through the many intertextual references to the Bible. She uses a tradition from which she at the same time distances herself; the effects of this double manoeuvre are among the most striking in the short story. This applies in particular to the combination, in the dinner scene, of intertextual references to the three events in the New Testament that we have noted. For example, the guests believe that the fantastic dinner is God's work, while in fact it is Babette's. Babette as an artist realizes what the guests believe only God can do. Another example is Philippa's words of comfort to Babette after the shocked sisters have learnt how much the dinner cost: 'Ah, how you will enchant the angels!' (p. 68). Closing the short story, these words repeat the ending of Papin's letter to Philippa (p. 34). Thus they acquire a touch of irony by being indirectly self-characterizing: in contrast to Philippa, Babette does not need any promise of becoming an artist in paradise—she has just shown that she is one here on earth.

Some film critics have said of *Babette's Feast* that the film is better as adaptation than as film. They find that 'as film' *Babette's Feast* is relatively traditional and cautious, and that filmatically Axel is hampered by his faithfulness to the literary text. Such an objection cannot be dismissed out of hand. Yet since adaptation is also film, it is not very helpful to judge filmic means and devices in isolation from the relationship the adaptation has to what it is adapting. As these selective comments have shown, this relationship is respectful and precise. Moreover, it is artistically creative since the adaptation manages to transfer so many of the short story's qualities to film, and since it compensates for what it cannot filmically achieve (e.g. presenting parts of the third-person narrator's comments) with what it can do just as well as, or better than, the literary text. One possible example of the latter is the 'seduction duet' between Philippa and Papin; another is the film's use of colour. Writing of Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958), Stanley Cavell finds that 'the film establishes the moment of moving from one color space into another as one of moving from one world into another' (Cavell 1979: 84). This is exactly what Axel achieves in his filmic presentation of Babette's feast.

This brief discussion of *Babette's Feast* constitutes a transition between Parts I and II of this book. The discussion has related events, characters, and characterization to both the adaptation and to the short story on which the film is based, and I have also linked these concepts to others introduced earlier in Part I. Since various narrative elements are interwoven in the shaping of the

discourse, we need different and supplementary narrative concepts to be able to understand and discuss narrative texts. As indicated at the end of the introductory chapter (which should also be seen as an introduction to Part II), I relate narrative theory and narrative terms closely to (literary and filmic) fictional texts. A selection of such texts forms the basis for the analyses in Part II.