The genre of screenwriting began right from the days of cinematographic history and so is over a hundred years old. Yet many people scoff at the idea of defending the screenplay as a form of literature and serious critics maintain that it is not an end-product, that it is just a stop-gap measure. A brief survey of this art-form shows that in the first few decades of this century, instead of according literary recognition to the screenplays of that day, critics were concerned in discussing not the individual merits of the writer but instead their literary motivations. Did they write for the screen in order to express themselves in a way impossible in any other medium, yet with the same dedication and meticulousness as writers in the more traditional literary arts? Or did they consider their screen writing endeavours as mere "hack" assignments, undertaken only to give them the financial support necessary to embark on a real "labor of love," such as writing a good novel or play? Unfortunately, in the history of the American film script, the latter has more often been the case. Very few critics seriously consider the screen work of great American writers like William Faulkner and F. Scott Fitzgerald in an exhaustive study of their literary accomplishments. In Europe, on the other hand, we find the first real trend of accomplished writers gravitating to the cinema in order to further their literary career and not to suspend them. In France, in particular, such well-known literary personages as Jaques Prevert, Jean Cocteau, Marguerite Duras and Alain Robbe-Grillet have all gone on to pursue very distinguished careers in film, not only as scriptwriters but, in some instances, as directors too.¹

Movie scripts seldom make for interesting reading precisely because they are mere blueprints of the finished product. Unlike a play script, which usually can be read with pleasure, too much is missing in a screenplay and even highly detailed scripts seldom offer us a sense of a film's mise-en-scene, one of the principal methods of expression at the director's disposal. However, the claim that screenplays are actually literature is based not so much on the recent trend to publish them (along with the fact that many of them do make very good reading), but on the new status that cinema itself has attained -- that of an art form. The post-Second World War cinema has proved once and for all that movies can not only entertain people but enlighten them as well, with the same subtleties and complexities that are to be found in any other art or literary form. As early as 1948, in an article entitled "La Camera-Stylo" ("camera-pen"), the French critic Alexandre Astruc first called attention to some of the changes that cinema was undergoing at that time:

...the cinema is quite simply becoming a means of expression, just as all the other arts have been before it...
...After having been successive a fairground attraction, an amusement analogous to boulevard theatre, or a means of preserving the images of an era, it is gradually becoming a language. By language, I mean a form in which and by which an artist can express his obsessions exactly as he does in the contemporary essay or novel. That is why I would like to call this new age of cinema the age of camera-stylo...By it I mean that the cinema... [becomes] a means of writing just as flexible and subtle as written language.²
Perhaps more than any of the director's other collaborators, the scriptwriter has been suggested from time to time as the main "author" of a film. After all, the writer is generally responsible for the dialogue, he outlines most of the action and sets forth the main theme of a film. Most great directors take a major hand in writing their scripts, but they bring in other writers to expand on their ideas. Fellini, Truffaut, Kurosawa, and Antonioni all work in this manner. The American studio system also tended to encourage multiple authorship of scripts. Often writers had a certain specialty, such as dialogue, comedy, construction, atmosphere, and so on. Some writers were best at "doctoring" weak scripts, others were good "idea" people but perhaps lacked the skill to execute their ideas. In such collaborative enterprises, the screen credits are not always an accurate reflection of who contributed what to a movie. Furthermore, even though many directors like Hitchcock contribute a great deal to the final shape of their scripts, they often refuse to take screen credit for their work, allowing the official writer to take it all. Surprisingly, few major directors depend entirely upon others for their scripts. Joseph Losey and Harold Pinter, Marcel Carno and Jaques Provert, Vittorio DeSica and Cesere Zavattini are perhaps the famous director-writer teams.3

"I'm a writer," That statement used to conjure up images of a solitary life, one of manual typewriters, converted attic offices and "Don't disturb him, he's writing". While some of this may still hold true, especially for the novelist or dramatist of romantic or sentimental temperament, the screenwriting game is much different. These days, terms such as "gross points," "right of first refusal," "WGA arbitration," and "script doctor" are as necessary a part of a screenwriter's lexicon as plot point, transition element and high concept. Also, the business of screenwriting has indeed become a 'business' as much as it is simply a profession. Today's writers and writer/directors have quite a bit of business that they need in order to make a go of it in the modern movie-making environment. Though relegated to 'B-status' of writing, this paper seeks to explore how far the screenplay can be considered as literature and as a case in point I wish to focus on Harold Pinter's screenwriting.

The very mention of the name of Harold Pinter brings to our mind the image of a dramatist who, along with Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco and Arthur Admov, became representative of the Theatre of the Absurd. His plays, which are supposedly esoteric avant-garde, and so often superciliously dismissed as nonsense or mystification, made deep impact upon the literary scene in England from the sixties decade. Striving to express its sense of the senselessness of the human condition and the inadequacy of the rational approach by the open abandonment of rational devices and discursive thought, Pinter regards life in its absurdity as basically funny to a certain extent:

Everything is funny; the greatest earnestness is funny; even tragedy is funny. And I think what I try to do in my plays is to get to this recognizable reality of absurdity of what we do and how we behave and how we speak. 4

His sparse style and gift for creating tension and horror though the most economic of means has made him one of the most respected playwrights of our day. By what is significant is the fact that apart from writing plays, Pinter also simultaneously pursued an illustrious career as a professional scriptwriter for the cinema. After a lukewarm response
to his first professionally produced play, *The Birthday Party* (1958), Pinter rose to fame with the 1960 stage production of *The Caretaker*. But with 1963's *The Servant*, he made his bow as a screenwriter, and also essayed his first role (he has since acted in other films but hasn't declared any intention of making this his life's work). While many of his films are adapted from his own plays, just as many have been screen originals.

Unlike George Bernard Shaw, who was very particular during the filming of adaptations made from his own plays and took an active role in many of the productions, Pinter primarily preferred to adapt other authors' plots and to play the role of the conscientious and highly professional craftsman. Interestingly, his film scripts aren't quite as enigmatic or confusing as his plays, in fact many of them have been models of clarity and succinctness. Though critics call screenwriting a totally different media, nevertheless much of Pinter's characteristic quality remains and enriches the films, most notably the ones which have been directed by Joseph Losey, a film-maker whose sensibility is beautifully attuned to Pinter's terse, elliptical style, his silences, and pauses. Losey directed *The Servant* (after a novel by Robin Maugham, 1963) and *Accident* (after a novel by Nicholas Mosley, 1967). Other films which Pinter scripted were *The Pumpkin Eater* (after a novel by Penelope Mortimer, 1964), *The Quiller Memorandum* (based on a thriller *The Berlin Memorandum* by Adam Hall, 1966), *The Go-Between* (after the novel by L.P Hartley in 1971), *The Last Tycoon* (after the novel by F. Scott Fitzgerald in 1976), *Langrishe, Go Down* (from A. Higgins, 1978), his Oscar-nominated adaptation of John Fowles' complex novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1981), *Turtle Diary* (from R. Hoban, 1985), *Heat of the Day* (from E. Bowen's novel, 1989), *The Handmaid's Tale* (from Margaret Atwood's novel in 1990), *The Comfort of Strangers* (from I. McEwan's novel 1990), *Victory* (from Joseph Conrad's novel, 1990), and *The Trial* (by Franz Kafka, 1991). Besides these, his masterly adaptation of Proust's great novel *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*, which has till now remained unfilmed because of financial difficulties, was published as a book in 1978, and shows Pinter's astonishing ability to translate a complex narrative into a series of powerful visual images.

The paper will concentrate on just three screenplays by Pinter, two produced by mainstream movie companies and one till date unproduced, but all of them adapted from other people's work. Due to space constraint, I shall leave out the adaptations made out of his own plays. The first screenplay is Scott Fitzgerald's *The Last Tycoon*, which was directed by Elia Kazan and is an exemplary model for *auteur* criticism. Based upon a posthumously published unfinished novel, which Edmund Wilson edited into seventeen episodes of a story that was still evolving, none of them regarded by the author as final drafts-- the novel has nonetheless continued to be read and admired since its publication, having the unofficial honour of being the best American book about Hollywood. The film faced a lot of criticism because the unfinished form of the novel left many problems unsolved in the film version as well. And this is where Harold Pinter's involvement came under discussion. Although we may have doubts about Fitzgerald's capacity for retaining his modified first-person narration while completing a complicated, naturalistic plot and connecting it to the protagonist's tragic love story, many critics have chosen to define the film's problems by conferring *auteur* status to the scenarist, Pinter and then blaming him for having either too much reverence for the original or not nearly enough. Kazan has claimed that he did not change a word of Pinter's script, which Mike Nichols, the film's first director, and Sam Spiegel both worked on. "It wasn't Fitzgerald I was reverential
toward. It was Harold," he stated. In attacking Pinter's failure to "fill in the characters and clarify the conflict" of the novel, Pauline Kael has described Kazan's decision as "reverence piled upon reverence." Others, however, have criticized Pinter for radically changing Fitzgerald's intention, though they frequently disagree about the nature of the alterations. Thus, Richard Combs accuses the screenplay of being "more satirical but less perceptive" about Hollywood by emphasizing the political machinations and hypocrisy Fitzgerald left only in his notes for the uncompleted sections of the novel.

The hero of *The Last Tycoon* of course, is Monroe Stahr, a movie producer on the order of Irving Thalberg, a "production genius" with a special feeling for "quality pictures". This fact alone is sufficient to nominate another candidate as the film's *auteur*. Writing before *The Last Tycoon*'s release, Hollis Alpert put the case very bluntly: "Make no mistake. It's Spiegel's picture. Auteur theory be damned." The movie is not precisely an adaptation of a finished literary work, but a *realization* of that work-- a term evoking Elia Kazan's favourite word for director, the French "*realisateur*." This is specifically found in the film's emphasis on work, morality and the immigrant theme. But what is remarkable is the way Pinter contributes to the film by offering the 'film within a film' formula that makes his later contribution to *The French Lieutenant's Woman* so significant. According to Fitzgerald's manuscript, in the flickering darkness of the screening room, Stahr has re-discovered each day the possibilities for shaping and unifying the collective dreams of the people. The movie begins here in the screening room with black-and-white footage from a standard gangster picture. Stahr offers a few comments, then watches the dailies for a technicolor romance and another black-and-white melodrama. In accordance with Thierry Kuntzel's theory granting a movie's opening sequence a privileged place in its structure, these three clips all serve to anticipate the large film's major action and themes. Together, they constitute virtually The Argument for *The Last Tycoon*, part of movies which seem in retrospect to have impelled the film into being. Their content may be summarized as follows:

1. A *femme fatale* type meets her gangster boyfriend in an Italian restaurant; as she leaves for the powder room, he is executed by machine gun fire from a passing car.
2. A young woman walks away from her lover on an empty beach; the camera stays on his reaction.
3. A foreign woman and a Latin lover type conduct their affair in her apartment; after her husband phones, she tells her lover to leave, then changes her mind and tells him to stay.

The first sequence foreshadows Stahr's ultimate destruction, which is linked both to a woman's betrayal and the forces of unseen men (collectively referred to as "New York" in the film). The second presages his love affair with Kathleen at the unfinished beach house and her eventual departure from his life. The third specifically refers to Kathleen in several ways: she is British, her "no's" to Stahr repeatedly turn out to mean "yes," and she belongs to another man who is always absent. These three films-within-the-film shown in the screening room also reflect the particular nature of the cinematic signifier. Each of them depicts a "presence of absence," which Christian Metz has defined as the distinguishing characteristic of cinema as opposed to theatre, where stage actors and props are actually present during a performance. In film, Metz explains, the actor is
present at shooting when the audience is not, but is absent during the film's projection, leaving only a "tracing" on the screen. Thus, cinema always presents us with a "double withdrawal" represented by our own distance from the screen and by the delegated image of absent objects being traced there. It is especially interesting that when we see a later portion of this last movie, the only one of the three whose progress we follow through production, we experience both a compounding of the self-reflexive functions we have been describing and the entropic effect which envelops the final stages of *The Last Tycoon*.

The second Pinter screenplay under discussion is *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. Now this was a novel of ideas in the most extreme sense. A large part of the book is devoted to exploring the whole idea of story. It is also devoted to exploring both some of the characters and the idea of character. Further, to some extent, the novel also compares two very different times in history - Victorian times and our own. Again, it was in some sense an "academic literary" novel – i.e., to some extent an exploration of formal literary theory. How does one bring such a novel to the screen? Indeed, so problematic was the translation that it took John Fowles eleven years to find a director and screenwriter willing to attempt it. Pinter's screenplay takes for granted an audience familiar with Fowles' story and like much of his earlier work in film, entails a search for metaphor rather than literal reproduction. The "excitement" in scripting the novel exists, in Pinter's own words, "in finding out how it can properly live in film." "It was a question," the playwright continued, "of how to keep faith with Fowles' complexity without being tortuous in film terms:

...the technical demands are, to use a cliché, a great challenge to solve. But also it's entering into another man's mind, which is very interesting ...They try to find the true mind...there are boundaries, proper limitations, that you have to adhere to, otherwise you are distorting, playing about, and having your own good time, which is not the idea. But there remains within that the freedom of the medium.

And that is the whole point...I don't really feel...any kind of constrictions. I always work -- and certainly in the case of "The French Lieutenant's Woman" -- from a substantial respect for the work itself.  

Pinter freely credits Reisz with the idea for the modern subject, though its elaboration was his own. The solution of director Karel Reisz and scenarist Harold Pinter was of another order altogether - and one so startlingly simple it seemed curious that no one had thought of it before and which paradoxically is also so stunningly original as to make the film as much of a *tour de force* as the novel. Since the book is essentially a novel within a novel, reasoned the director, why not, in translating it to screen use the device of a movie within a movie as Francois Truffaut did previously in *Day for Night?* Thus emerged not one love story but two: that of a contemporary actor and actress who are working together on a period movie, intercutting the tale of their affair with the period movie itself. The period movie is, of course, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, and though considerably condensed, it otherwise follows Fowles' story line quite closely. As in the novel, the action begins when Charles Smithson (Jeremy Irons), gentleman, amateur scientist, and Darwinian disciple, proposes marriage to the wealthy and charming Ernestina Freeman. Shortly thereafter, he catches a glimpse of the woman who will end up changing his life. Hooded, mysterious, standing mournfully on the quay at Lyme
Regis — the English coastal town — she is Sarah Woodruff (Meryl Streep), who, according to local gossip and her own account as well, has been seduced and abandoned by a worthless officer in the French navy and who so flaunts her shame and melancholy as to suggest she may be insane. Nonetheless, to Charles she becomes an obsession that intensifies: first, when he becomes her lover and discovers, to his total puzzlement, that he is the only lover and she has ever had; and second, when she abruptly disappears, leaving him as desperate an outcast as she herself has been.

So goes the film within the film. As for the one that frames it, breaking into it only briefly and intermittently at the outset and more frequently and extensively towards the end, it too focuses on a love affair: between Mike, a young British actor who is portraying Charles in the film, and Anna, an American actress who is playing Sarah. Like Charles, Mike is committed to another woman — though she is not his fiancée but his wife. Like Sarah, Anna has a French lover — only this time an authentic one who seems totally committed to her. Like Charles too, Mike display a passion that is obsessive: while like Sarah, Anna proves ultimately elusive. Pinter, very effectively, provides a double vision and an opportunity for double ending — in the Victorian tale the lovers are united in the end; in the modern one, Anna runs off, leaving a despairing Mike behind her. The fourteen scenes detailing Mike and Anna's relationship are purely Pinter's invention and the screenplay switches back and forth between 1867 and 1979 in a clever juxtaposition of manners, plots, and social and sexual mores. Past comments on present, present comments on past. Many viewers find themselves bewildered by this framing device, troubled as to what to make of it and how to evaluate it. According to Peter Conradi's telling summary, the modern love-affair "acts as an acoustic chamber within which the Victorian affair can resonate, amplify and ironise some of its meanings. It is a brilliant device." 14

Although the movie was a screen-adaptation of the book, the filmmakers experimented a bit with the subject and the result is peculiar in a way, but very interesting. For instance the film-within-a-film segments are presented without too many distracting reminders of what they are. Here and there, a sound bridge pulls up out of our reverie — as when, immediately before a shift to the present tense from the Victorian era, we hear a telephone ringing, or the sound of a helicopter or automobile. At another moment, immediately after watching Anna rehearsing a fall in the present, we cut (via a stunning edit) to Sarah executing that fall in the past, carrying overtones of what is happening in the present into our awareness of the past. The first sequence of the movie is set at the Cobb in the Victorian town of Lime Regis:

It is dawn, 1867: "A clapperboard. On it is written: THE FRENCH LIEUTENANT'S WOMAN. Scene 1 Take 3. In shuts and withdraws, leaving a close shot of ANNA, the actress who plays SARAH. She is holding her hair in place against the wind."
VOICE (off screen)
All right. Let's go.
The actress nods, releases her hair. The wind catches it.
VOICE (off screen)
Action.
SARAH starts to walk along the Cobb, a stone pier in the Harbour of Lyme. It is dawn. Windy. Deserted. She is dressed in black. She reaches the end of the Cobb and stands still, starting out at the sea. (p.1)

In this opening scene, Pinter's adaptation is particularly apt, since it seems to hearken back to the origins of the novel itself. Yet our awareness of the modern day world comes only gradually, for the first shot of the movie crew is followed by 25 consecutive period scenes. Only in scene 27 are we back in 1979:

Dim light. A man and a woman in bed asleep. It is at once clear that they are the man and the woman playing CHARLES and SARAH, but we do not immediately appreciate that the time is the present. (p. 8)

Pinter meant for us to be disoriented. "It's a kind of distancing, isn't it?" he admits, "I remain very, very interested......as to whether a given audience will find the presence of the modern scenes undermining to the Victorian tale. But I'm not a theoretician. I work mainly by instinct and sense of smell, as it were". The film's double vision is seen in many other modern segments: Mike is shown at lunch wearing Charles's make-up and costumes, whereas Charles makes no reference to Mike; Anna is shown selecting fabric for one of Sarah's dresses, whereas Sarah shows no awareness of Anna's existence; while in the final scene, Mike registers the loss of Anna is the very same room that only moments before served as the setting for Charles and Sarah's reconciliation. Scenes 113 and 118 point towards the same asymmetry. In the first Mike "is lying on a sofa, staring at the ceiling. Jazz is playing from a transistor radio." (p.46) In the second, Charles is lying on the sofa in dressing gown, staring at the ceiling: "Same set-up as shot 113." (p.47) Pinter makes us see that Mike's affair, despite the jazz, is becoming as complicated as Charles Smithson's. Thus, though the film certainly places its Victorian segments in quotation marks, we still watch them with only minimal interference — with the result that rather than experiencing them as fantasy, we reflect on them as such only after the fact. Sometimes this montage is executed in a very sophisticated way. For example, a rehearsal for a scene between the actors suddenly switches to the scene in the 'movie' and sometimes with the fun of playing with it. Irons, as actor Mike, discusses the end of the movie plot in one scene, with dialogue approximately like this:

*Man* : "did you take the happy end or the sad end of the plot now?"
*Irons* (busy eating): "We took the first."
*Man* : "Which one was the first ?"
*Irons* (still absent-minded): "I mean, the second one."

Again, while the novel hints at the extent to which we not only sometimes confuse illusion and reality, but actually try to impose one on the other, the film makes the point explicit. Pinter also heightens irony by inlaying the past with the present in the other scenes as well. In scenes 72-74 the "actors" Mike and Anna will use the lines of their "script" to refer to their own situation in the present.

CHARLES
May I accompany you? Since we walk in the same direction.
She stops.
SARAH
I prefer to walk alone.

*They stand.*

CHARLES
May I introduce myself?

SARAH
I know who you are. (p. 24)

In the scene that follows, set in Anna's caravan on the set, Mike and Anna will play with the same "text," but the nuances they interject foreshadow the end of their affair:

ANNA
Hello! MIKE comes in.

MIKE
May I introduce myself?

ANNA
I know who you are. *They smile.* *He closes the door.*

MIKE
So you prefer to walk alone?....

ANNA
Not always. Sometimes I prefer to walk alone (pp. 25-26).

Pinter has made the dialogue serve both his "modern" and "period" ends. So much emotion — and so much irony — has been grafted into this exchange that when Mike and Anna do another "take" of the same Victorian scene from another camera angle, the tableau they have been trying to sustain breaks down completely. Reality intrudes into cinematic illusion:

CHARLES
May I accompany you? Since we walk in the same direction.

*She stops.*

SARAH
I prefer to walk alone.

CHARLES
May I introduce myself?

SARAH
I KNOW WHO YOU ARE.

*She collapses in laughter.* *He grins.*

VOICE (off screen)
Cut! (*With bewilderment.*) What's going on? (p. 26)

At the end of the movie, Mike, seeing Anna drive off and out of his life, cries out, "Sarah." For him, quite clearly, art has become indistinguishable from life or, perhaps, preferable to it. And we can see why. The "illusory" ending that has proceeded this discomforting "realistic one" was much more optimistic, offering a soft, romantic image of Charles and Sarah together in a boat on a lake. In this way, we at least have a chance to choose a happy (if make-believe) ending, should that be our preference.
The modern tale inserted into The French Lieutenant's Woman in all the more Pinteresque once we consider its relationship to the playwright's recent work for the theatre, for Mike and Anna's story is a tale of upper-middle-class adultery, the sad litany of infidelity that Pinter portrays in Betrayal. His plays are noted for their use of silence to increase tension, understatement, and cryptic small talk. Equally recognizable are the 'Pinteresque' themes — nameless menace, erotic fantasy, obsession and jealousy, family hatred and mental disturbance. His dialogue in his plays follows a line of associative thinking in which sound regularly prevails over sense and his playwriting style distinguished by tension-filled pregnant pauses are missing in his screenplays. Part of the secret of this movie's success of course, is that Pinter did not make a literal translation. He altered the plot elements (including adding a whole new framing device) in order to convey the same ideas and emotions as the novel. In short, he was completely faithful to the spirit of the novel and John Fowles, the author was quite happy with the result, calling the framing device itself "a brilliant metaphor" for the novel. Also, Pinter offered a good solution to the problem of the novel's troublesome point of view.

But there is also another explanation for this adaptation's special power. Apart from being analysis of the Victorian age: an existential exploration, a commentary on art, The French Lieutenant's Woman is above all, "a love story" (Pinter's own words) — a novel about romance, about the complexities of passion, about the intricacies of male-female relationships, about the acceptance of love in society and the private problems that come with it, and, about the mysterious and illusory power of women. Both the relationships offer a way of dealing with it: while in the past, the lovers are ready to give up their bonds with society and family and face the problems that come with it, in the more 'modern' world, the affair is still hidden from others and even the own family.

Pinter's next screenplay differs from the two mentioned here in several ways. Marcel Proust's Remembrance of Things Past is considered to be among the most cinematic novels in style. In a 1935 essay entitled "The Proustian Camera Eye," Paul Goodman offers a point-by-point comparison between the Proustian techniques and those of the cinema. He identifies "the Proustian free-association with the dissolving flow of cinema, the Proustian idée fixe [the obsessive return to a single idea, image, or sensation] with the focusing of the camera, the Proustian revelation [or sudden flash of memory, usually set off by a sensation — for example, the taste of Proust's famous Madeleine dipped in a cup of tea which brings back to him his entire childhood at Combray] with the unexpected juxtapositions of the cutting-room, and the passivity of the Proustian narrator [the ultimate "voyeur"] with the 'photographic' quality of the newsreel." Extensive as are Goodman's claims for Proust's cinematic quality, French critic Jacques Bourgeois makes even greater ones. Putting forth the notion that, as a writer committed to visualizing sensation and to the image above all, Proust had "invented" all varieties of cinematic techniques, Bourgeois goes on to suggest that these techniques hold within them the promise of a "cinema of tomorrow." — a claim that turned out to be prophetic. For the Proustian or subjective cinema, what Bourgeois envisioned in his 1946 essay is precisely the type of "first-person" cinema that has been realized in the world of Resnais and Bergman, among others.

But there are other qualities, aside from its technique, that make Remembrance of Things Past tempting to film. A Bergsonian meditation on the fluidity of time and
consciousness, on the ever-changing nature of personality, on the power of art and memory to recover mores and fashions, of snobbery and declassement, of the decay of the aristocratic society of the nineteenth century and the ushering in of the triumphant bourgeois one of the twentieth, it is also an exploration of the idealization and impermanence of love, of the destructive obsessiveness of jealousy, of what in the homosexual eyes of Proust was the "vice" of homosexuality. It is also a study of the growth of an artist and especially of the nature of perception. All of this may boggle and intimidate the would-be adaptor, seeming so utterly, totally untranslatable; yet, the novel also offers endless materials and possibilities. [Here I am omitting the discussion of Volker Schlondorff's Proust adaptation, *Swann in Love* as the film is based on a fragment of a fragment, one of the several parts that make up the first volume of the whole novel cycle.]

When such a cinematic novel is made into a screenplay, one definitely expects a unique *avant-garde* production. In the early 1970's Pinter joined forces with director Joseph Losey and Barbara Bray to develop this screenplay of Proust's masterpiece and took more than a year to conceive and write it. There could be no more fascinating demonstration of how a literary masterpiece, vast in scope, complex in structure and subtle in philosophy, could be dismembered and then reassembled and yet, by some miracle of tact and skill, lose little of its essence. Though it has not been produced, yet it has been published and is considered a fine piece of literature. Obedient to the very difficult architecture of the book, Pinter made an extraordinarily good screenplay out of this famous sequence of novels; a work that has been "thought out clearly and faithfully; it is a beautiful working-model in which Proust's million-and-a-half words have been brought lucidly down to 455 separate, seldom extensive shots." 18 Thus we read *The Proust Screenplay* with all kinds of things in our mind: Proust, Pinter's reading of Proust: the problem of abridgement, the problem of dramatization, the problem of visualization; the film which might be made from this script: the script itself as a literary work, words on the page. In the Introduction to the published screenplay, Pinter clearly states:

For three months I read *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* everyday. I took hundreds of notes while reading but was left at the end quite baffled as to how to approach a task of such magnitude. The one thing of which I was certain was that it would be wrong to attempt to make a film centered around one or two volumes..... If the thing was to be done at all, one would have to try to distill the whole work, to incorporate the major themes of the book into an integrated whole.... We decided that the architecture of the film should be based on two main and contrasting principles: one, a movement, chiefly narrative, towards disillusion, and the other, more intermittent, towards revelation, rising to where time that was lost is found, and fixed forever in art.

Proust wrote *Du cote de Chez Swann* [Swann's Way] first and *Le Temps Retrovue* [Time Regained], the last volume, second. He then wrote the rest. The relationship between the first volume and the last seemed to us the crucial one. The whole book is, as it were, contained in the last volume.

...We evolved a working plan and I plunged in the deep end on the basis of it. The subject was Time....

*Working on A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* was the best working year of my life. 19
The Proust Screenplay thus manages to capture much of the thrust and movement of the entire novel cycle: its circularity, its pattern of motifs, its texture as a series of experiences that both inspire the creation of a work of art and constitute a work of art themselves. Astoundingly too, it touches on almost all of the major Proustian themes. But what Pinter grasps and emphasizes most of all is that central Proustian concern with inner states, with the subjective nature of experience, with the fluidity of time and consciousness. Establishing "Marcel" as central consciousness, the screenplay presents the experience of the whole exclusively from his point of view — though, unlike the novel where he is essentially both invisible and passive, he appears here also as participant. We meet him first in a scene taken from the final volume of the series, as a middle-aged man en route to a musicale at the Guermantes mansion. In Proust, the narrator stumbles on an uneven flagstone in that scene, setting off a series of memories which are further intensified as he sits in the Guermantes library. Similarly, in Pinter, Marcel also stumbles, also sits in the library, and we move via his thoughts back to his childhood; we then proceed chronologically from that point forward in time. As in the novel, however, that forward movement is often interrupted — sometimes with a flash-forward, other times with an associative montage.

Pinter carries us, moreover, through just about every major dramatic event in the novel. He introduces us to most of its major characters as well, and compresses it all with breathtaking skill. A critic, Mark Graham opines that there are no parallels in the novel for the kind of rapid juxtaposition of both events and images found in the Pinter screenplay. Cinematic as Proust's techniques may be, Proust is also so leisurely that we often lose sight of his total design. This isn't true of Pinter's adaptation which has the virtue of making that design — the thematic unity of the whole, he analogies between the various phases of Marcel's experience, the echoes, the repetitions, the sustained motifs — more strongly evident. Also present in the screenplay are sequences that convey the Proustian stress on the importance of perception, on the shifting nature of point of view. Significantly, Pinter has chosen to preserve the two scenes in the novel most crucial in expressing Proust's vision. For example, we can cite Marcel's glimpse of the church steeples and his sight of the trees on the road to Hudimesnil. Pinter's description in both instances emphasizes (as does that of Proust) the continual alteration of Marcel's perspective and of his perceptions in turn. Choosing to center the film on Marcel's subjectivity, Pinter at the same time omits the entire opening section of the novel where the narrator, lying sleepless in bed, recalls his past. What he gives us instead in a montage of images which, much more immediately cinematic in nature, works quite exquisitely to the same end. That is, like the Madeleine and the section devoted to the narrator musing, these images both assert the film's inner focus and establish the various motifs which will be developed later. The film begins:


2. Open countryside, a line of trees, seen from a railway carriage. The train is still. No sound. Quick fade out.

3. Momentary yellow screen.
4. The sea, seen from a high window, a towel hanging on a towel rack in foreground. No sound. Quick fade out.

5. Momentary yellow screen.


7. Momentary yellow screen.

8. The dining room at Balbec. No sound. Empty.

9. EXT. THE HOUSE OF THE PRINCE OF GUERMANTES. PARIS. 1921. AFTERNOON.
In long shot a middle-aged man (Marcel) walks towards the PRINCE DE GUERMANTES' house.
His posture is hunched, his demeanour one of defeat.
Many carriages, a few cars, a crowd of chauffeurs. Realistic sound.

10. INT. LIBRARY. THE PRINCE DE GUERMANTES'S HOUSE. 1921.
A waiter inadvertently knocks a spoon against a plate. MARCEL, large in foreground, looks up.

11. INT. DRAWING ROOM. THE PRINCE DE GUERMANTES'S HOUSE. 1921.
The drawing room doors open.
The camera enters with MARCEL, who hesitates.
Hundreds of faces, some of which turn towards him, grotesquely made-up, grotesquely old.
A tumult of voices.

12. The sea from the window. Silent


14. Continue Marcel's progress into the drawing room. Voices. Faces. The wigs and makeup, combined with the extreme age of those who with difficulty stand, sit, gesture, laugh, give the impression of grotesque fancy dress.

The scene is confusing at first, perhaps, but completely, inescapably Proustian. Besides, whatever the immediate dislocation, there are significant clues to what is going on and what it all means. We can assume that the stream of images before us most likely constitute the man's "steam of consciousness" — and all the more so because certain of the shots, such as the one through the open window, imply an observer. In the course of the film, moreover, each of these images clarifies itself, the yellow screen almost immediately. For in Shot 22, the camera pulls back to reveal that the yellow screen is actually a portion of Vermeer's View of Delft, the painting which as Marcel will tell us later, is "the most beautiful painting in the world."
This is Pinter, not the playwright of the Absurd, but a different Pinter nonetheless. Taking Harold Pinter's case of writing the Proustian screenplay, we can conclude by repudiating filmmaker Ingmar Bergman's claim when he states:

It is mainly because of this difference between film and literature that we should avoid making films out of books. The irrational dimensional of a literary work, the germ of its existence, is often untranslatable into visual terms — and it, in turn, destroys the special, irrational dimension of the film. If despite this, we wish to translate something literary into film terms, we must make an infinite number of complicated adjustments which often bear little or no fruit in proportion to the effort expended.

Also, it implies that when an adaptation fails it isn't because of any inherent limitations in the film medium or because a novel simply can't be put on screen; it suggests that the cause lies instead in a very individual failure of either courage or imagination on the part of the filmmaker. What's more, the way Pinter handled such a difficult literary work proves that the finest adaptation is centered on the most sensitive reading of its source and that it consequently exists not simply as art but as a significant commentary; and that rather than diminishing film, the contact with literature tends to enrich it.

NOTES AND REFERENCES


4. Pinter interview with Tennyson.


18. John Sturrock's review in *New Statesman*.

