Nineteenth-Century American Fiction on Screen

The process of translating works of literature to the silver screen is a rich field of study for both students and scholars of literature and cinema. The fourteen essays collected here provide an up-to-date survey of the important films based on, or inspired by, nineteenth-century American fiction, from James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* to Owen Wister's *The Virginian*. Several of the major works of the American canon are examined, notably *The Scarlet Letter*, *Moby-Dick*, and *Sister Carrie*. The starting point of each essay is the literary text itself, the focus then moving on to describe specific aspects of the adaptation process, including details of production and reception. Written in a lively and accessible style, the book includes production stills and full filmographies. With its companion volume on twentieth-century fiction, this study offers a comprehensive account of the rich tradition of American literature on screen.

R. Barton Palmer holds Ph.D. degrees from Yale University (medieval studies) and New York University (cinema studies) and has published widely in those two fields. He is Calhoun Lemon Professor of English at Clemson University, directs the Film Studies Program at Clemson, and is the Director of the South Carolina Film Institute.
Nineteenth-Century American Fiction on Screen

Edited by

R. Barton Palmer
## Contents

| List of illustrations                      | page vii |
| Notes on contributors                    | ix       |
| Acknowledgments                           | xiii     |
| Introduction                              | 1        |
| R. Barton Palmer                          |          |
| 1 A very American fable: the making of a  | 9        |
| Mohicans adaptation                       |          |
| Martin Barker and Roger Sabin             |          |
| 2 Romancing the letter: screening a Hawthorne classic | 29    |
| Michael Dunne                             |          |
| 3 The movies in the Rue Morgue: adapting Edgar Allan Poe for the screen | 43 |
| Paul Woolf                                |          |
| 4 Readapting Uncle Tom’s Cabin            | 62       |
| Stephen Railton                           |          |
| 5 Screening authorship: Little Women on screen 1933–1994 | 77      |
| Deborah Cartmell and Judy Simons          |          |
| 6 Melville’s Moby-Dick and Hollywood      | 94       |
| David Lavery                              |          |
| 7 Screening male sentimental power in Ben-Hur | 106     |
| Marcia L. Pentz-Harris, Linda Seger, and R. Barton Palmer |          |
| 8 John Huston’s The Red Badge of Courage  | 133      |
| Jakob Lothe                               |          |
| 9 Translating Daisy Miller                | 146      |
| Douglas McFarland                         |          |
Contents

10 Jane Campion’s *The Portrait of a Lady*  
Harriet Margolis and Janet Hughes  
161

11 *The Europeans* – and the Americans  
Brian McFarlane  
175

12 *Sister Carrie* becomes *Carrie*  
Stephen C. Brennan  
186

13 Hollywood and *The Sea-Wolf*  
Tony Williams  
206

14 An untypical typicality: screening Owen Wister’s *The Virginian*  
R. Barton Palmer  
219

Filmography  
246

Index  
254
Illustrations

1. A montage photograph, one of a number offered to cinemas as posters for the 1936 adaptation of *The Last of the Mohicans*  page 25

2. The 1995 Entertainment/Hollywood production of *The Scarlet Letter* emphasizes the doomed romance between Hester (Demi Moore) and the erstwhile Reverend Dimmesdale (Gary Oldman)  page 40

3. Universal Pictures’ 1932 production of Edgar Allan Poe’s *Murders in the Rue Morgue* shows strong influence from German Expressionism in its art design and themes  page 58

4. Cassy being sold at auction in New Orleans, and separated from her child Eliza. This is the original opening scene of Universal’s 1927 Super-Jewel production of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. (Harry Pollard Papers, Wichita State University Libraries, Department of Special Collections)  page 74

5. Guests at the Shelbys’ plantation for the wedding of Eliza and George. This is the opening scene of the movie as released. The photo is from the Grosset & Dunlap movie edition of the novel (New York: 1927)  page 75

6. The George Cukor version of Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women* is dominated by a star-studded female cast, including Spring Byington, Joan Bennett, Frances Dee, Katharine Hepburn, and Jean Parker  page 91

7. The raw physicality of Judah Ben-Hur (Ramon Novarro) conquers the political power of the Roman ruling class, represented by the tribune Quintus Arrius (Frank Currier), in the 1925 M-G-M production of Lew Wallace’s *Ben-Hur*  page 128
8. The 1925 M-G-M version of *Ben-Hur* exemplifies Hollywood’s growing interest in elaborate, authentic spectacle

9. World War II’s most decorated soldier, Audie Murphy, stars as the soldier in the 1951 M-G-M production of Stephen Crane’s *The Red Badge of Courage*

10. The title character from *Daisy Miller* is caught between her American heritage and the apparently greater refinement of Italian culture. Here portrayed by Cybill Shepherd in the 1974 Paramount Pictures release

11. *The Europeans* is a costume drama in the heritage film tradition, a nuanced exploration of difficult personal relationships and conflicting social values. A 1979 Merchant/Ivory production

12. *Carrie* emphasizes the doomed love affair between the mismatched couple played by Laurence Olivier and Jennifer Jones. A 1952 Paramount Pictures release (Production stills are all courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences)
Notes on contributors


STEPHEN C. BRENNAN is Professor of English at Louisiana State University in Shreveport. He has published numerous articles on Theodore Dreiser in such journals as *Studies in American Fiction* and *American Realism* and is currently co-editor of *Dreiser Studies*. He is at work on a study of Dreiser's short fiction.

DEBORAH CARTMELL is Head of the Graduate Centre in Humanities and Principal Lecturer in English at De Montfort University, UK. She is an editor of the newly formed journal *Shakespeare*, co-editor of the Film/Fiction series, *Adaptations: From Text to Screen, Screen to Text* (1999), author of *Interpreting Shakespeare on Screen* (2000), and *Talking Shakespeare* (2001). She is currently editing *The Cambridge Companion to Literature on Screen* and working on *Literature on Screen: An Overview*.

MICHAEL DUNNE is Professor of English at Middle Tennessee State University, where he specializes in American literature. Among his books are *Hawthorne's Narrative Strategies* (1995), *Intertextual Encounters in American Fiction, Film, and Popular Culture* (2001), and *American Film Musical Themes and Forms* (2003).
Notes on contributors

Janet Hughes, a painter and printmaker, has tutored for twelve years in the School of English, Film, and Theatre at Victoria University, Wellington, New Zealand, before and after completing her Ph.D. She now works as an editor for the New Zealand Parliament. Her principal research interest is poetry of the modernist era. Stairdancing, a collection of her poetry and prints, was recently published.

David Lavery is Professor of English at Middle Tennessee State University and the author of more than ninety published essays and reviews; he is also the author/editor/co-editor of ten books, including Full of Secrets: Critical Approaches to Twin Peaks (1995) and Reading The Sopranos: Hit TV from HBO (2006). He co-edits the e-journal Slayage: The Online International Journal of Buffy Studies and is one of the founding editors of the new journal Critical Studies in Television: Scholarly Studies of Small Screen Fictions.

Jakob Lothe is Professor of English Literature at the University of Oslo. His books include Conrad’s Narrative Method (1991) and Narrative in Fiction and Film (2000). He has also edited and co-edited several volumes, including The Art of Brevity (2004) and European and Nordic Modernisms (2005). In 2005–2006 he served as the leader of a research project entitled “Narrative Theory and Analysis” at the Centre of Advanced Study, Oslo.

Harriet Margolis teaches film at Victoria University, Wellington, New Zealand. She is the author of essays on film, literature, and feminism published in such international journals as Poetics Today, Semiotica, Para*Doxa, Cinema Journal, and the Quarterly Review of Film and Video. Author of The Cinema Ideal (1988), she is the editor of Jane Campion’s The Piano (1989) and co-editor of Studying the Event Film: The Lord of the Rings (in preparation).

Douglas McFarland is Associate Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Oglethorpe University in Atlanta, Georgia. He has published studies of Rabelais, Montaigne, and Spenser, and is currently working on a book-length study of Peter Bogdanovich.

Brian McFarlane is an Honorary Associate Professor at the School of Literary, Visual and Performance Studies, Monash University, Melbourne. His most recent books include Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation (1996), Lance Comfort (2000), and The Encyclopedia of British Film (2006).

R. Barton Palmer is Calhoun Lemon Professor of Literature at Clemson University, where he directs the Film Studies and
Notes on contributors


MARCIA PENTZ-HARRIS is a lecturer in Management Communication at the University of Virginia’s McIntire School of Commerce. Her current project combines literary, business, and dramatic interests and has a working title of “The Business of Building Men: Performing Commercial Masculinity in Popular Nineteenth-Century American Fiction and Drama.” She has presented papers including “Dogs and Rude Mechanics: Performing Manliness in Aiken’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin,” “Housebreaking Your Man: Women Constructing Men in The Lamplighter and The Hidden Hand,” and “‘Is There a Doctor in the House?’ Containing Female Physicians in Howells, Holmes, Jewett, and Phelps.” She also presents annually with the Association for Business Communication and works as a consultant in public speaking and management communication, while researching for her Ph.D. in American Literature at the University of Virginia.

STEPHEN RAILTON teaches American literature at the University of Virginia. His most recent book is Fenimore Cooper: A Study of His Life and Imagination (1978). Among his other books are Authorship and Audience: Literary Performance in the American Renaissance (1992) and Mark Twain: A Short Introduction (2003). Since 1966, much of his work has been involved with exploring the uses of electronic technology in teaching and research.


LINDA SEGER is a script consultant and teaches screenwriting seminars around the world. She is the author of nine books, seven of which are on screenwriting, including Making a Good Script Great (1984), Creating Unforgettable Characters (1990), and Advanced Screenwriting (2003). She has also written The Art of Adaptation: Turning Fact and Fiction into Film.

JUDY SIMONS is Professor of English and Pro Vice-Chancellor at De Montfort University, UK. Her books include Diaries and Journals of


PAUL WOOLF is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Birmingham, UK. His thesis examines depictions of Anglo-American love affairs and marriages in nineteenth-century fiction. Since completing Masters thesis about detective stories, he has written conference papers and journal articles on Arthur Conan Doyle, Anna Katharine Green, Wilkie Collins, and the television series 24. He spent five years between undergraduate and postgraduate study originating, developing, and making television documentaries for major British broadcasters, an occupation that he now continues part-time.
Acknowledgments

The idea for this volume, and its companion, emerged from discussions with Dr. Linda Bree, senior editor at Cambridge University Press, that followed our serendipitous meeting at the Medieval Institute. I have benefited greatly not only from Linda's continuing interest and sound advice on sundry matters, but also from the comments of several anonymous readers, all of whom made very useful criticisms and suggestions. A larger, if more indirect, debt is owed to Jim Naremore of Indiana University and Bob Stam of New York University, whose stimulating work on film/literature adaptation has provided this volume with a theoretical program of sorts. The Calhoun Lemon foundation at Clemson University provided necessary research funds for completing this project, while graduate assistants John Longo and Kevin Manus ably assisted with copyediting the manuscript.