

*Barry Lyndon: Intertextuality and Film Adaptation*

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The adaptation *Barry Lyndon* (1975) by Stanley Kubrick cannot help but be different from the novel written by William Makepeace Thackeray in the nineteenth-century. The alterations are due to a number of factors, including the difference in media, the number of individuals working on the production, and those viewing the film, or even time periods. Such factors are the especial focus of intertextuality theory. Approaching a text with intertextuality is liberating. It can make use of several theoretical stances without binding the scholar to any. For instance, the structuralist approach of theorist “Michael Riffaterre’s work can be said to straddle structuralism, poststructuralism, semiotics, psychoanalytic theories of literature and various other theories of reading” (Graham, 111). These other theories of reading include audience reception theory, which does not limit the focus on the intended audience of the film itself, as it should include the filmmakers who adapt the work from literature. It should also consider the timing. The adapter’s interpretation of Thackeray’s novel has a direct effect on what is produced. Thus, theorists like Riffaterre may insist they belong to a rigid system of theory, but in finding their meanings in the examined text they are required to use multiple theories.

Despite the numerous perspectives used, intertextuality is not a haphazard means of examining a text. Serious scholars have written on the topic and work to give the theory a more definitive structure. Alan Graham, in his work *Intertextuality*, defines his meaning of text and work, which are essential notions to the theory. “Work is primary, the text secondary” (Graham, 62). What he means is that the work is the physical object and the text is the meaning found in observing the object. The work must also exist first, before meaning can be made. Graham reversed the formerly accepted idea, which made the object the text (whether it be a song or film, painting or novel) and the meaning the work (Graham, 64). In addition, Graham’s intertextuality ascribes more of an artistry to the work than any other theory (Graham, 73). He sees the *author*

much like a textile weaver, drawing the threads of various texts together to create meaning. “The text, after all, is a plural phenomenon; it has structure, yet also an infinity of meaning” (Graham, 80). Graham is stating that the nature of the text is to have many meanings, which will reveal themselves over time and multiple readings, because they are dependent on the understanding and knowledge of the reader. In the novel *Barry Lyndon*, a modern reader is required to have a certain understanding of history to access some of the novel’s meanings, while other meanings remain universal. Much of his meaning, the nuances of the period, and the mental image would be limited without some historical understanding. However, limited may not be the best choice of words. Without historical understanding, the reading would be different, along fewer lines than what is possible.

A direct cause of multiplicity of meaning in adaptations is that it is impossible to transfer a novel (one work) straight to film (another work) without serious alterations, even if the technical aspects of doing such a translation were possible to set aside. Each reading, even by the same individual contains multiple variables. This is because:

Reading...takes place on two successive levels: first, a mimetic level which tries to relate textual signs to external referents and tends to proceed in a linear fashion; second, a retroactive reading which proceeds, in a nonlinear fashion, to unearth the underlying semiotic units and structures which produce the text’s non-referential significance. (112)

Also, the external and internal referents are constantly modified. For instance, the reading of a Shakespeare play is different from watching a performance of the play. The sign is clarified by the presence of the signifieds. In addition, once a text is read, it will continue to be modified in memory from day to day when some event or object refers to it, either opening up new meaning

or allowing meaning to be understood where it was previously hindered. The text may also help to create meaning in the everyday world in reference to itself.

Graham reminds the reader that despite complicated theories, that no reader contains the entirety of the world, and that every reading of a work is going to be different (Graham, 85). In addition, he writes that “forgetting meanings is...a part of reading” (Graham, 86). By forgetting, Graham reiterates that no reader can think of every allusion the text makes in the moment of reading, nor be exempt from meanings being remade. This is because analysis of any text is entirely personal and even temporal. It is dependent on the repository of ready knowledge the analyst contains, but also that the reader may forget a meaning they employed the last time they read a text, replacing it with something new.

For instance, consider the cultural codes communicated in the text of *Barry Lyndon*. The novel was written by Thackeray in the eighteenth-century. The reading that is made by someone at the time of its publication would be vastly different from one made in the middle of the twentieth-century. Graham asks, “It is one thing to discuss...a text’s intertextual relation to cultural codes, but what kind of cultural codes are we referring to?” (Graham, 90). Do we impossibly consider the minds of eighteenth-century peoples? What people in particular in that time? Men or women? A specific ethnicity or social strata? The variables are endless, which make this theory quite exciting (Barker, 77-78, 259-314). However, Graham feels that “intertextual has less to do with specific inter-texts than with the entire cultural code” (Graham, 71). This is an interesting point to examine, but it complicates the theory’s possibilities and thus possibly limits it. Does Graham only refer to the Western, Eastern or the whole human culture? Is it possible to apply the entire cultural code, when, as said before, no one reader contains the

entire world? In fact, referents can reach across these barriers without the reader realizing it, while others have no translation across cultures.

Limits to a theory's possibilities are a common issue in the realm of textual analysis. "Our reading...depends upon long-standing cultural associations connected to the word" (Graham, 119). This meaning shifts throughout time and space, because, meaning is dependent upon the readers existing knowledge (Graham, 120-121). It is only conjecture to state what an eighteenth-century reader got from the Thackeray's novel, and even so to assume the reading of a mid-twentieth-century reader, even when citing critical responses which are also left up to interpretation. Yet, Graham claims that literary competence is "the reader's awareness of language as it is presently used in communication and as it has been used in previous eras" (Graham, 122). Exactly how does a reader know the previous era's usage of language, except through conjecture or continuation of linguistic norms, which can be flawed?

Graham goes further with this disparity by stating that "the textual scholar searches for as complete a version as possible of the author's intended structure, individual sentences, paragraphing, and so forth," (Graham, 59). (This is a prime example of intertextual studies requiring the help of other theoretical fields like structuralism and poststructuralism. Semiotics is another field often applied, in connection with structuralism). Graham insinuates that competence is an unreachable goal. This may be, however unsettling, but it disproves the following point. Signs are not sealed units from which stable meaning can be derived.

Roland Barthes, one of the foremost scholars on intertexts studies, uses a "traditional viewpoint" to apply "a new semiotic approach" to textual analysis (Graham, 59-60). Barthes technique makes sense to many, because of a "long-standing Western understanding of the sign and of signification" (Graham, 60). The technique is based on shared Western cultural

understanding to explain the ease of most readings. Understanding of a text is possible because according to Barthes, “the classical sign is a sealed unit” (Graham, 61). Barthes is stating that there is a stable and locked meaning inside of traditional understandings of signs (language) and signifieds (object). Barthes is also stating that “stable meaning is possible...that a truth can finally be delivered by an author to a reader” (Graham, 76-77). This may work for specific instances in Thackeray’s novel and Kubrick’s adaptation of the novel, but it doesn’t explain why a multitude of readings occurs in both texts. How can meaning be stable in the face of multiple readings?

Meaning is often created from a comparison between binary pairs (male/female, air/vacuum), “where signifiers refer to signifieds...within language conceived...as a system of difference” (Graham, 63). However, the image the sign conjures is nuanced between individuals. That is the point where Barthes technique falls apart, because the unit is not sealed. Differences of understanding provide a point of miscommunication. A female of one culture is quite a different image to that of another culture, and so on. When you think of *cat*, does the image of a house cat form, or that of a lion or tiger?

It is also important to consider the long standing cultural experiences, though altered by the transition of time in their appearances, are indeed still shared. For instance, the first love, a theme that Thackeray’s novel examines for his eighteenth-century audience and one which Kubrick’s audience can also appreciate in his film. This theme and many others cross temporal barriers and still make meaning with the reader. However, that meaning is not universal. First love may be regarded with nostalgia, but also with scorn or reverence.

The format of a novel is vastly different than the highly visual format of cinema, and this difference is the basis for many differences. In George Bluestone’s words, novel writing is

“packed with symbolic thinking which is peculiar to the imaginative rather than visual activity” (23). The trouble with translation, turning novels into screenplays or films, is in the translation from one sign system to another (Bluestone, 22). Unfortunately most analysis done on the transition from novel to film speaks mainly on the differences in the comparative texts. Bluestone writes, “quantitative analyses have very little to do with qualitative changes. They tell us nothing about the mutational process, let alone how to judge it” (Bluestone, 5). In other words, this analysis does very little to illuminate the translation from book to film. It ignores the process made by the adapters.

The lack of good adaptation analysis is in part due to the admiration of the book as sacred object. Graham tells his readers that “in an age before the mass publication of books, possession of an individual text was extremely rare and of enormous value” creating the “aura of the original” (Graham, 176). Books became coveted items and thus revered. In addition, because of their lofty status, they were viewed as “sacred,” original creations. In the twentieth-century, when film became a strong popular-culture industry, it was quickly relegated to the status of simulacrum, “a copy which does not possess an original” (Graham, 177). Due to the popularity of film, it was feared that “the *simulacrum*...comes to replace the *real*” (Graham, 177). Because of this, the film adapted from a novel was viewed as a lesser entity, which could not be given the equal treatment of the sacred novel. It was suspected that adaptations would *copy* and replace the *original* work with lowly counterfeits, instead of existing as separate intertexts of meaning. The loyalty sought by critics (coined fidelity by newer theorists like Robert Stam) simultaneously created this fear and limited the insight into the work being done (Stam, 1). Robert Stam, a preeminent critic of film theory, questions what is the film being faithful to (Stam, 57)? Linda Hutcheon challenges the idea of mere mimesis between film and novel stating that, critics “often

find that the film adapter has not even read the book, that he has depended instead on a paraphrase by his secretary or his screen writer,” utilizing the novel as raw material, which is actually the case with Kubrick’s *Barry Lyndon* (Hutcheon, 62-63; Hofsess). Graham states that “in writing a historically-oriented text the principle problem is intertextual: the *already written* and *already said* threaten to turn one’s narrative and narrative voice into a mere repetition of previous utterances and previous texts” (Graham, 189). In other words, that it is no more than mimesis or copying. Both Kubrick and Thackeray are far more artful in how they make use of “what has been written” (Graham, 83).

Regardless of the reason why adaptation theory lacks serious examinations or that such works are viewed negatively (usually as barbarizing the *originating* text), in most cases “the story is the core of what is transposed across media genres” (Hutcheon, 62-63). The story thus becomes the sign communicated between the texts. This is one reason why viewers and critics don’t always recognize an adaptation of a text (Stam, 1-2). The viewer does not recognize the translation between the sign systems. Other questions Stam poses are: “What principle guides the processes? What is the ‘drift’ of these changes? What principles orient the choices” (Stam, 34)? In these questions, we have a much more interesting tract to explore, instead of writing a comparison of film and novel, scene by scene (the level of mimesis between the works). This is because it reaches far beyond the notion of fidelity to grasp the idea that either incarnation of the text is distinct.

Film is still considered a new art, without its own set of critical terms and forms. In order to analyze the text of a film, “literary traditions are radically transposed” to fit the new medium (Graham, 175). Therefore, Utilizing literary theory to analyze film is insufficient and problematic, even as it is altered to fit the different medium. Film exists between two worlds, the

visual and the literary. Stam writes that “we are reminded, [it] is a form of writing that borrows from other forms of writing” (1-2). Adaptations take place when a novel is translated to the written screenplay and from the written screenplay to the visual film. This process of “adapting literary texts relates...cinema to a universally recognized aesthetic field:” the literary arts (Graham, 175). Because of this relationship, there are “deeply-rooted intertextual relationships between film and literature” (Graham, 175). However, the status of the lofty novel creates a “tension between film and original film-script” (Graham, 175). At the outset, the film is held to impossible standards, and the literary theorist’s expectations of it fitting neatly inside what they believe (or know). Bluestone attempts to alleviate controversy that exists in adaptations by saying that “the film becomes a different *thing* in the same sense that a historical painting becomes a different thing from the historical event which it illustrates” (5). The film and novel share an intertext of meaning, but are not the same text, thus they should be regarded with equal respect and interest. Intertextual theory is a great help in overcoming notions of fidelity and the perceived differences between adapted texts.

The idea of authorship and ownership of a text is also widely explored in intertextual analysis. “*The death of the author* is perhaps one of the more widely known features of intertextual theory” (Graham, 68). Scholars, such as Roland Barthes and Michael Foucault, question what defines an author (Graham, 68-69). Authorship is often defined as ownership. Others use authorship as a means to categorize or index a work. “Notions of paternity...ownership, giving birth, familiar power—all attach themselves to the name of the author in order to endorse it at the same moment as they express through it dominant social structures of power” (Graham, 69). Defining authorship as ownership “reinforce[s] the illusion that a text possesses and conveys a meaning imparted to it by its author” (Graham, 70). It can be

argued that the author does, but that does not limit the readings available to the author's intentions alone.

In his introduction to *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation*, Stam swiftly pushes aside concerns of fidelity to any particular work, utilizing cultural studies, structuralism and post-structuralism to question order or seniority (8-12). (This question also asserts that authorship is a mere categorization.) Obviously if you line up texts on a timeline, you could say this one preceded that one, but that is not exactly what Stam is getting at. The scholar or student, or audience, is temporally placed looking backward. Seniority is thus dependent upon when a particular incarnation of a text reaches the reader. Regarding a novel as always superior to film limits the scope of what can be gathered from particular readings. For instance, viewers of Stanley Kubrick's *Lyndon* may or may not have read Thackeray's novel. If they did not read the novel, this would place Kubrick's film in the senior position of all the texts related to it. His interpretation of the meaning of the text becomes primary.

Michael Dempsey wrote a substantial review of Kubrick's *Lyndon* in a 1976 edition of *Film Quarterly*, which looked at the history of the novel. Dempsey wrote that, "Thackeray's novel had something else in mind: debunking the kind of lovable rogue which books like *Tom Jones* had popularized during the decades preceding its first publication in 1844" (Dempsey, 49). The *something else* was creating a character that was highly flawed and seriously questionable, and somehow still considered the *hero* of the work. Throughout Thackeray's novel, the reader is made increasingly aware that Redmond Barry is a liar (he embellishes and refuses to give details which would convict him). Thackeray took a different tract than his fellow authors. As Thomas Allen Nelson tells his readers, "early in his career Thackeray set out to examine levels of social and psychological understanding through the manipulation of such stylistic distancing devices as

point of view and disparities between forms of language and perception” (Nelson, 39). Nelson means to say that through a flawed perspective like Barry’s, he explored his reader’s reaction to the violation of social mores and cultural understanding. In this way, “Thackeray constructs a critique of the romantic novel, a rejoinder to the romantic proclivity for hero worship” (Tibbetts, 23). To put it simply, “the novel is a bitterly ironic comedy” (Tibbetts, 24). Kubrick’s *Lyndon* does not make such a statement, unless the reader has a familiarity with the text already. Barry comes out more of a victim of his time, or simply human. He is a flawed man who simply sought to better his circumstances. His sense of humor is not evident, nor that of the narrator or author. From an American perspective, this view of Barry does not hold the bite of cynicism that it may for a member of a different culture. After all, Barry does achieve his desires for a time and he is punished for his flaws. It is a highly Puritanical lesson.

In both texts, the presence of a narrator is a shared quality, and both voices are untrustworthy. With such an untrustworthy narrator, why should the reader trust the book over the film? Both film and novel are fantasies about historical periods and conventions. However, the film provides a seemingly trustworthy perspective in the alteration from first person to third person narration. The film’s narrator is assumed an outside observer with no personal investment in the details. Yet, Nelson asserts his words are often challenged by the images on the screen (Nelson, 41-43). Other critics agree with this, stating that “unlike the usual third-person narrator, this one is not the *Voice of God*” (Dempsey, 50). So, much like the novel, the narrator is actively working to sway the viewer’s opinion of what he or she sees, through tone and word choice. Can this be regarded as much of an alteration? Do we know for certain that this narrator is not Barry, just because he speaks in the third person? The narrator is privy to a great deal of personal information and has the same propensity for skewing the facts (Dempsey, 50; Tibbetts, 24). Is it

possible that Kubrick's narrator is Barry post mortem, in the vein of Melville's "call me Ishmael?" Or does he view himself as deceased and transformed? We never do see the narrator, nor come to understand that he is relating the tale from prison. (The questions here are a great example of the effect intertextual analysis can have on a reading.)

The ending is also a major point of parting for Kubrick from Thackeray's novel. In the film, Lord Bullingdon returns from Canada. This alteration is meant to seat Bullingdon as a more vengeful and weaker man than Barry, and provide for Barry's redemption. This is accomplished by the scenes of the duel between the two adversaries. Bullingdon is inexperienced and scared. He misfires and even vomits. He has no control over his emotions, unlike Barry who stands by calmly facing whatever will come. Barry fires into the ground though everyone is certain he will shoot Bullingdon. That shot into the ground is Barry's redemption. By refusing to fight this time, he chooses to preserve the life of his wife's only remaining son. Bullingdon has only the satisfaction for his hurt pride in mind, but this too emphasizes that Barry is the better man. With Bullingdon as a symbol of the society he tried to become a part of, Barry's duels and antics appear somehow nobler and that society becomes cruel in retrospect. Also in retrospect, Barry has paid a heavy price throughout his life (forced service in the military, imprisonment, and finally the loss of limb) to achieve a better place in the world. Kubrick has dropped almost all mention of Barry's abuse (toward his nephew, who is completely dropped from the film, his wife, his drinking problem, gambling problem and general waste of money). Kubrick does keep the abuse of Bullingdon, but tends to paint it in the light of a bratty child and frustrated step-parent. In this way, he effectively makes Bullingdon the bully and embodiment of the social rules that have bound and tormented Barry. Also dropped from the ending is Lady Lyndon's desperate letters to George Poyning and her success in escaping Barry, as well as anything to do

with Barry's extended family (his nephew helps her in the novel). In the book, Barry becomes quite a vile and dangerous bully. The only similarity between the two works is that it can still be believed that Barry is a victim of society and its rigid rules. The difference lies in how the two Barry's respond. It should also be said that both Barry's somehow remain likeable, either because of their charm or the sympathy the reader feels for their perceived victimhood.

The difference in narration, despite the presence or absence of truth from either, can also supply an examination of how texts compete for primacy. Regardless of both narrators being liars, the viewer of the film comes to "believe the camera instead of the narrator" (Dempsey, 52). The picture becomes proof. Thus, the reader believes the film over the novel, although this may reflexively give the novel truth. We return to either of the texts, seeking a reading between the lines for what might have been missed, realizing a need for discernment between what is told and what is. The comparison between the narration of the film and the narration of the book "forces us to apprehend a world separate from the narrator's perceptions and to acknowledge a fuller human content" (Nelson, 44). The reader is forced to compare the novel and film, dialogue, narration and image to judge where a truer story lies. This work equates the purity or honesty of the events and things related in the telling of the *Lyndon* text to truth and therefore primacy, or the ranking of which telling is better and therefore first.

Ironically, Kubrick did not use much of the book at all to inform his film (Hofsess). Neither did he find much merit in reviewing film criticism to inform his process (Hofsess). The theme of Thackeray's novel is what attracted Kubrick to make the film, not a desire to copy the novel or satisfy critics (Feldman, 12). After reviewing the screenplay against the film, a reader will find innumerable examples of changes between the draft and the final product. In fact, the draft of the screenplay reads like a summary of Thackeray's novel, which may be a clue to how

Kubrick created the translation. For instance, “there is a scene in *Barry Lyndon*...which in Kubrick’s screenplay simply read, ‘Barry duels with Bullingdon.’ Just that, nothing more. Yet what finally reached the screen is one the most stunning sequences in modern film” (Hofsess). The draft reviewed here had this line followed by several lines of dialogue and scene summaries. Hofsess’s examination shows that Kubrick required no further signification to convey meaning than that simple four word sentence. Whether he made it based on other sources is not stated by any of the aforementioned critics. However, it is easy to surmise that Kubrick drew on his knowledge of historical contexts and culture absorbed through his experiences, and reduced the description to four words without losing an ounce of its meaning.

There are many ways an author (director, screenwriter, actor or producer in the case of film) can affect a text. The small entry in the *Encyclopedia of Novels into Film* states that “Kubrick’s film is resolutely modern...an alienated, postmodern subject” (Tibbetts, 23). How could it be anything less? The film was made in the 1970s, and cannot escape the temporal perspective that spawned it. Though authorship may not necessarily determine ownership, it does supply another point of reference in the author’s perspective, which is, to some degree, inevitably imprinted on the final product.

Due to the influence an *author* has on the work they create, a review of other Kubrick films can supply an intertextual viewpoint. James Naremore’s contribution on this work in the fall 2006 edition of *Film Quarterly* examines just that. Naremore states that “most of [Kubrick’s] films are obviously satiric and are focused on flawed, criminal, or even monstrous protagonists” (Naremore, 5). In light of this analysis, it becomes obvious why he chose to adapt Thackeray’s novel. Other elements of his work included a heavy influence of modernism, which he “absorbed in New York in the late 1940s and 50s,” when black humor and absurdity were in full swing

(Naremore, 7). Black humor is employed by Thackeray in his novel, cluing a possible other reason why Kubrick was interested in the piece. Also,

One of the keys to his style lies in his anxious fascination with the human body... which he shares with all black humorists and artists of the grotesque, to yoke together conflicting emotions, so that he confuses both our intellectual and emotional responses. (8)

Thus, the point of many Kubrick films was to push “inspiration and obsession to their outer limits” (Hofsess). A good example of this is his adaptation of *A Clockwork Orange* (1971). The film is shocking and exists to be so. It makes the viewer confront the darker portions of themselves and their culture. As Hans Feldman states, “man is *an ignoble savage*” (18). Kubrick is illustrating examples of that savagery, much like Thackeray, through the illustration of the grotesque. One of the keys to understanding this is noticing the “shift from comedy to tragedy in the two versions” (Tibbetts, 24). Thackeray’s novel can be viewed as quite darkly humorous, but that humor is blackened over more deeply in Kubrick’s adaptation, so much so that it bears toward the tragic.

Is *Barry Lyndon* simply another Kubrick parade of the grotesque? Firstly, “grotesque should be understood as a subcategory of black humor” (Naremore, 7). Then it should be understood that grotesque is up to the interpretation of the viewer, “because it involves discordant effects, people sometimes disagree about what things it should include” (6). In the film, and in this case the novel as well, the grotesque can be found in “the grossly made-up *Chevalier de Balibari*” (Naremore, 8). Another instance of grotesque is the scene in which the countess sits in her bathtub, listless and staring into infinity as if dead. Grotesque could even be seen in the images of Barry’s infidelities, because they could be perceived as unsettling to some.

To what point is Kubrick using the grotesque? The reader is required to understand how the grotesque “unsettle[s] social norms” and provides “a troubling emotional ambiguity” (Naremore, 8-9). In films like *A Clockwork Orange*, *Lolita* (1962), *The Killing* (1956), Kubrick makes use of the grotesque to elicit an emotional response, but I believe it is not really ambiguous. The discomfort is the point and if it were ambiguous that would be missed. For instance, “the emotions he elicits are primal but mixed; the fear is charged with humor and the laughter is both liberating and defensive” (Naremore, 12). Audiences laugh at Alex’s antics but defensively. Alex’s transitions are clearly vile, he is violently abusive and then violently abused. However, Alex reverts to his old ways in the very end of the film, having learned to just disguise them. Furthermore, the audience has delighted in his *treatment*, calling their morality into question and citing its failure. Audiences laugh at George Peatty’s weakness defensively because George Peatty and his wife are a tableau of grotesque through inversions. The use of odd camera angles, which make George’s wife appear larger than her husband, emphasizes the reversed social roles and inverted desires of their relationship. Professor Humbert is pathetic and laughable, because of his tragic obsession with a teenage girl. By the end of *Lolita*, the viewer may feel sorry for the professor, seeing him as the victim of a young girl’s wicked nature, and that he is truly in love with Lolita. This reading elicits the disturbing realization that the culture blames the sexualized teenage girl, instead of blaming the sexualization by the professor of the teenage girl.

Feldman and other critics connect the grotesque with psychoanalysis and the idea of the repressed shadow part of human psyche (Feldman, 13). The audience is placed on the defensive, because “like many other practitioners of the grotesque, [Kubrick] aims to show a paradoxical and potentially disturbing truth: at the farthest reaches of our experience, extremes meet and

transform themselves” (Naremore, 12). This correlates to the dream state that faces a subject with the realization that their nightmares speak a frightening truth (Barker, 22-23; 221-222). It pushes the limits of what a waking psyche can process and thus makes the viewer uncomfortable, but aware of their contradictions.

Kubrick’s psychological focus, while keeping the historical aspect in mind, can make interesting meanings. For instance, *Barry Lyndon*’s “awesome detailing of eighteenth-century life creates not the realism of a historian but the mirage of a dreamer” and hence makes the grotesqueness of a nightmare possible (Dempsey, 53). The viewer is faced with disturbing images of humanity’s social contradictions. “The world of Barry Lyndon is a world of ceremonies...embodying the way that ritual traps the characters” (Dempsey, 50). For instance, the ritual of war creates the monsters of *Fear and Desire* (1952), the ritual of the day-to-day creates the introspection of *2001* and boredom cum criminality of *A Clockwork Orange*. These rituals ensnare the characters of these films and create the catalyst that causes them to act out, usually for the worst. It provides the mirage of nightmare to protect the ego, absurdity and the grotesque, but anchors them to realistic signs that make them possible to understand and therefore they result in a greater impact on the viewer’s mind. These are the dark inner thoughts and urges of humanity, quite thinly veiled and held in check by social ritual and expectation.

In addition to pushing limits, “the substance of a Kubrick movie is always delivered through the images projected on the screen; seldom, if ever, is it delivered through the dialogue” (Feldman, 14). This is why many viewers miss what is conveyed in *A Clockwork Orange*, and a prime reason adolescent minded males are drawn to it. These viewers stop at Alex’s challenge to social order and the “immediate gratification” of urges that the images provide (the naked female form and the use of power) (Feldman, 15). They interpret the system as having punished and

tamed Alex, disregarding that he has only learned to play society's game and veil his nature. They fail to realize that the language Alex uses, in narration or dialogue, is hard to access, so it forces the viewer to focus on the image. They fail to see that the image tells the story, and that there is something more they should find in the work. Oddly, Feldman cites that there are "numerically...more violent scenes in *Barry Lyndon* than *A Clockwork Orange*" but that they are "all according to forms which Western man [has] come to accept" (Feldman, 17). Barry is a womanizer instead of a rapist. The women are all willing according to Barry. Alex openly admits that he takes what he desires, very similarly to Barry, but that he is resisted more violently in satisfying his desires by certain aspects of society (embodied by the writer's wife and the viewer's reaction). The viewer interprets the signs and symbols differently because they are culturally conditioned to parse meaning and attribute difference: Alex is grotesque and Barry refined.

Kubrick also creates other points of notable differences that can be mislabeled as misinterpretation in his adaptation of *Barry Lyndon*. The images on film are brief, but in the novel a scene can be multiple lines, paragraphs and even pages of words. An advantage of film is its ability to be concise. To quote an old adage: "a picture is worth a thousand words." When a script is written from a source novel, much of the language is dropped, as has been highlighted above (see Hofsess). A much more limited set of lines is rendered. This can create a disparity between novel and film in a few ways. The screenwriter is usually not the director and the intended meaning on the script page may be lost in translation between novel, screenplay and film. Reading each of the incarnations of the *Barry Lyndon* text illustrates this translational process and its pitfalls (or liberations). Pitfalls of misreading are not realizing inversions, allusions and things as simple as not understanding the meaning of a word used (Graham, 113-

115). The process makes an exact reading impossible and meeting the expectations of the viewer or critic just as unlikely. In his review of Kubrick's film, Hofsess writes that:

*Barry Lyndon* throws down the gauntlet to those film critics who are really literary or drama critics in disguise and tests their ability to appreciate qualities of form, composition, color, mood, music, editing rhythms—among other cinematic qualities that generally do not interest them.

Hofsess challenges the acceptance of the limited view of literary critics. It is not possible for them to effectively review the Kubrick film when they miss or skip major portions of a film's text (form, music, etc). The disparity they often cite between film and novel may be a matter of not understanding, or forgetting, the multiple layers of translated sign forms. Perhaps what they cite as missing was merely missed in their reading. Isn't it possible that aspects of a novel are translated onto film through editing rhythms and music, colors and form? Or tone and mood are made more precise through alterations, not just meant to convey the reading of the filmmaker? Such readings are far more important than direct translation comparisons, such as he wore a blue cravat in the book and it was ivory in the film, which is utterly pointless without examining why the color was altered and to what effect. For example, lines describing a bird singing may be translated to film as a mere background sound effect. The filmmakers didn't miss it, they translated the sign.

Kubrick condenses the opening scenes of the Thackeray novel with shots of the duel, his mother in her humble settings and the ribbon incident with Nora. In reviewing Thackeray's novel, it becomes obvious that the opening scenes, and actually most of the novel, would be impossible to translate to film without economizing. It is a very long film as it stands. Barry goes into great detail describing his circumstances, which Kubrick artfully displays with quick shots

that take much less time to convey, but make the same meaning. Critics are “inclined to dismiss [the film] as unimportant or as a failure” because words fail these critics (Hofsess). They are searching for the language, instead of signs and signifieds. Hofsess reminds the reader that film is often difficult to explain because it crosses language or sign types (sound, image, or dialogue). Film is not as simple as words on a page, as it makes use of multiple sign types.

One of the other major issues in adaptation is the historical barriers of the texts, which fight against the reader ever finding meaning. Nelson sums it up by saying that “Kubrick brings a 20<sup>th</sup> century cinematic intelligence to bear upon a 19<sup>th</sup> century novelist’s interpretation, or reinvention, of an 18<sup>th</sup> century form and subject” (Nelson, 40). But the adaptation is not that simple. Nelson goes on to state that “Kubrick’s interpretation of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century suggests a belief in a period’s tragic entrapment within its own rational and mechanical formalism” (Nelson, 49). In other words, Kubrick inferred Thackeray’s social experiment in *Barry Lyndon*, something we accept because the novel’s author stated his intention to do such, and because others examined the idea in criticism of the work. Therefore, Kubrick’s “film suggests, the disparities between different periods of human history may not be disparities at all, but particular instances of a universal condition” (Nelson, 50). This is a significant statement, returning to the ideas of the reader being able to find universality despite temporal barriers. Feldman chimes in writing, “Kubrick is making a significant statement about his age” (12). Kubrick examines the frail veneer of human morality and the transience of human life. Thus, each of Kubrick’s films are preoccupied by the question: “What is a man, and what must he do with his life” (Feldman, 15)? This is a commonly asked question throughout human culture and time. Despite all the sets and costumes, *Barry Lyndon*, reaches past time and poses the viewer with something else:

*Barry Lyndon* must rely on the stately pace, the painterly framing, the detached tone, the unpsychoanalyzed characters, and the lack of dramatization which have made so many dislike it. But all these criticisms are beside the point. *Barry Lyndon* is not a drama or a character study or even a satire on the abundant human corruption which it portrays. It is... a meditation on the transience of life. (Dempsey, 49)

The reading of *transience of life* can also be found in how the director and even the author “linger over moments which have less, often no, narrative significance” (Dempsey, 52). Kubrick relies on the visual power of cinema to stress this idea (Dempsey, 53). Through his images, “we are inexorably pulled back into awareness of mortality” (Dempsey, 53). For instance, the humdrum images of *2001* which have left many viewers confused. Is Kubrick documenting life and moments in his art? Dempsey suggests that he is: “the film is a funeral ode to the charms of existence” (Dempsey, 54). Dempsey’s interpretation is backed by the sympathetic narration of the film, and the abuses of the historical social order illustrated in the novel (Tibbetts, 24). The texts team up to treat Barry as a victim of the inevitable passage of time. It is always a matter of time and human nature in each of the texts.

Feldman considers *Barry Lyndon* a member of a trilogy, adding *A Clockwork Orange* and *2001* as its additional parts, a “disturbing study of a decadent civilization” (Feldman, 12-13). Kubrick showed an interest in such dialogue as early as his first film *Fear and Desire*. *Fear and Desire* illustrates the ugliness of the human condition, as strained by the conditions of war. In the film, Kubrick makes no distinction between race and national borders, or the lines between the opposing sides. He went so far as to have them played by the same actors. Humanity is equally susceptible to turning ugly when pressed, obsessed or inspired, returning to the idea of the

*ignoble savage* as posed by Feldman. It shows the soldiers of both sides devolving under pressure, whether it is holding a position against perceived enemies, or guarding a beautiful girl when they haven't seen one in years and have pent up desire. These soldiers no longer exhibit the control of men in *civilized* society. The film may not be of high quality like Kubrick's other works, but the director's focus is present and thus it should be considered in analyzing the others.

There is substantial criticism written on both *Lyndon* texts. In reviewing some of these sources, a great deal more can be opened up in the reading. Engaging a perspective outside of one's own helps the reader be aware of many more meanings, although it may affect the reading of the texts by determining those readings.

In the above passages, intertextuality has been shown to be a broad, if not depthless, spectrum of theory that encompasses far more than literature (Graham, 169). However, critical examinations of cinema are still "based on literary conventions and familiar structures, [so] that to see a film which stretches one's awareness of what can be achieved in the medium seems prickly and puzzling" (Hofsess). Kubrick's work should open the discussion to far greater readings than just the limited views of literature, but the attempt often causes discomfort because the conventions don't fit the medium. *Barry Lyndon* is not a critical failure, but the critics have failed the film. The director makes use of music, form, costuming, make up, and the entire cinematic process to bring a text into a new perspective, and to a wider audience of varying degrees. To dismiss this film, is to disguise a lack of proper critical tools and, more so, to hide the critic's inability to apply their knowledge or create the tools required for substantial film theory. Intertextuality can help bridge this gap by exposing the points where the tools are lacking, while simultaneously helping to fill them in.

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