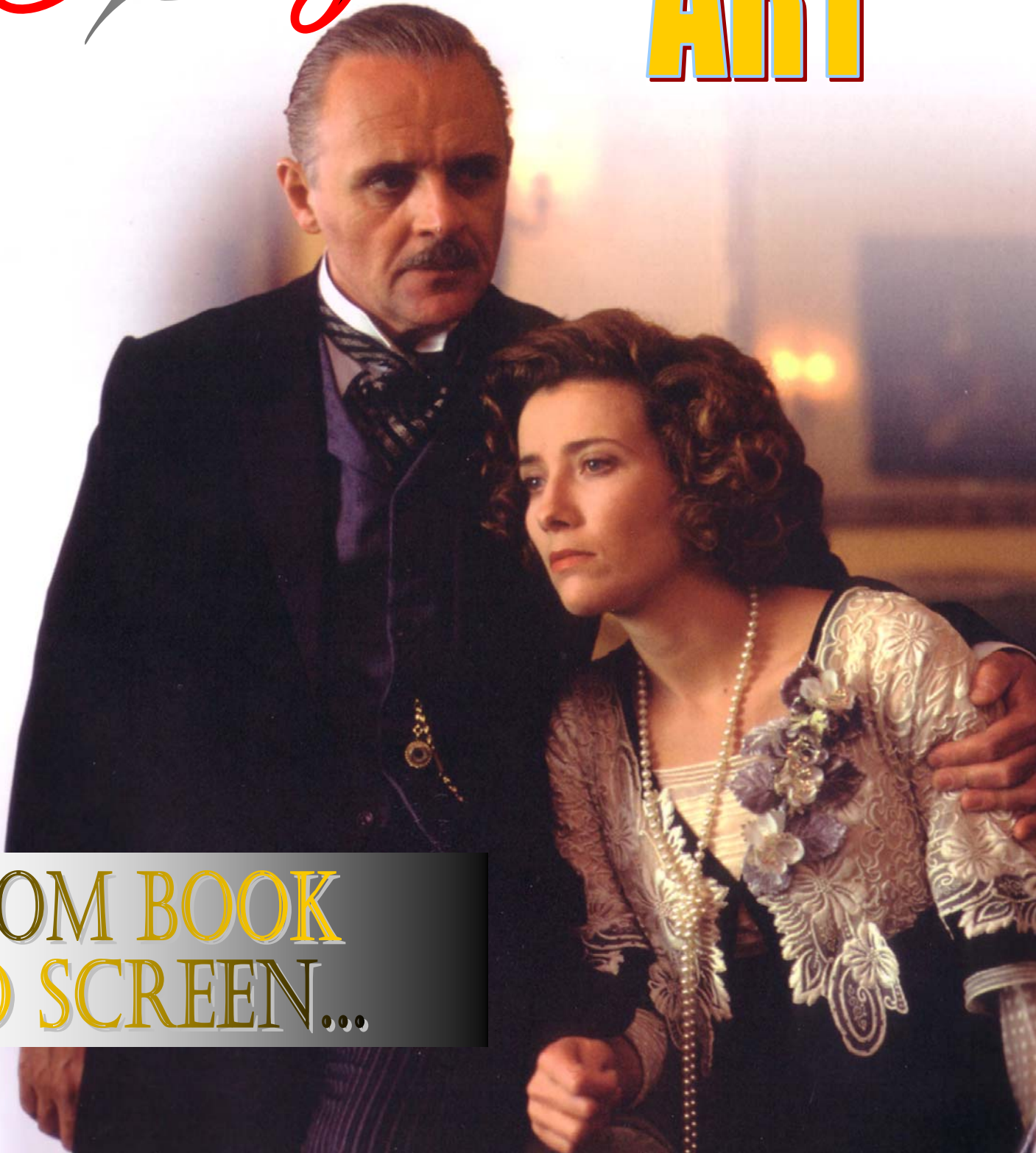


THE

Nick Zegarac's

Hollywood

ART



FROM BOOK
TO SCREEN...



READ THE MOVIE/SEE THE BOOK

Chic good taste in all things literary

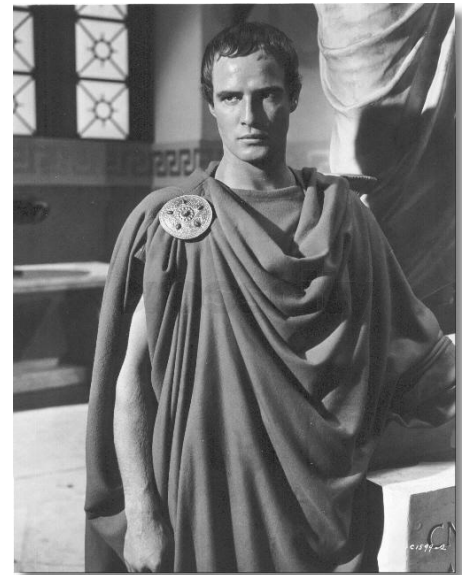
by *Nick Zegarcac*

Cinematic adaptations of great literature are nothing new. Transcribing books into movies has been one of Hollywood's time honored traditions, almost as ancient as the art of making movies itself. However, the delicacy required in transmutation from book to celluloid has often made for much consternation amongst the Hollywood elite and many an empty coffer and sleepless night in the executive bedroom.

Consider this: how could the movies, with all their infinite wellsprings of talent and production values make any Shakespearean tragedy appear to be dull, placid and stultified? Yet time and again, Shakespeare on screen has proven all too fallible to these pitfalls – the bard's lyrical language becoming as clotted, unclear, inarticulate and overly theatrical as any of the B-westerns produced by Monogram Pictures in the mid-1930s. Even today, some 100 years after the birth of movies, audiences continue to wait for definitive screen versions of *The Merchant of Venice*, *King Lear* and *As You Like It* among others.

Yet, Shakespeare is but one of many sacred authors that the movies have tried – mostly in vane – to resurrect and conquer in the 'new' medium. Ernest Hemmingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald are two others.

(The classical model for bringing great literature to life on the screen. MGM were the great purveyors of this sort of grandiose entertainment, usually with a prologue derived from the actual text. Top left: Garbo in Rouben Mamoulian's *Anna Karenina* (1935) based on Leo Tolstoy's novel. Middle: Louis Jourdan and Jennifer Jones in Vincente Minnelli's *Madame Bovary* (1949), based on Gustav Flaubert's imperishable tale of romantic desire no matter the cost. Top right: Ronald Colman strikes a pose as Sidney Carton in David O. Selznick's production of Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* (1935). Right: Joseph L. Mankiewicz' adaptation of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (1953) made the unlikely casting choice of Marlon Brando as Marc Anthony. Brando proved equal to the task. Right: Greer Garson and Laurence Olivier find idyllic romance at the end of Sidney Franklin's *Pride and Prejudice* (1940), based on Jane Austen's novel of manners.)





(In 1970s Hollywood, the studio's economized in the extreme; producing or merely acquiring cheaply made melodramas and horror movies for distribution. Occasionally, a studio would gamble on a single project in the hopes that it would yield blockbuster returns. Left: one of the biggest gambles of the decade that paid off handsomely: Irwin Allen's *The Towering Inferno* 1974 – so mammoth in scope and cost that Warner Bros. and 20th Century-Fox co-funded it, the first time in movie history for such a joint venture.

Top middle: Ellen Burstyn took home the Best Actress Oscar for *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* 1974. Director Martin Scorsese shot the film on location in Texas and on a shoestring, all about a widowed waitress who dreams of making it big as a Nashville singer, but winds up slinging hash at a greasy spoon instead. Top right: masked murderer, Michael Myers (Nick Castle) returns to Haddonfield in director/writer John Carpenter's best horror movie – *Halloween* (1977).



Left: Elliot (Henry Thomas) and his 'friend' fly past a full moon in Steven Spielberg's *E.T. The Extra Terrestrial* (1982), an unexpectedly poignant melodrama about an alien child left behind on earth who befriends a human family for companionship.

Bottom: Judd Nelson, Molly Ringwald, Emilio Estevez, Ally Sheedy and Anthony Michael Hall are *The Breakfast Club* (1985) – five teenagers assigned an all day Saturday detention at Vernon High School. Seemingly with nothing in common, by the end of the day they will have made startling realizations and developed lasting bonds. This was just one of direct John Hughes mega hits from the decade, tapping into teen angst and frustration. Topical to a point, the film continues to hold up today.)

Occasionally, through perseverance, a gentle director's touch, and the skilled appreciation from a gifted screenwriter, the trick and magic of delivering a relatively faithful adaptation to the big screen has been achieved, though purists would argue against such nonsense as finite movie visuals substituting for either the written word or the imagination of any reader.



During Hollywood's golden age, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer became the most prolific purveyor of literary adaptations. There are few critics even today who do not regard the studio's incarnations of *David Copperfield* (1935), *A Tale of Two Cities* (1935), *Anna Karenina* (1935), *Pride and Prejudice* (1940), *Madame Bovary* (1949) and *Julius Caesar* (1953) - among others - to be amongst the definitive screen adaptations of their respective literary masterworks, each introducing the masses to time-honored writing they might otherwise not have had either the time nor the inclination to invest in for themselves.



(A triumph of composition: top, 'Wolfie' Mozart (Tom Hulce) debuts his German symphony for the Emperor, much to the dismay of Court composer, Salieri (F. Murray Abraham, right). Director Milos Forman's bio pic was an exercise in pure fiction that miraculously caught on despite working against the status quo of film fare from the eighties. Forman shot most of the film on location in Prague, lending an air of opulence at a fraction of what it would have cost to recreate interiors on a back lot in Hollywood. Bottom: Elizabeth Berridge as Constanze Mozart, the naïve guttersnipe who confides in Salieri by showing him original compositions by her husband. In return he offers her 'Nipples of Venus' – a sugary dessert that tempts Constanze's more base needs.)



With MGM's formidable decline in the late 1960s, and its complete demise by 1979, Hollywood seemed content to let the sacred cows of 'good' literature molder with its own celluloid past.

In retrospect, the decision seems more prudent than obvious – fueled by the Government Consent Decrees (that fragmented the film establishment and effectively brought an end to their 'monopolies'), the studios (or what was left of them after the ruthless deluge in economizing) focused their efforts on cheaply made independent productions: gritty street dramas (**Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore** 1974, **Taxi Driver** 1976); escapist horror films (*Carrie* 1976, *Halloween* 1978) and occasionally a gamble on a moderate budgeted sci-fi blockbuster (**Close Encounters of a Third Kind** 1977, **Star Wars** 1977). These latter examples, with their potential for enormous box office returns on a limited investment were perceived as safe bets,





(*A Passage to India* (1984): a strangely moving and intimate melodrama from director David Lean with tinges of his former epic glory exhibited on films like *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) and *Doctor Zhivago* (1965). Following the disastrous critical response to his *Ryan's Daughter* (1970) Lean went into creative isolation until this movie. It would be his last. Top left: an optimistic Adela Quested (Judy Davis) and her mother-in-law to be, Mrs. Moore (Dame Peggy Ashcroft) arrive in India and are soon quite appalled by the British treatment of the native Indians. Top right: Victor Banerjee as Dr. Aziz H. Amed. His good intentions of providing Adela and Mrs. Moore with a trip to the Mirabar Caves proves his undoing when Adela suffers a nervous breakdown and accuses Aziz of rape – a charge simply taken at face value by her husband to be, Ronny Heaslop (Nigel Havers).

Bottom row, left: Aziz's one enduring friend from the British aristocracy is Prof. Richard Fielding (James Fox) seen here giving his blessing to Prof. Godbole (Alec Guinness). After his contemporaries suggest that he abandon Aziz's defense or face exile from their private club, Fielding replies, "I shall resign from the college tomorrow. I resign from the club as of now." Lean received a considerable amount of critical backlash for casting Guinness as an East Indian, though Guinness had long been what the director called "my good luck charm" appearing in virtually all of Lean's later movies except *Ryan's Daughter*.

Middle: In failing health and utterly infuriated by Aziz's incarceration, Mrs. Moore departs India alone for the long ocean voyage back to Britain. She will never arrive, dying of a heart attack on the ship's decks – her body committed to the sea. Right: following his exoneration of all charges, Aziz notices Fielding escorting Adela out of court. Assuming that Fielding has sided with Adela – and later – that he has actually married her, Aziz harbors anger towards his one time friend until a chance meeting many years later in which Aziz learns that Fielding has in fact married Mrs. Moore's daughter, Stella (Sandra Holtz) instead. Here, with Fielding for the last time, Aziz bids a tearful goodbye to his old friend. As Fielding's car pulls from view, a voice over narration in Aziz's voice quietly comments, "I do not think I shall ever see him again.")

particularly in the late 1970s and early '80s – as much of a guarantee as clever (if shortsighted) market research could predict.

To be certain, there were large scale entertainments in development during this same period, such as Irwin Allen's **The Towering Inferno** (1974), but these were rare exceptions to the norm and most certainly geared to take advantage of the contemporary cynical public fascination with destruction on a grand scale.

By 1983, the movie landscape was awash in quick and cheaply made disposable entertainments. Some caught the public fascination and became relatively successful. Others were easily relegated to the \$1.99 bin at their local video retailer after the proliferation of home video mid-decade. Ironically, the resurrection of great literary screen adaptations was owed largely to a blind-faith gamble made by the Ladd Company in 1984 on a costume epic that had little to do with great literature or indeed, cold hard fact.

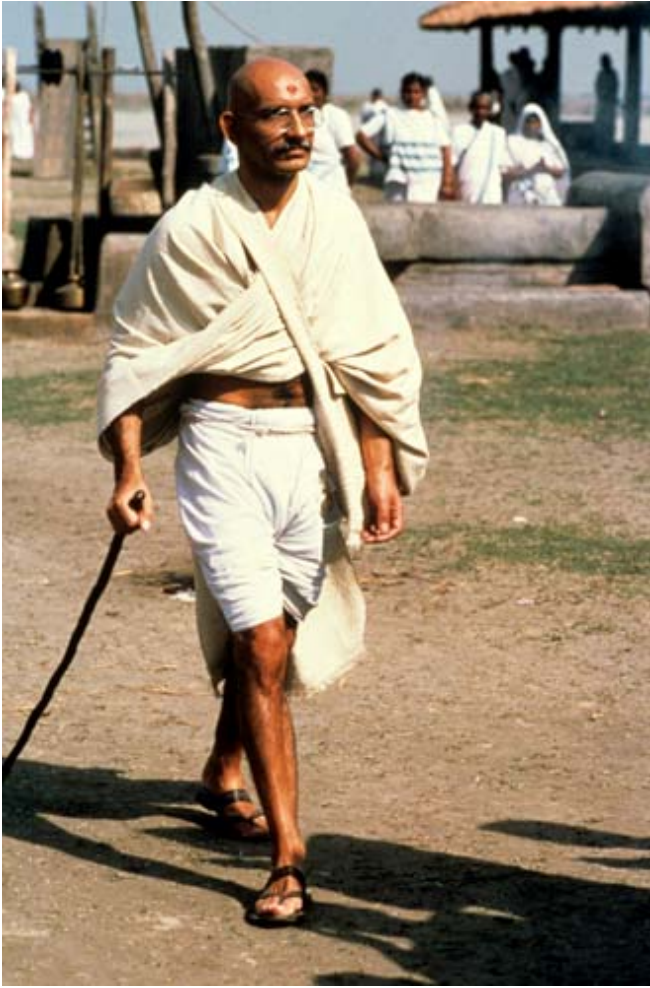


(Quaint views of British aristocracy. Merchant/Ivory's *A Room With A View* (1985) playfully absconds with the very definitions of propriety and decorum. Top: Lucy Honeychurch (Helena Bonham Carter) is passionately propositioned by George Emerson (Julian Sands) while on holiday in Italy. She returns to England a wiser girl, engaged to stuffed shirt, Cecil Vyse (Daniel Day-Lewis, middle). Bottom: discovering Reverend Beebe (Simon Callow) and George skinny dipping in a pond, Lucy – dressed in virginal white – cannot contain her shock and surprise at seeing the male anatomy for the first time.)

Nevertheless, immediately following the film's triumphant debut and litany of Oscar nominations and wins, the costume drama – long thought of by the Hollywood establishment as archaic and most certainly dead – suddenly came full circle and back into vogue. Any doubts that hardened critics may have had about this rebirth and cannibalization of 'the classics' was further laid to rest when Columbia Pictures premiered director David Lean's opus magnum, **A Passage to India** (1984) later that same year.

In retrospect, Lean's final epic (based on and remaining faithful to E.M Forster's brilliantly structured novel) is a much more worthy contender than **Amadeus** for demarcating the resurrection of literary/film adaptations. Yet, upon its debut, **A Passage to India** was generally maligned by several prominent film critics as a thinly veiled attempt by Lean to recapture the successes of **Lawrence of Arabia** (1962) and **Doctor Zhivago** (1965). Judged inferior to both, and, in the shadow of Forman's overwhelming success with **Amadeus**, **A Passage to India** remained a quiet, slightly discarded masterpiece for several years to follow, though its reputation has since steadily grown.





In point of fact and in retrospect, **A Passage to India** does tend to run on a bit 'long and overtly stylized'—much more the grand celebrated relic and holdover from Lean's best period in films (1955-65) than a much needed update to the sub-genre of literary melodrama in contemporary films. Its performances are solid and textured, the best being Alec Guinness' Godbole. Lean was heavily criticized at the time for not using a real East Indian actor in the role, though Guinness' assimilation into the part of Arab Prince Feisel in **Lawrence of Arabia** (1962) failed to generate similar critical outrage.

Audiences' interests - both in E. M. Forster and filmic period costume melodramas in general – had not been lost on a pair of filmmakers working in Britain. With the release of director James Ivory and producer Ismail Merchant's **A Room With A View** (1985) Hollywood once more began to realize the box office potential of literary adaptations.

In terms of box office gross, **A Room With A View** was hardly a blockbuster, but it garnered respectable returns and critical accolades – a prelude to the saturation of 'book to film' adaptations that were to follow. Moreover, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, with their own long standing appreciation for this type of movie making, and the public – who had virtually abandoned costume drama in the mid-60s and 70s - were beginning to warm to the exercise once again.

(Top: A passage to India of a different kind: Director Richard Attenborough's lumbering epic, **Gandhi** (1982) may not have been based on any definitive text, but its three hour plus running time was overshadowed by Ben Kingsley's miraculous transformation into the title character. Kingsley justly took home the Best Actor Oscar. Top left: Mahandas Gandhi (Kingsley) arrives to conduct a peaceful demonstration at a salt mine. Top right: the epic funeral procession in India's capital – restaged with hundreds of thousands of extras in waiting. Told before hand that a film company would be coming to India to immortalize the man on celluloid, some of the extras traveled for days to partake in this stunning recreation. Bottom right: Gandhi and his followers meet with Britain's Lord Irwin (John Gielgud) at Irwin's estate. The meeting, however, does not go according to plan.)



Ironically, looking back at the 1980s in film history – a cinematic landscape overly populated by R-rated slasher films (**Friday the 13th** 1980, **Sleep Away Camp** 1983, **Nightmare on Elm Street** 1984), campy and crude sex-comedies (**Bachelor Party** 1984, **Splash** 1984, **Weird Science** 1985, **My Chauffeur** 1986, **Mannequin** 1987) and teen driven angst-ridden diversions; (**Sixteen Candles** 1984, **The Breakfast Club** 1985, **St. Elmo's Fire** 1985, **Pretty in Pink** 1986) – not to mention the proliferation of mindless sci-fi adventures that followed the debut of Steven Spielberg's **E.T.** (1982) – arguably still the most intelligently produced and stimulating of this latest cycle in intergalactic nonsense – serious projects like **A Passage to India** and **A Room With A View** must have seemed fool-hardy folly and very risky gambles at best; expensive and dangerous to the overall fiscal prosperity of the 'new' Hollywood that had been built on market research and an ever-increasing litany of clever press promos and product tie-ins.



All the more impressive then to reconsider that with a change from one decade to the next, the 'new' Hollywood steadily increased its stakes in producing some of the finest yet literary-to-film adaptations. Not surprisingly, this most recent investment in the sub-genre required one more nudge from abroad; another made by Merchant/Ivory: **Howards End** (1992).



(The look and feel of great literature - left top: Director Steven Spielberg surprised his contemporaries by directing one of the most stirring human dramas of the 1980s – **The Color Purple** (1985). Based on a Pulitzer Prize winning novel, initially author Alice Walker openly balked at Spielberg doing the film. Eventually, Walker came to acknowledge that Spielberg understood her material much better than she could have ever anticipated.

Middle: Shug Avery (Margaret Avery) prepares to pay tribute to Celie at the local honky-tonk. The film considerably toned down the novel's lesbianism.

Right: Karen Blixen (Meryl Streep) looks on lovingly as Denys Finch Hatten (Robert Redford) relays a story in Sidney Pollock's **Out of Africa** (1985) based on Blixen's own writings; 'Shadows on the Grass' and 'Letter from Africa'. A proud and progressive woman of means, Blixen published her books both under her own name and under the pen name Isaac Dinesen.



Bottom: Clutching a baby owl given to her by one of the natives, Karen is greeted by her loyal man servant, Farah (Malick Bowens) after recovering from a virulent bout of syphilis given to her by her philandering husband, Bror (Klaus Maria Brandauer). Though the convention of the times would not permit, the film hinted at more than a master/servant relationship. If not romantic, then Farah was clearly, and at the very least, a trusted friend.)



HERE TO REPRESENT THE FAMILY... RESSURECTION with *Howards End*

Based on E.M. Forster novelized critique of Edwardian England's rigid class distinction, the filmic adaptation of **Howards End** made several key changes to Forster's text, including a softening in the character of philistine businessman Henry Wilcox (Anthony Hopkins) to create a minor, yet pleasing romantic love interest between Wilcox and middle class 'old maid' Margaret Schlegel (Emma Thompson) – the emotional grounding center of the story.



Shooting in and around London, the production utilized the rustic Peppard Cottage (itself an almost exact replica of Forster's own Rooksnest in Henley) as the fabled house from whence all subsequent narrative class struggles between the Wilcoxes, the Schlegels and a third couple – the Basts - derive.



Actress Emma Thompson, who had auditioned for the part of Margaret with her husband/actor Kenneth Branagh (then, enjoying a minor renaissance of his own with the visceral filmic adaptation of Shakespeare's **Henry V** 1989)



(Superbly crafted, *Howards End* provided a template for future literary adaptations – maintaining the cadence of the original text while making literature 'pop' entertaining for the masses. Top: Rooksnest Cottage, subbing in for E.M. Forster's fabled rural estate. Right: Margaret Schlegel (Emma Thompson) visits Mrs. Wilcox (Vanessa Redgrave) in the hospital.

Middle: Mr. Wilcox (Anthony Hopkins) shows impervious contempt for the middle class after his late wife has bequeathed *Howards End* to Margaret. Bottom: a precocious Helen Schlegel (Helena Bonham Carter) encourages a awkward and shy Leonard Bast (Samuel West) to call again for a visit when he is in better spirits.



(Above: a pair of frustrated romantics. Leonard Bast's seduction of Helen feeds into his own wounded desire to rise above his station in life. Married to a former prostitute, Leonard fulfills Helen's desire for Bohemian love, she – his need to desperately belong somewhere.

Right: Forced into a corner, Henry Wilcox confesses to his wife, Margaret that he used to frequently entertain himself inside the boudoir of Jackie Bast when she was still a prostitute. Below: Margaret confides her frustrations and concerns to her brother, Tibby (Adrian Ross Magenty) after Helen mysteriously leaves England for Italy. In fact, Helen has gone into hiding to give birth to the bastard love child of Leonard Bast. Bottom: Henry encourages Margaret not to take such a sentimental view of her sister's erratic behavior and 'condition.' His cool reply will soften after his own son is sent to prison for murdering Leonard Bast.)



was pitted against one of England's most celebrated – yet internationally underrated – actors of his generation, Anthony Hopkins.

The teaming of Hopkins and Thompson proved enough of an interest to break the ceiling in Thompson's career. She had already appeared opposite Branagh in **Henry V** and **Dead Again** (1991), but it was **Howards End** that effectively introduced her to American audiences as England's "**most brilliant, talented actress...since Vanessa Redgrave.**"



As they say in the business, *timing is everything*. The financial success of **Howards End** in America in particular was abetted by Anthony Hopkins formidable mark made via **The Silence of the Lambs** (1991), coupled with his justly deserved Oscar win for the role of Hannibal Lecter. That win generated a virtual overnight groundswell of American celebrity for the actor. His instant fame became the catalyst for marketing **Howards End** in the U.S. – a debut nearly sabotaged when Orion Pictures – the distribution company for the film in America - filed for bankruptcy and threatened to delay the film's premiere.



Instead, Sony Picture Classics assumed the responsibility of marketing and releasing the film.

Heralded by Newsweek as “a **crowning achievement...a film of dazzling splendor... powered by a dream cast**” **Howards End**’s miniscule budget of \$8 million was eclipsed by its world wide gross of \$70 million and a litany of international accolades and awards.

At roughly the same interval as **Howards End** was wrapping principle photography, Kenneth Branagh’s version of Shakespeare’s **Much Ado About Nothing** (1993) was preparing to go before the cameras. Branagh’s knack for avoiding the pitfalls when translating that most celebrated of English playwright’s masterworks into engaging films had already been established with the release of **Henry V**. Moreover, Branagh’s acclaim on both continents was then in modest competition with his wife’s – a conflict that would prove the couple’s undoing later in the decade.

For **Much Ado About Nothing** Branagh infused a bawdy – yet slightly whimsical - liberation into the comedic underpinnings of the play; reinvigorating without contemporizing the conflict between Hero and Claudio. “**I want this to be a fairytale...**” said Branagh at the time, “**Beautifully dressed and lovingly photographed...that can be very frightening at times. Like all good fairytales, there’s a strong undercurrent to the story. It’s also very very fiery.**”

The chief problem for Branagh, however, proved to be in his central casting choices which, apart from Emma Thompson as Beatrice, left much to be desired. Though undeniably good looking, the film remains populated with rather frozen performances, the worst among them Michael Keaton’s Dogberry and Keanu Reeves’ Don John. Nevertheless, **Much Ado About Nothing** proved popular enough with audiences to continue Branagh’s career upswing, even though the film was overlooked for a single nomination at Oscar time.



(Right: **Much Ado About...something?** Top: a romantic stalemate between guardsman Benedick (Kenneth Branagh) and the sultry lady of a Tuscan vineyard, Beatrice (Emma Thompson). In truth, their real life marriage had already begun to show signs of strain. Middle: Hero (Kate Beckinsale) is introduced to the Captain of the Guard Don Pedro (Denzel Washington) as Benedick looks on. Washington’s performance may have been stiff, but it was a veritable tour de force of acting compared to that of Keanu Reeves – cast as schemer Don John. Bottom: all’s well that ends well. Claudio (Robert Sean Leonard) is married to Hero, whom he earlier suspected of infidelity.)



(Above: Darlington Hall's housekeeper, Mary Kenton (Emma Thompson) draws Mr. Stevens' (Anthony Hopkins) attention to the fact that his father refuses to accept that he fell of his own accord and not due to some ill fitting paving stones in the courtyard in Merchant/Ivory's *The Remains of The Day* (1993) a bittersweet romantic melodrama set in pre and post war England.

Right and below: the relationship between Stevens and Miss Kenton becomes the focal point of the latter half of the film. Although Stevens confides to Mr. Thomas Benn (Tim Piggott Smith) that he could not imagine a world without Miss Kenton in it, Stevens' inability to confide as much to the only woman he's ever loved, leads her to accept a proposal of marriage from Mr. Benn instead.

Middle: following the war, Mr. Stevens reunites with Miss Kenton at a rather decrepit seaside resort. Miss Kenton confides that she is once more estranged from her husband.

Bottom: Miss Kenton confesses that the announcement of her daughter's pregnancy has afforded her a new lease on staying with her husband. She will not return to Darlington Hall as Stevens had hoped. The look of utter desolation in Hopkins eyes tells the rest of his character's story.)

This slight on both the film and Branagh's reputation as the premiere purveyor of filmed Shakespearean entertainments did little to sway the momentum in his wife's career. Riding the crest of her Oscar win (Best Actress for **Howards End**), Thompson was reunited with Ishmail Merchant and James Ivory for **The Remains of the Day** (1993), based on Kazuo Ishiguro's Booker prize-winning novel and transcribed for the screen by Ruth Praver Jhabvala, who had also written the screenplay for **Howards End**. Once again, Thompson's costar was Anthony Hopkins, causing some critics to glibly nickname the project the **'Em and Tony show.'**

Initially, **The Remains of the Day** had been brought to the attention of director James Ivory by actor Remak Ramsay.





However, the novel had already been optioned by director Mike Nichols and Columbia Pictures by the time Ivory decided he would like to become involved. For reasons unclear and undisclosed, Nichols eventually opted not to direct the film, assuming a co-producers credit instead.

In transcribing book into screenplay, author Ishiguro openly admitted to Jhabvala that he had 'made up' the duties of an English butler entirely from imagination for his novel. To refine these duties and reflect an air of authenticity for the film, Jhabvala suggested the crew hire a real life butler as consultant – a move seconded by Anthony Hopkins who felt particularly ill at ease in the part of Stevens. Enter retired Buckingham Palace steward, Cyril Dykman – a man whose fifty year career 'in service' to the Royal family was beyond reproach.

As production on **The Remains of the Day** began in several stately manors scattered about the English countryside, Columbia Pictures was also embarking on a home grown literary/film adaptation a continent away, with director Martin Scorsese and **The Age of Innocence** (1993). Based on Edith Wharton's scathing indictment of social hypocrisy that had first been published to acclaim in 1920, the novel had been made into a movie no less than three times before, the most celebrated version in 1934, starring Irene Dunne as the Countess Olenska. In resurrecting Wharton's particular brand of affectation and keen glibness for social critique and commentary (a contemporary slant of Jane Austen), director Scorsese imbued his film with a rigid discipline that was quite uncharacteristic of his own directorial style.

Shooting in and around Troy New York, and even going so far as to redecorate a Pi Kapp Phi fraternity house to replicate the opulence of the Mingott home, no expense was spared on this opulent recreation of New York's turn of the last century aristocracy. The top heavy cast was capped off by star turns from Michelle Pfeiffer as Olenska, Daniel Day Lewis - her tortured would-be lover, Newland Archer and Winona Ryder as his seemingly innocent wife, May. Though Oscar nominated (and winning for Best Costume Design), in retrospect the film is a rather costly and dull excursion for which box office response remained tepid.

(Left top: Michelle Pfeiffer as the scheming Countess Olenska in Martin Scorsese's *The Age Of Innocence* 1993. Left: with Daniel Day-Lewis after she has already seduced him from his intended bride, May (Winona Ryder). The film emphasized the hypocrisies of the Gilded Age and was an exercise in revealing the quiet desperation of unrequited lovers caught in the depths of lustful despair.)





Undaunted Columbia Pictures pushed onward with yet another literary/film adaptation with director Gillian Armstrong's **Little Women** (1994) – an all together more poignant and satisfying movie that became a modest, though well deserved box office triumph.

Filed twice before, first as a vehicle for Katharine Hepburn in 1933 and later, as a glossy MGM Technicolor remake in 1949, Armstrong's adaptation of Louisa May Alcott's celebrated tale tread a more balanced repartee between the March sisters; Jo (Winona Ryder in this version), Amy (Kirsten Dunst/Samantha Mathis) Beth (Claire Danes) and Meg (Trini Alvarado).



For the 1949 remake, MGM leveled an all-star cast that included June Allyson as Jo, Elizabeth Taylor as Amy, Janet Leigh (Meg), Margaret O'Brien (Beth) and, for the male protagonist Laurie – Peter Lawford. Though in Technicolor, the film was basically an exercise in restrained production values. With a few brief exceptions the entire film was shot on sound stages.



The 1994 version also made the most of its male counterparts, most notably, Christian Bale (above) as Laurie in an expanded role. ***“It was the theme of family, support and love – sisterly love in particular – that drew me to this project,”*** said Armstrong in an interview at the time. Released for Christmas, **Little Women** was embraced by both the critics and the public.