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# Faulks, Tagore, Proust:

# From Flaubert to *Birdsong* through Adaptation

*Abstract*

This essay addresses the question of literary adaptation, with reference to Sebastian Faulks' 1993 novel *Birdsong*, which has proved notoriously difficult to adapt for the stage as well as the screen. It is argued that *Birdsong* is better understood both despite and because of its problematic adaptations. Not reductively a novel 'about' the First World War, *Birdsong* may be seen as itself a form of adaptation of works by key writers who feature in Faulks' text, namely Rabindranath Tagore and Marcel Proust. It emerges that Faulks is more of a *writer* in the tradition of Flaubert and Proust than a *novelist* in the classic realist tradition. A properly literary adaptation of *Birdsong* is seen – through a pivotal transversalist turn – as one which grasps this novel as a form of verbal artifice, of artful fabrication. In this respect it is an expression of style as content's 'overdrive', an 'overdetermining', that is, of the semantics of content that produces an at once reflexive and supplemental decomposition of the age-old form/content antinomy.

## Writer/Novelist

What is revealed of the nature of fiction when a novel is adapted for another medium, for instance the stage or the screen? What understanding arises of that same work of fiction through the process of adaptation itself? That adaptation is a form of reading – and of misreading – gives rise to these questions. A related idea is the notion of the work of fiction as product of a process of reading (and of misreading) of other works and hence itself a form of adaptation. Such is the transversalist universe (a signifying galaxy) of the problematics of adaptation. In what follows we shall bring this problematics to bear on a particular work of fiction, the novel *Birdsong* by Sebastian Faulks, which, it will be argued, is better understood by virtue of its *problematic*

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adaptations on stage and screen. The follow through on this line of enquiry at the end here is a strategic resituating of *Birdsong* in the space of our transversalist universe (in, that is, literature as a space of reflexive-supplemental styles). Faulks as a writer is positioned more closely than heretofore in relation to the writers who feature in *Birdsong,* in particular Rabindranath Tagore and Marcel Proust. Consequently, the view of Faulks as a novelist whose subject in *Birdsong* is the First World War, arising from the stage and screen adaptations, is significantly altered. Here it is not at all that such things as form and style are given priority over content; at issue, rather, is a dialectical dissolution of the very opposition of form and content. This issue of the vanishing point of the conventional form/content dichotomy brings into view, as a premium, the functioning of the writer as a writer. Faulks emerges in this regard as more of a *writer* than a *novelist*, someone who writes as, in fact, a concrete way of living, manifesting a particular passion *vis-à-vis* the structure of language.

The writer/novelist distinction in play here is derived from, as may be readily observed, the split between ‘writerly’ and ‘readerly’ texts introduced by Roland Barthes through extended work on a Balzac novella in his book (the title of which encapsulates the diacritical, differential nature of the language system and its forms of spelling) *S/Z*. Here the designation *readerly* is reserved for the classic texts of literature, ‘what can be read, but not written’, whereas *writerly* is used for ‘what can be written (rewritten) today’, namely texts ‘produced’ by readers and not just writers, or by writers who are themselves readers.[1] Thus the *writerly* is to the ‘writer’ what the *readerly* is to the ‘novelist’; in other words, Barthes offers a good description of what the writer is like in the field of adaptation now, as the field of what can be ‘written

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(rewritten) today'. Importantly, recent developments in the theory of adaptation have led to a significant expansion of this field of work. Robert Stam outlines clearly for us the extent of this expansion when he argues that 'one cannot separate the history of adaptation theory from the history of the arts and of artistic discourse'.[2] Significantly, Stam's argument here is influenced by that understanding of 'dialogic' forms of textuality – a historic ushering in of utterance and of general transtextuality – which has been formulated by Mikhail Bakhtin (a figure whose work has been early disseminated from the Soviet Union, around the time of *S/Z*, by Barthes' student Julia Kristeva). What now arises as a situation where adaptation is the degree-zero of writing – to coin a phrase, there is no outside to adaptation (Derrida meets Darwin!) – is one that takes us beyond the aporias of 'fidelity' in adaptation theory. In the process of adaptation, the source text may no longer be seen as *a priori* 'superior' by virtue of its anteriority, or indeed originality, when it is inserted into a virtually palimpsestic layering of texts. By the same token, what is adapted from the source text, no longer thus overshadowed by its 'original', may be valued more in its own right as an art form (an as it were neo-original), liberated into a universe of 'many adaptations'. In an account of 'contemporary dilemmas' regarding 'adaptations', Imelda Whelehan points up the drift of this new direction, emphasising the value of work which 'destabilizes the tendency to believe that the origin text is of primary importance'.[3] She then traces a positive movement 'from a consideration of "literary" adaptations [. . .] to a focus on adaptations more broadly' (3-4). This reframed, broader category of adaptation is useful to us now in an approach to both Sebastian Faulks' *Birdsong* and its stage and screen adaptations. In brief, *Birdsong* has been a difficult work of fiction

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to adapt; as we shall see, the basic reason for this difficulty is that the novel itself is an adaptation, in the broad sense of being palimpsestic in style, though its adapters have to date not fully appreciated the significance of this.

## Problematic adaptations

Sebastian Faulks' 1993 novel *Birdsong* – both critically and commercially a success – has proved notoriously difficult to adapt, whether for stage or for screen. To date, there has been a 2010 adaptation for the dramatic stage, scripted by Rachel Wagstaff and directed by Trevor Nunn, which opened in September of that year at the Comedy Theatre in London and ran only till the following January; a 2012 adaptation scripted by Abi Morgan and directed by Philip Martin, broadcast as two ninety-minute films on BBC television in January (which Faulks himself has commented on in rather guarded terms: 'These things', he observes, 'are always a work in progress'[4]); and, in 2014, a touring version of what was produced in 2010, with Rachel Wagstaff revising her own script and this time working with Adrian Whatley as director (the show has received mixed reviews, with, for example, the *Times* being more favourable than the *Guardian*[5]). Also, there are plans for a Hollywood version of *Birdsong* as a feature-length film, though, interestingly, Faulks has refused to give the go-ahead, saying he will do so only when it is clear what will be produced will be a 'very good' film (see Eden).

So, *Birdsong* seems well and truly a difficult novel to adapt. The reason for this is that this is a work of fiction which is typically read as a love story set against the

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backdrop of the First World War. The horrors of war thus throw into relief love itself as a form of strength. This love transcends national boundaries, unfolding between the Englishman Stephen Wraysford and the Frenchwoman Isabelle Azaire. (Although the lovers will later separate, Isabelle falls in love during wartime with a German officer, a young Prussian named Max.) There is then the difficulty in this reading of *Birdsong* of telling two stories in one, essentially a love story and a war story. This duality is what previous adaptations of *Birdsong*, on both stage and screen, have had difficulty with, especially as the time-frame shifts in Faulks' story between 1910, 1916-18, and 1978-79. (In each case, the 1970s part of the story, dealing with the granddaughter's attempt at reconstructing Stephen and Isabelle's relationship through the former's old papers, is left out.) All the same, the birdsong – a lark singing – which Stephen hears when he is rescued from a collapsed tunnel amongst the trenches and learns that the war is over is, on this reading of the Faulks story, seen as emblematic of there being unity in nature, and of the strong love which Stephen has for Isabelle outlasting war's atrocities.

This account of Faulks' story is, as one might recognise, really rather sentimental. Moreover, it is arguably more sentimental than what is actually presented to us in the shape of Faulks' novel. Another reading of birdsong in the novel is that it signifies the indifference of nature to all human life (love, war, whatever it might be), since there is not much of a happy ending for Stephen in this story – left alone and battle-scarred – after the war has ended. (Intriguingly, we might note briefly how in Ralph Vaughan Williams's *The Lark Ascending*, itself composed in 1914, the lark is singing sweetly while ascending higher and thus further away from human life on the ground below.)

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This less sentimental, perhaps more sober reading of the birdsong in *Birdsong* is in fact key to understanding the problem of this novel's adaptation for stage and screen. What that element of indifference suggests is the idea that Sebastian Faulks' work as a writer is best approached as, above all, that of a great stylist. In other words, to read *Birdsong* as a romantic realist story about 'love in a time of war' is precisely to miss the point. The point is that that romantic realist story in *Birdsong* is strongly stylised as such. What is expressed is not just the love affair between Stephen and Isabelle, but also, figuratively speaking, Faulks' love affair with the French novel, principally the prose fiction of Stendhal, Flaubert, Zola, as well as Proust. Think, perhaps, of how Faulks has shaped his subsequent career as a writer. The notion of writing as a matter of style has grown more pronounced after *Birdsong* with such novels as *Devil May Care* of 2008 and *Jeeves and the Wedding Bells* of 2013; the former done as a James Bond novel by Ian Fleming, the latter a P. G. Wodehouse Jeeves and Wooster story (both with an equal degree of explicitness in this respect). The important thing to note is that this all-important germ of a certain reworking of interdependent 'form' and 'content' in Faulks' writing is already there in his fourth novel (his 'breakout' work of fiction), *Birdsong*.

Perhaps there is a small clue to the significance of style in *Birdsong* in the novel's epigraph (the full significance of which we shall return to later). Faulks quotes a line from Rabindranath Tagore's *Gitanjali*: 'When I go from hence, let this be my parting word, that what I have seen is unsurpassable.' As is the way that epigraphs tend to work, we might well imagine Stephen Wraysford saying these words, as Faulks' main character in his story, thus as he reflects on his own life, ranging from Isabelle as the

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love of his life to his experience of the Battle of the Somme and its aftermath. The implication would then be that Stephen expects never to see again the like of what he has seen in France with its extremes of love and war. But much like the emblematic birdsong in this story, there may be a second reading to this epigraph. This time what is suggested via Tagore's words is the idea that the realism in Faulks' fiction is a false front. Where experience itself is 'unsurpassable', as in extreme conditions, it becomes unstable in fiction, whether realist or otherwise. The basic model for Faulks' novel is then *not* one where the fiction, in a conventional sense, is a reflection of the world being written about. Hitherto the problem for the adapters of *Birdsong* has been the assumption that it is a novel operating within the realist mode; the adaptations they have produced themselves prolong this same realist aesthetic. The difficulty of this basic assumption is something which is thrown into relief by Robert Stam's work on the art of adaptation, in particular his notion (developed from Bakhtin) of cinema's 'excess seeing' that illuminates 'the dark corners and dialogizing backdrops of the classics of world literature', being by nature readier to recognise palimpsestic 'origin' texts (365). It is, by contrast, the short-sightedness of adaptations governed by realism – and, by extension, 'fidelity' discourse – that becomes apparent across from the alternative perspective advanced by Stam.

Without a doubt, *Birdsong* is extremely powerful in its rendering of the realities of human experience. The novel is by turns tender and terrifying. Within this, there are frequent poignant juxtapositions of such things as boredom and barbarism, desire and despair, happiness and hatred: as a piece of prose fiction *Birdsong* is positively poetic in its attention to detail in the imagery and in its lyrical turn of phrase. The moment is

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well observed, for instance, when René Azaire discovers his wife's infidelity and, symbolically, the unfamiliarity of the house he has bought as a family home: 'It was a place [René] had not refound', Faulks writes, 'but which had stayed, as Stephen had feared it might for him, beyond the reach of memory.'[6] But throughout all this there remains a sense of the world itself as 'unsurpassable' at the level of putting it into words. If Faulks' novel is about such things as passion and sadness and violence, such things are all too irreducible; nor is *Birdsong* the sort of work that wants to 'get to the bottom' of that complex and controversial question of the origins of the First World War – war itself is a given. And this matter of the world's irreducibility, the very *sine qua non* of a dizzyingly vertiginous human condition, is a problem for any attempt at transposing this particular text onto either stage or screen. Hence the suggestion that to get to grips with this problem, it is really quite helpful that we can virtually forget the idea that this is a novel modelled on a 'reflectionist' or 'mimetic' form of fiction. This is a novel, rather, that grows thick with – and is enriched by (in a baroque sort of way) – its self-consciousness of itself as a novel, a literary form made of words, and of words meant by Faulks to intersect (and be in a state of flux) with sentences and statements from other works of fiction . . . traversed by an infinity of mediations, rhetorical protocols, love letters.

## Love affairs

To say this is not to suggest that Faulks is fashionably postmodern in his approach to fiction in the 1990s (or later). Quite the contrary: what is in many ways unfashionable

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is Faulks' habit of using his fiction to express his love of classic French fiction (from, mainly, the nineteenth century), to say nothing of the greater genre of classic realism in fiction.[7] Whilst *Birdsong* is a text that does not reflect the world in its irreducibility, it nonetheless mediates the intangibility of response where Faulks and the French novel are concerned, especially where there are signs available in the latter of its procedural quoting and questioning of a 'mimetic' model of fiction and discourse of the real. Putting it differently, in *Birdsong* the passion between Stephen and Isabelle is one thing; that between Faulks and Flaubert, or Faulks and Proust, is another. This latter aspect of Faulks' work is what both stage and screen adaptations of *Birdsong* have not begun to grasp. The adaptations are simply not 'writerly' enough, in the sense of manifesting an understanding of a writer's representations as realising their meaning more literally as re-presentations. Traces of the making of different versions of *Birdsong* tend to be erased for the sake of creating imagistically an illusion of transparency *vis-à-vis* external reality. But at the same time, what Faulks himself has said what France, as both a country and a culture, has done for him reinforces his sense of himself as a writer. Responding on his website to a question about the nature of his interest in France, Faulks is emphatic, while describing his love of French literature (and French painting more than that), about how '[France] enabled me to become a writer by getting me out of my own culture'.[8]

A love affair with language (or, the right way to understand 'the world' and 'the book'): the case of Sebastian Faulks in this regard is, in certain respects, similar to that of Vladimir Nabokov, author of *Lolita*, not so much a 'dirty book' as an erotics of discourse. Gabriel Josipovici – in *The World and the Book* – affirms: 'When Nabokov

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said that his novel was about his love affair with the English language he spoke more literally than his critics realised.'[9] Instead of a Russian writer's passion for the English language, we now have an English writer's passion for French writing in novelistic prose (suffice to mention: *Birdsong* is part of Faulks' French Trilogy, with *The Girl at the Lion d'Or* of 1989 and *Charlotte Gray* of 1999). It is not hard to see, on this basis, how *Birdsong* is a complex retelling of Gustave Flaubert's 1869 novel *A Sentimental Education* (to single out just one French novel in a comparison with Faulks' writing). The 'sentimental education' of Frédéric Moreau in Flaubert is substituted for that of Stephen Wraysford through all the expansions and contractions of the heart related in Faulks' story. Similarly, what is the 1848 Revolution in one novel becomes the First World War in the other. There are some due alterations of detail, of course. Flaubert has it, with devastating irony, that the thing which interrupts the final consummation of Moreau's love affair with Madame Arnoux is the February 1848 outbreak of revolution in Paris. Faulks, in contrast, lets his lovers enjoy the consummation of their love – for a while, their time together is idyllic – and so war's function in the plot is to bring out Stephen's vital, sustaining memory of desire, rather than impede desire itself. If 'retelling' is the right word for the intertextual relation (or metonymics, or displacement dynamics) of *A Sentimental Education* and *Birdsong*, then it should be stressed how it provides the occasion for Faulks to work *creatively* as at once a stylist and a writer. It should be added as well, as Pat Wheeler points out while sketching a brief biography of Faulks as a writer in her study of *Birdsong*, that Flaubert is 'one of [Faulks'] favorite authors', whom '[h]e frequently quotes'.[10]

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## Cineaesthetics

In a now well-known *New Yorker* review, Simon Schama has referred to Faulks with his *Birdsong* as ‘Flaubert in the trenches’.[11] Schama’s witty phrase is certainly pithy in that it condenses many of the observations one might make about Faulks’ method as a writer in transposing key aspects of Flaubert into his own work. There is the famous Flaubertian ‘impartiality’ in the handling of key antagonistic political and ideological differences; the close attention paid to authenticating historical details; the dextrous labouring with/on language (in order to make it transparently opaque); and the poetry in the prose. Indeed, in the process of declaring an allegiance to the work in fiction of Émile Zola, Faulks has said of Flaubert, ‘I admire [him] greatly and wouldn’t dream of criticizing him – in the same way that one wouldn’t dream of criticizing Mozart’ (‘FAQ ONE’). Yet there is a particular feature of Flaubert’s writing which it is important to comment on, to do with the subsequent ‘retellings’ of *Birdsong* on stage and screen. Robert Stam has commented astutely on what he calls the ‘[p]roto-cinematic novel’ associated with Flaubert, outlining in this respect this author’s ‘[c]inematic [g]aze’ (144, 147). Of crucial importance in this reading is the reappearance of Flaubert’s subtle (not to say virtuosic) use of free indirect style in his prose fiction as the ‘shifting point of view’ which is familiar in cinematography. The effect of the former is ‘of a “dolly-in” to consciousness’, as Stam puts it, deliberately using the language of filmmaking in so doing. Time and again in Flaubert’s writing different subjectivities – a narrator and a character, for example – slide into one another, but this happens as it were between the sentences so that the reader barely

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notices the slippages taking place (at the same time as narrative viewpoint grows remarkably mobile, fantastically free-floating, airily aerial).

This is a feature which has been brought out particularly well by James Wood, in the course of his own critical analysis of Flaubert. Specifically, he has stressed how ‘cinematic’ Flaubert is as a writer, while crediting him – through a familiar critical commonplace[12] – with giving birth to modern realist narration. First citing a passage from (of all things) *A Sentimental Education*, with Frédéric Moreau sauntering idly up the Latin Quarter, Wood then tells us how it works as a piece of fiction. And, in this case, he highlights Flaubert’s great innovativeness as a writer, writing after the rise of photography but also before the rise of cinema. ‘Flaubert seems to scan the streets indifferently, like a camera.’[13] (Remember, in this connection, how birdsong might be read as signifying indifference in Faulks’ *Birdsong*.[14]) Wood explains further: ‘Just as when we watch a film we no longer notice what has been excluded, what is just outside the edges of the camera-frame, so we no longer notice what Flaubert chooses *not* to notice. [. . .] each detail is almost frozen in its gel of chosenness’ (33). Thus, Flaubert may be said to anticipate the ‘I am a camera’ style of narration found later in Isherwood’s *Goodbye to Berlin* of 1939, for example (qtd in Wood, 43), *and also* practices of reimagining literary works in directly visual terms (though perhaps, as we shall see shortly, less so those associated with traditionally realist ‘heritage cinema’).

In short, there is a certain cinematics of style in Flaubert, itself an aspect of the famous ‘impartiality’, that, arguably, Sebastian Faulks as reader of the author of *A Sentimental Education* has noticed, hence all the ‘beautifully observed’ details of the prose in *Birdsong*. Moreover, Flaubert’s practice of ‘writing like a camera’, typically

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confusing habitual detail with dynamic detail (‘The effect is lifelike’, Wood writes, ‘in a beautifully artificial way’ (34)), which Faulks has taken over in his own fiction is undoubtedly something which, by virtue of its inherent audio-visual potential, has attracted the attention of filmmaker and dramatist alike. At an early stage of Flaubert’s reception, in fact, Marcel Proust has noticed this key characteristic of this author’s style, speaking in a glorious phrase of ‘the great *Moving pavement* that are the pages of Flaubert’, adding that his ‘grammatical singularities reveal a new vision’.[15] What it is then important to say, regarding this ‘new vision’, is that this (audio-)visual potential should be seen as not so much the occasion for a new adaptation of *Birdsong* in another medium. Rather, *it should be integral to the adaptation itself*. Taking this step, truly vital in terms of understanding Faulks’ artistic ‘code’ imprinted in his aesthetic vocation and his novelistic art, may well be what has been missed in the way that *Birdsong* remains difficult to do on screen and on stage. What appears symptomatic of this difficulty is that there is no birdsong to be heard (indifferent or otherwise) as Stephen emerges from his collapsed tunnel, when the war is over, in, for example, the 2012 television film of *Birdsong*; lush romantic strings, accompanying a sweetly melancholic melody on the piano, are heard on the soundtrack instead.[16] (If Flaubert is, so to speak, Faulks’ own private Mozart, then this music which replaces the birdsong-motif is not at all ‘Mozartian’.) We can take a look at an extract from *Birdsong* in a moment, to examine the cinematic grammar of Faulks’ writing, thereby analysing the ‘lens of his optic’ in this novel.

But it will be helpful to do this with a further comment in mind from James Wood; in particular, Wood’s brilliant notion, formulated as he develops his analysis of

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Flaubert, that there exists a sort of post-Flaubertian correlation between storytelling in novels and in war reportage. The point is that through Flaubert's lifelike-yet-artificial way of noticing, the details are 'seen as if out of the corner of the eye; they seem to come at us "like life". From this flows a great deal of modern story-telling, such as war reportage' (34-35). (A little later on, Wood notes nicely how, in Flaubertian realism, 'like most fiction. [. . .] detail really does hit us [. . .] in a tattoo of randomness' (46).[17]) The issue is not that Flaubert, in *A Sentimental Education*, tends to write about Parisian street-battle scenes 'in great detail'. His way of seeing, rather, as a modern novelist – wherein details 'hit' us – thus lends itself to other types of storytellers, including war reporters, not to mention the novelists who, like Sebastian Faulks, write about war in their fiction. (It is surely no accident that one of the best books ever written on war, Michael Herr's *Dispatches* of 1977, tends to read like 'Flaubert on speed', thanks to Herr covering the war in Vietnam as an often narcotically-intoxicated reporter for *Esquire* magazine.[18])

## A 'wire' tragedy (in a 'film')

Naturally enough, in war writing details often 'hit' us within the narrative (in Wood's 'tattoo of randomness'). Now one of Sebastian Faulks' accomplishments as a writer is that he grasps firmly the significance of this point, thus when treating the Battle of the Somme in *Birdsong*. The idea regarding this technique of war writing may be seen as being emblematised in the *tour de force* that is Faulks' treatment of the Battle. As is well known, one of the most important things that went wrong in the Battle, on 1 July

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1916 – the Battle of the Somme has gone down in history as the single worst day in British military history (marking one of the bloodiest battles in humanity's history) – is that barbed wire protecting German trenches had not been cut, as planned, by a prior aerial bombardment: advancing British soldiers were slaughtered from German machine-gun fire when they got caught in the wire. It is the imagery of these caught human bodies being hit by rounds of gun fire that is emblematic, in an absolutely shocking way, of at once the method of modern realist narration and its underlying, Flaubertian 'cinematic' grammar. The principle of this seems to have been understood perhaps intuitively, but firmly nonetheless by Faulks. We can say this through noting how powerfully emblematic is his presentation of the 'hit' human bodies in the British troops' encounter with the German wire and machine-gun fire. The relevant passage in *Birdsong* is as follows.

> Remembering his order not to stop for those behind him, he [Stephen] pressed slowly on, and as the smoke lifted in front of him he saw the German wire.
>
> It had not been cut. Men were running up and down it in turmoil, looking for a way through. They were caught in the coils where they brought down torrents of machine gun fire. Their bodies jerked up and down, twisting and jumping. Still they tried. Two men were clipping vainly with their cutters among the corpses, their movement bringing the sharp disdainful fire of a sniper. They lay still. (182)

This key passage has been produced by Faulks as a writer as a macabre tableau (of, as we shall see below, a weird *danse macabre* of death). Ironically, it is beautiful, in a

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strictly aesthetic sense: the extent to which the abstract notion of a form of narrative method – the details 'hit' us – is rendered in concrete terms is astonishing. Such is the signification of the jerking bodies 'twisting and jumping'. Is it Stephen or Faulks' narrator who sees these bodies in this way? The reason one puts it like this is to suggest the effect of a lifelike-yet-artificial way of seeing, manifested in terms of a critical confusion of 'habitual' and 'dynamic' details. It is altogether hard to imagine how this effect could have been created in a more forceful way, other than by working with the details of the Battle of the Somme's 'wire' tragedy in this film-like sequence of shots (comprising *shots* in multiple senses of the word).

Speaking of tragedy, this passage, with its reference to bodies 'caught in the coils', bodies that perform a weird dance of death before 'They lay still', may well recall Hamlet's 'To be, or not to be' soliloquy in Shakespeare. In particular, the allusion seems to be to what Hamlet speaks of as 'the thousand natural shocks / That flesh is heir to', whose painfulness may be ended 'When we have shuffled off this mortal coil'.[19] In other words, Faulks is able to give a sharply ironic twist to the well-known 'mortal coil' idea. And in so doing he thereby generates the remarkable force, all at once aesthetically and emotionally and morally, of this whole tableau that deals with (to invoke a further famous trope, this time from Wilfred Owen) the 'pity of War'.[20] All the while, Faulks is here operating as a writer, as opposed to a chronicler, of war. The literary allusions in Faulks' *danse macabre* – at different levels, to Shakespeare, to Owen and to Flaubert – are themselves the sign of Faulks' writerliness. They carry forward the suggestion that the kind of work Faulks' fiction is doing exceeds the frame of an aesthetic of reflection. A triumph of art is brought about from this way of

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writing about death, and, more than that, it is a hard-won triumph in that the passage eschews a tone of sentimentality such as might have been generated from the pathos of this particular moment in the Battle of the Somme (the broken promise regarding the wire, the loss of human life, and so on). So, in the spirit of Flaubertian ‘impartiality’, Faulks’ writing remains true to that idea of indifference as a *leitmotiv* of the actually existing moral world that, as we have seen, tends to displace emotional sentimentality. An appreciation of indifference of this kind is just what a *sentimental* education is for, as both Flaubert and Faulks seem to say.

It is therefore all the more ironic that when played as a scene in the 2012 television adaptation of *Birdsong* that this passage in Faulks – Stephen’s sighting of the uncut German wire – should have been played for the degree of poignancy it is able to generate. It is tantamount to a misreading of *Birdsong* as source text. What happens is as follows. The camera (in shot/reverse-shot filming) shows us Stephen, with his troops, advancing precariously towards the German wire, but not *him* seeing that the wire is uncut. It is, rather, another soldier who notices this first and calls out to the others. Then we see a third soldier being shot, by machine-gun fire: he falls onto the uncut wire, where, ‘twisting and jumping’, he is shot again by ‘the sharp disdainful fire’ of snipers. For a brief moment, the camera holds in its gaze the lifeless expression of the now-dead soldier, before there is a dissolve into the next shot. What we see is the same soldier who, on screen we had seen just a moment ago, writing what has now proven to be his last letter home.

The scene, as abrupt as it is brutal, works well in conveying the horrifying nature of this particular soldier’s death. The foreshortening of the interval, done in screen-time,

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between the writing of the last letter and the moment of death on the wire (with its weird *danse macabre*) is in itself shocking. The dead soldier with his blank expression who, in effect, gazes at us through the camera is able to inspire a profound sense of loss. But these are not all the same effects as the ones created by Faulks in his novel. We do not see Stephen seeing that the wire is uncut, and the significance of this is that the meshing together of habitual and dynamic details – ‘Remembering his order not to stop for those behind him [. . .]. It [the wire] had not been cut’ – that produces the whole lifelike-yet-artificial visuality and optical culture of Faulks’ fiction *is not there*. Also, the idea of having a single soldier being shot (and dancing a dance of death) is, of course, what makes this scene in its effects all the more poignant; the emphatic singularity recalls, from the Spanish Civil War, Robert Capa’s iconic Falling Solider (which may have been staged, as suggested from the decontextualising way the photographic image has been framed).

But poignancy itself, as is implied by the discussion above, is not necessarily the right thing to aim for in the storytelling on screen. It smacks of a sort of sentimentality that is discordant with what might be considered the mere artifice of creative art, coextensive with the materialism of making, such as is evident in Faulks’ work. The problem of poignancy in this respect is that the screenwriting, in this case by Abi Morgan for Philip Martin’s film, allows itself to become involved in the emotion of its material rather than asserting itself as writing; that is, as a form of making, and hence a triumph of creativity over chaos through the functioning of modern authorial impersonality, ultimately a celebration, in the teeth of death itself, of *Homo faber*. Not only that, whilst poignancy appears to be the premium in the scripting of this scene

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for the television film, the result in the diegesis, of showing specifically a single soldier's death on the German wire is not really an appropriate rendering of either the counterpart scene in Faulks' narrative or the actuality of the Battle of the Somme. Here, it is not necessarily the case that Faulks wants to be strictly accurate in his novelistic treatment of what happened on the battlefield on 1 July 1916: the 'Flaubert in the trenches' idea (advanced by Schama as a historian) suggests otherwise in this respect. But even so, Faulks' judgement is surely right in depicting the death of more than just a single soldier in that moment of 'Their bodies jerked up and down, twisting and jumping': after all, the Battle of the Somme *was* the direst in British military history.

So, in contradistinction to its screen adaptation, *Birdsong* may quite properly be read as a historical novel.[21] Ironically enough, this is both despite and because of the degree of its stylisation as such. The nature of Faulks' realism as a writer of historical fiction, located at the vanishing point of a fixed dichotomy of form and content as suggested from the outset here, is that it makes him a 'Flaubertian' stylist. A further look at the very end of the passage from *Birdsong* which was quoted above a moment or two ago should help to make the point conclusively clear. Thus, through the physical-temporal ambiguity of 'They lay still', as written by Faulks in his text to signify the deaths of the caught-in-the-coils British troops, Faulks' prose maintains a focus on the wire-dead whilst drawing away – zooming-out in camera-like fashion – in order to insist on a posture of anti-sentimentality. Maintaining an *un*sentimental composure in his work like this, this is precisely the sort of thing that allows Faulks as a writer to operate as at once a realist and a stylist. Such is the lesson he learns from

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Flaubert as one of his ‘masters’. In general, the meshing together of unimportant and important details in the overall play of different points of view – the narrator, on the one hand, the protagonist, on the other – is what generates the distinctive (indeed the constitutive) tension of modern fiction. Faulks in *Birdsong* is truly a modern novelist in this sense.

## From Flaubert to Tagore (metonymies in action, part 1)

This point brings us back to the question of Faulks’ choice of epigraph for his novel. Why choose a line from Tagore’s *Gitanjali* rather than one from Wilfred Owen, or another of the First World War poets, if, as is often the case, *Birdsong* is seen as being ‘about’ the First World War? The answer is that *Birdsong* is not in a reductive sense ‘about’ the First World War. Furthermore, the Bengali *Gitanjali* of 1910 as well as the English *Gitanjali* of 1912 – the latter comprising Tagore’s translations of his poems – are from the same historical period dealt with, for the most part, in Faulks’ story. (The English *Gitanjali*, with an Introduction by W. B. Yeats, was in fact chiefly responsible for Tagore being awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, on the eve of World War I, in 1913.) The point to make is that Tagore’s *Gitanjali* – that is, his devotional ‘Song Offerings’ – is there to be mined for epigraphs, and to produce pithy statements concerning the Great War era, should the author of *Birdsong* wish to do so. Not only that, the actual quotation from Tagore that Faulks uses as an epigraph in his novel, since it is from *Gitanjali* rather than Wilfred Owen, for example, opens out the scope of the narrative, notwithstanding the fact that ‘When I go from hence’ should

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have resonated, via quotation, through the war and post-war years of World War I. The epigraph indicates – better, anticipates – a certain breadth to Faulks' story, as something which a quotation from one of the trench poets would not have been able to do.[22] It is time for a closer look, therefore, at the line Faulks quotes from Tagore as his epigraph.

To quote it once more: 'When I go from hence, let this be my parting word, that what I have seen is unsurpassable.'[23] This line, which brings with it an element of reconciliation in the face of death, looks back to, principally, earlier poems in the collection wherein a visitation from God occurs in the space of a single night (the motif from classical Indian love poetry of a bride waiting for her lord to return is centrally important). 'When I go from hence', like all the other sentiments that are expressed in these poems by Tagore, is ultimately devotional in character: *Gitanjali* itself, as stated a moment ago, is a collection of 'Song Offerings'. But if Tagore's Hinduism is not what is being subscribed to by Faulks when he quotes from him like this, it is everything that is devotional – fundamentally, the notion of a song offering – that is important in this quotation. The reason, then, becomes clear why it has been suggested above that it is not entirely right to say that Faulks' subject as a novelist in *Birdsong* is World War I. The argument has been advanced that beyond the love affair of Stephen and Isabelle in this story, the novel relates its author's love affair with the French novel. Thus, it is this double reading of *Birdsong* which reinforces the sense of this novel as a secular 'Song Offering' to Stephen and Isabelle's manifestation of love in a time of war and, in a still more intimate way, to French culture, an epitome of which, in Faulks' eyes, is the great novelist Marcel Proust (as we have seen, an early

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and perceptive admirer of Flaubert-the-stylist in the realm of free indirect style and of ‘double-voiced’ speech). When commenting on how France enabled him to become a writer, ‘by getting me out of my own culture’, it is Faulks’ remarks on Proust that are especially interesting. For, as an underlying notion of devotion might perhaps suggest, if Faulks’ relation to Proust as a writer is liberating, it brings with it as well a form of constraint. This idea is expressed in the following remarks by Faulks regarding his first encounter with Proust’s *A la recherche du temps perdu* ‘in, I think, 1984’:

> there’s no doubt that the domestic detail of Proust was, as well as the whole theme of Proust’s novel, was a catalyst for something in me. Luckily, by the time I read him, I was old enough to know that admiring someone was fine, but you shouldn’t let them influence your style. And I did, luckily, recognise that his style was so much his own that it would be mad to let it near me, though that’s not to say that there isn’t maybe a sentence or two sentences perhaps, in the first part of Birdsong, which are offered as a sort of modest homage to him. (‘FAQ ONE’)

At once liberating and a form of constraint: Proust is described as a ‘catalyst’ and as such, as far as Faulks is concerned regarding Proust’s style, ‘it would be mad to let it near me’. The very complexity of this response is what accounts for, at the level of sentence construction in a couple of instances in *Birdsong*, the tenor of his ‘modest homage’ to Proust. Here, the language of devotion – not just ‘Song Offering’, but also ‘homage’ – seems appropriate to characterise the relationship of Faulks the writer to the author of the *Recherche du temps perdu*. The sense of this is reinforced in the way

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Faulks speaks of Proust's difference *vis-à-vis* the other French novelists he reads and admires, mentioning Stendhal, Balzac, Flaubert, and Zola by name. 'But none of these', he says, 'I didn't really hero-worship any of these writers, apart from Proust maybe' ('FAQ ONE'). He adds: 'I admire and respect them, but I didn't have an emotional surrender to the glamour or romance or skill of any of these people, with the possible exception of Proust' ('FAQ ONE'). The exceptional Proust (to whom one might possibly surrender in an emotional way), is then the secret object – 'what I have seen is unsurpassable' – of *Birdsong* as the work of art it is, by Faulks as decidedly a consummate practitioner of verbal art; as suggested, a writer as opposed to a novelist.

## From Tagore to Proust (metonymies in action, part 2)

To stress the artistic nature of Faulks' novel is to remind us of the materiality of its nature as a contingent artefact (and this materialism qualifies what might be termed the epigraphic Hinduism in Faulks). Pat Wheeler puts it well, in a fine extended study of *Birdsong*, when she observes how '*Birdsong* is not "real", it is not even a real representation of the war, it is a literary work that reflects upon the reality of human experience during the war' (25). At stake here is a crucial shift of focus, away from the Faulks novel as a work of realist reflectionism, and a positive identification of it with the literature of the signifier (recall 'Proust's work', as described by Roland Barthes, 'purports to be a mere introduction to Literature'[24]). Put another way, this is a text which belongs to a situation of citation – a veritable rhetoric of reversibility – at a level deeper than that of its realism: the 'realism' is an effect (the mythic alibi) of

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this situation and this rhetoric.[25] To be sure, there are lessons to be learned from this understanding of *Birdsong* as a novel the hidden lack (a ludic truth, a lucid reality) of which is Marcel Proust. What is to be gathered in this way is apropos of any further reimagining of the work in the form of an adaptation. Such lessons are bound up with a post-Flaubertian sense of modern fiction's optical unconscious and general visuality arising from style as content's 'overdrive'. This latter is something associated with a key 'overdeterming' of the semantics of content in an art work. Its operation produces an at once reflexive and supplemental – in certain lights parodic – decomposition (hence displaced recomposition) of the time-honoured 'form-and-content' paradigm. At issue is a turn to the transversal.

So we might note how Raoul Ruiz, with his 1999 film *Time Regained*, has in fact succeeded in producing a properly artful adaptation of the seventh and final volume of Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*. The adaptation itself goes beyond 'fidelity' in a way that is in keeping with critique of such a form of faithfulness as seen earlier in the present discussion; parts of Proust's novel as a whole and not just the last volume are featured in the film, for instance. More broadly, the modernist vocation of rethinking realism, which marks the birth of cinema as well as Proust's novel, leaves its mark firmly on Ruiz's work. In their study of 'Proust at the movies' Martine Beugnet and Marion Schmid make special mention of *Time Regained* as a film adaptation which, through the extent of its artful fabrication – essentially, its modernist sur-realism – amounts to a parody of forms of heritage cinema and costume drama which appear less successful as Proust adaptations on the basis of an underlying realism-fidelity complex of values. (This point is analogous to what has

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been suggested in the present pages regarding stage and screen adaptations of Sebastian Faulks' *Birdsong*.) Thus, Beugnet and Schmid argue that Ruiz 'rules out the concept of adaptation as an attempt at a faithful recreation – his cinema does not aspire to a reconstitution but a re-presentation of the Proustian universe'.[26] They add to this argument (in alliterative fashion) Ruiz's own description of his film as 'an "adoption" rather than an adaptation' (142).[27] They stress ultimately (while still alliterating) how Ruiz's cinematic interests and techniques 'show a deep affinity with Proust's own work' (146-47). It could almost be the case, let it be said, that Ruiz offers a literalisation of Proust's notable '*Moving pavement*' account of Flaubert's style when, filming Proust's concert scene at the Guermantes', entire rows of chairs are made to move (on rails) from side to side in exaggerated fashion.

So it is by no means the case that the *Recherche*, the novel which Proust quite literally lived to write – synchronously embodying the fateful Death of the Author – is 'unfilmable', just as the expressive powers of film (multitrack medium that it is) are not in fact less than those of literature. Rather, Ruiz's success with *Time Regained* has been in his 'making a film of', in its material reality, not just literature-as-production but also the uncanny unity of Proust-and-his-novel, wherein the desire to write shifts into a desire to film, *ad infinitum*, being nothing if not quixotically adventurous, a drama in the theatre of vertigo.[28] Ruiz's filmic language in this work – the elegant pans and the graceful tracking-shots, the dissolves and the superimpositions, the flashbacks and the dream sequences – are Proustian, without being vulgarly so. His shots are often in themselves reminiscent of the Proustian sentence (not to mention the long-drawn-out metaphors and pervasive reflexivity). This work on screen is

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testimony to Ruiz's own understanding of the *Recherche* as a novel – generically, a work of art – which duly discovers its aesthetic in the process of creation itself: not 'art for art's sake' so much as writing itself as the-being-of-the-writer. Just as in Proust, there is a 'radical questioning', in Beugnet and Schmid's words, 'of language and representation in relation to truth and artifice' (153).

With this sense of an ending in Proust we are reminded that his novel (of 1913-27[29]) has quite a lot in common, thematically speaking, with Tagore's *Gitanjali*: a sense of completeness is a marked characteristic of both works (think as well of this era's phenomenon of the '24-hour novel', Joyce's *Ulysses* or Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, later on McEwan's *Saturday*). Moreover, just as both works reveal the workings of time and memory, they are also *of* their time and thus stand in symbolic relation to the very same part of the early twentieth century that, now, is periodised principally in relation to the First World War. In what may be an intriguing instance of palimpsestic style in reverse, Proust abandoned the title *La Fugitive* for the sixth volume of the *Recherche* after Tagore published his volume of life-poems with that title in 1921; Proust's work, with the title *Albertine disparue*, appeared posthumously in 1925. At issue is a thematic of the transfiguration of life into something 'higher', spirituality or art, for example. It is this thematic which now brings into view for us precisely the idea of adaptation as that process-of-the-palimpsest which recent developments in adaptation theory have furnished. The sense of completeness articulated in such works as *Gitanjali* and *A la recherche du temps perdu*, on this view, marks the moment of their becoming most readily available as material for adaptation. It gives expression to the juncture (break, opening) of their symbolic passage to a 'higher' form *vis-à-vis* the

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transversal transtextual shaped by the logic of the palimpsest. Whence the expressive conjugation 'Faulks, Tagore, Proust': *Birdsong* is that form of artifice which in itself draws out such a form of passage for two of the great 'transfigurative' works of art of the Great War era as referenced strategically – the epigraph, the secret object – in it is text. The referencing is strategic, one might suggest, even to the extent whereby first Tagore (epigraph) then Proust (secret object) are located at the circumference and the centre, respectively, of *Birdsong* as a novel. It appears as an index of the strength of the testament which Faulks makes of the transformative power of human making in the face of tragic loss.

Therefore, the point of suggesting the above conjugation is to provide a pointer towards what a properly literary adaptation of Faulks' *Birdsong* might look like. Any classic realist aesthetic would be misplaced, by virtue of the likely adaptational flaws it throws up *vis-à-vis* the materiality – by extension, the heteronomy and atopia – of the signifier. What is in order in this case is without doubt treatment of the historical presentation of the horrors of war (as well as their consequences). But a triumph of art in its dealings with death – very much an art of war – is what, in the end, is to be aimed at: 'And now', to quote from Tagore's *Gitanjali*, 'I am eager to die into the deathless' (poem C, 66). A project such as this (erotic as it might be: 'The text of bliss', Barthes suggests, 'is absolutely intransitive'[30]) proceeds on the basis of what has here been sketched out from reflection on the adaptations to date of *Birdsong*. It is developed as well in a reading of Faulks' novel precisely as a writerly production, paying particular attention as a general rule of reading to the logic of mentioning and *a fortiori*, in some cases, of not-mentioning other writers in the structure of the text.

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Henceforth, *Birdsong* will have been an adaptation (under the star-sign of metonymy, or, transversalism writ large) of some preceding works of art which figure as Proustian precursors in reminiscence and its pleasures. (Is our Barthesian theory of writerliness 'conceivable', as Barthes himself asks regarding his theory of the text, 'without the notions of pleasure, of bliss?' (*Pleasure*, 64).) What symbolises the positive gain from this endeavour is that the motif-signification of birdsong in Faulks' novel appears powerfully moving – stronger in intensity, and to a virtually operatic, Mozartian extent – through the rejection of sentimentality, precisely, entailed by a strictly aesthetic indifference. In literature, this latter form of outlook is what comes, as we have seen, after Flaubert.

## Notes

1 Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), p. 4.

2 Robert Stam, *Literature through Film: Realism, Magic, and the Art of Adaptation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), p. 16. See also the following for a systematic theory: Robert Stam, 'Introduction: The Theory and Practice of Adaptation', in Robert Stam and Alessandra Raengo, eds, *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 1-52.

3 Imelda Whelehan, 'Adaptations: The Contemporary Dilemmas', in Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan, eds, *Adaptations: From Text to Screen, Screen to Text* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 3-19 (p. 3).

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4 See Richard Eden, ‘Sebastian Faulks fires warning shot over Birdsong film starring Nicholas Hoult’, *The Telegraph,* 5 May 2013, available at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/film-news/10037693/Sebastian-Faulks-fires-warning-shot-over-Birdsong-film-starring-Nicholas-Hoult.html> (accessed: 23 April 2014).

5 See Kate Bassett, ‘Birdsong at Birmingham Rep’, *The Times,* 19 March 2014, available at <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/arts/stage/theatre/article4037249.ece>; Alfred Hickling, ‘Birdsong review – adaptation owes as much to Feydeau as Sebastian Faulks’, *The Guardian*, 25 March 2014, available at <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2014/mar/25/birdsong-review-sebastian-faulks> (accessed: 23 April 2014).

6 Sebastian Faulks, *Birdsong* (London: Hutchinson, 1993), p. 82.

7 See also Sebastian Faulks, *Faulks on Fiction* (London: BBC Books, 2011).

8 Sebastian Faulks, *The Official Website of Sebastian Faulks*, see ‘FAQ ONE: What first drew you to France? Why are so many of your books set there?’ at <http://www.sebastianfaulks.com/index.php/category/faqs/> (accessed: 23 April 2014).

9 Gabriel Josipovici, *The World and the Book: A Study of Modern Fiction* (London: Macmillan, 1971), p. 220. As regards the ‘discursive’ dimension of Nabokov’s novel, see also Robert Stam’s literature-through-film reflections on *Lolita* in *Literature through Film*, pp. 223-43.

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10 Pat Wheeler, *Sebastian Faulks's* Birdsong*: A Reader's Guide* (New York: Continuum, 2002), p. 10.

11 Simon Schama, 'Flaubert in the Trenches', *The New Yorker*, 1 April 1996, pp. 97-98.

12 On Flaubert's modernity as a writer, see Roland Barthes' account of how 'around 1850', classical writing disintegrated, 'and the whole of Literature, from Flaubert to the present day, became the problematics of language'. 'Flaubert', Barthes adds, 'finally established Literature as an object, through promoting literary labour to the status of a value', in *'Writing Degree Zero' & 'Elements of Semiology'*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (London: Jonathan Cape, 1984), pp. 4, 5-6. Similarities with Barthes' argument are manifested by Jonathan Culler in his *Flaubert: The Uses of Uncertainty* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, rev. ed., 1985): 'in Flaubert', Culler writes, 'the starting point seems to be the writing of sentences rather than a particular expressive project. [. . .] Flaubert's novels come to take as their subject the tension between the need to read and interpret the world as one is accustomed to read a text and the irony that undercuts possible readings' (105). (Incidentally, this argument formulated by Culler comes from his reading of *A Sentimental Education*, 'A puzzling and exasperating masterpiece' (147).)

13 James Wood, *How Fiction Works* (London: Vintage Books, 2009), p. 33.

14 Typically enough for Flaubert, one might suggest, there is in *A Sentimental Education* indifferent birdsong which marks the aftermath of the 1848 uprising in Paris. Flaubert writes (as usual 'confusing' his authorial point of view with that

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of Moreau as his protagonist): 'He [Moreau] dashed down towards the quai Voltaire. An old man stood in his shirt-sleeves at an open window; as he looked up at the sky, he was crying. The Seine was flowing peacefully. The sky was all blue; in the trees of the Tuileries gardens birds were singing.' See *A Sentimental Education: The Story of a Young Man*, trans. Douglas Parmée (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 364-65.

15 Marcel Proust, 'On Flaubert's Style', in *Against Sainte-Beuve and Other Essays*, trans. John Sturrock (London: Penguin Books, 1988), pp. 261-74 (pp. 262, 266).

16 See Philip Martin, dir., *Birdsong* (London: Working Title TV, 2012).

17 For further discussion of *A Sentimental Education* (setting forth its place in Flaubert's development as a writer), see the chapter on this novel in Geoffrey Wall, *Flaubert: A Life* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001), pp. 290-308.

18 See Michael Herr, *Dispatches* (London: Pan Books, 1978).

19 See William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Hamlet Prince of Denmark* (III.i.64-65, 69), in *The Complete Works*, ed. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor et al. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

20 See the 'Preface to Edition', drafted by Wilfred Owen as a preface to a collection of poems he hoped to publish in 1919, available online in *The First World War Poetry Digital Archive*: <https://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit/education/tutorials/intro/owen/preface.html> (accessed: 23 April 2014).

21 As regards the undoubtedly complex nature of Faulks' historical interest in World War I, see the following as a non-fictional supplement to Faulks' First

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World War fiction: Sebastian Faulks and Hope Wolf, eds, *A Broken World: Letters, Diaries and Memories of the Great War*, introd. Sebastian Faulks (London: Hutchinson, 2014). A sharply critical view of what is 'complex' regarding Faulks' interest in World War I is taken by Christopher Hart. Hart, while reviewing *A Broken World* (which on its front cover references Faulks-as-editor as 'the author of *Birdsong*'), suggests that the anthology is 'an ill-judged exercise in selling Brand Faulks'. See 'Two faces of war', *The Sunday Times: Culture*, 27 July 2014, pp. 34-35 (p. 34). Controversy of this kind is itself perhaps reminiscent of the controversial nature of Flaubert's fiction arising from its famous-or-notorious 'indeterminacies' (most notably so in the case of the *Madame Bovary* trial).

22 For a good account of trench poetry as a form of poetic speech act with which to relieve symptoms associated with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, see Gabrielle Myers, '"Spread Like a Veil Upon a Rock": Septimus and the Trench Poets of World War I', *English*, 60.230 (Autumn 2011), 212-28.

23 See Rabindranath Tagore, *Gitanjali: Song Offerings, A Collection of Prose Translations Made by the Author from the Original Bengali*, introd. W. B. Yeats (Delhi: Macmillan, 1913), poem XCVI (p. 63).

24 Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, 31. For further discussion consonant with the idea of Proust as 'a mere introduction to Literature' (his work is associated with 'the apprenticeship to signs' (Deleuze)), see Gilles Deleuze, *Proust and Signs: The Complete Text*, trans. Richard Howard (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), especially the last chapter, 'Style' (at pp. 161-69).

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25 On literary realism's production of a so-called 'reality effect' (as presented with reference principally to Flaubert), see Roland Barthes, 'The Reality Effect', in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), pp. 141-48.

26 Martine Beugnet and Marion Schmid, *Proust at the Movies* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), p. 140. For an account of the different approaches to the extremely difficult task of adapting Proust, that lauds the more 'creative' approaches (including Ruiz's), see Melissa Anderson, 'In Search of Adaptation: Proust and Film', in Stam and Raengo, eds, *Literature and Film*, pp. 100-10.

27 Beugnet and Schmid quote from Stéphane Bouquet, 'Tous en scène: A propos du *Temps retrouvé* de Raoul Ruiz', *Cahiers du cinéma*, 535 (1999), 52-53 (p. 52).

28 On the *Recherche* as 'the narrative of a desire to write' (and *not*, in this sense, a recounting of the life of Marcel Proust), see Roland Barthes, '*Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure . . .*', in *The Rustle of Language*, pp. 277-90 (p. 277).

29 For an elegant account of the *Recherche* as a form of historical fiction (of the *fin de siècle*-Great War era), see Erin G. Carlston, 'Secret Dossiers: Sexuality, Race, and Treason in Proust and the Dreyfus Affair', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 48.4 (2002), 937-68.

30 Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), p. 52.