

Dostoevskii's "White Nights": The Dreamer Goes Abroad

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Ahista Ahista is [...] yet another adaptation of Fyodor Dostoyevsky's short story "White Nights"—and honestly, I've read and reread this story and [...] I wonder what it inspires in filmmakers, that so many of them want to explore it.¹

Fedor Dostoevskii's short story "White Nights" (1848), subtitled a "sentimental love story (from the notes of a dreamer)," has been adapted for the screen more than any other of his short works. A staggering twelve feature films have been mounted on the basis of this early short story, though only two Russian entries and Luchino Visconti's *Le notti bianche* (1957) carry Dostoevskii's title.² Perhaps even more surprising than the sheer number of adaptations, half of which were released in the twenty-first century, is the language distribution: Russian and Hindi tie for the most with three each, followed by two in English and French, and one in Iranian and Italian.³ Like the reviewer of *Ahista Ahista* in my epigraph, one wonders why this simple story of the eternal triangle has inspired so many filmmakers.

None of the non-Russian adaptations strives to recreate the time and place of Dostoevskii's story, that is, St. Petersburg of the 1840s.⁴ How, then, are these films framed? What happens to Dostoevskii's narrator when he goes abroad and settles down in twentieth- or twenty-first-century Livorno, Paris, Mumbai, or Strasbourg? Or, to use Lawrence Venuti's terminology, how does a film adaptation decontextualize the source text and recontextualize that same text in a different setting and time?⁵ One might also begin to think about how Dostoevskii's hypertext was translated into French and Italian hypertexts. This complex process of translation into a foreign language encodes cultural meaning into the hypertext, even before the translation is used in making a film script. What happens when the Romantic idealist of Dostoevskii's fiction is transformed into a character plucked from the cinema of the French New

Wave or Bollywood? Finally, how does the canon of film transpositions of "White Nights" influence subsequent versions? Visconti's film, for example, serves as an intertext, equal in significance to Dostoevskii's hypotext, not only for subsequent adaptations in the West (e.g., *Two Lovers*, 2009), but also in the East (e.g., *Saamariya*, 2007).

To answer these questions, I propose, first, to examine the two best-known cinematic hypertexts, namely, Luchino Visconti's *Le notti bianche* (1957) and Robert Bresson's *Quatre nuits d'un rêveur* (1971), focusing on how these two hypertexts interpret the identical hypotext (most likely through two different translations) so very differently, not only in terms of the details these directors choose to accent, but also how they manipulate the medium of film to convey their interpretations. I want to explore how these directors make use of what Alexander Burry refers to as "transpositional openings," that is, "transposable material—biographical, literary, religious, or journalistic intertexts—that had already been reworked by Dostoevsky in his creation of the source text, and because of the resulting instability is especially inviting of further transposition."⁶ I will demonstrate that *Le notti bianche* and *Quatre nuits d'un rêveur*, even though they are often regarded as minor films in these two directors' oeuvres, hold a special place among "White Nights" hypertexts, in that subsequent films might almost be regarded as remakes, although conceived in a completely different genre, for example Bollywood or twenty-first-century Catalan film. In other words, the cinematic language of Visconti and Bresson has become an integral component of what we might call the "White Nights Text." My consideration of Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Saamariya* and José Luis Guerín's *En la ciudad de Sylvia*, both released in 2007, will establish the "continuing life,"⁷ to use Walter Benjamin's term, of "White Nights" in the twenty-first century, and the continuing importance of Visconti and Bresson in that life.

Before turning to the films themselves, I want to say a few words about Dostoevskii's "charming"⁸ story (not necessarily an adjective that one associates with Dostoevskii's work), highlighting some of the features that have lent this film to such varied transpositional interpretations. The Dreamer in "White Nights" is the first in a series of nameless monologists in Dostoevskii's works—the most famous of whom is the spiteful narrator of *Notes from Underground* (1864)—who tell their own stories, often self-consciously foregrounding the act of narration itself. These dreamers all live their lives through books rather than experiencing real life, and their stories all involve an encounter with a young girl in distress. Virtually friendless, without family, seemingly without occupation, the dreamers in these tales live in almost permanent isolation. In the case of "White Nights," we learn in the extended monologue that opens the work that the Dreamer has been a resident in St. Petersburg for eight years. He roams the city and observes, but does not speak to anyone. He is the *flâneur* transported from Dostoevskii's "Petersburg Chronicle" of the

preceding year. He befriends not people but certain houses he passes on his wanderings, and it is with them that he converses. The reader assumes that he is one of the hordes of clerks that people St. Petersburg and so much of Russian literature of the 1840s, for example Nikolai Gogol's "Overcoat" and Dostoevskii's own earlier "Poor Folk," but no mention is made of his occupation, except near the end when he remarks that he is behind in his rent, but will take care of that when his salary is paid.

"White Nights" takes place over four nights and one morning during the magical period from late May through late July when the skies never completely darken, making the already ethereal St. Petersburg landscape even more magical, dreamlike, and unearthly. The days are marked by section titles in the text. On the first night, after returning to the city from a day in the countryside, the Dreamer chances to observe a young girl leaning against the railing of a canal and believes that he hears a muffled sigh. The Dreamer's actions and speech take their cue from books—everything he sees and experiences is filtered through literature and his imagination. He first imagines how he might act, as if he were a character in a novel: "I turned around, took a step in her direction and would certainly have uttered the word 'Madam,' but for the fact that I knew that this exclamation had already been uttered a thousand times in all our Russian society novels."⁹ It is not until a reeling gentleman begins to pursue the girl that the Dreamer finally does spring into action and save her from the man's unwanted attentions. Conversation ensues, during which the traditional gender roles are reversed: It is the Dreamer who admits to being "frightened" and Nastenka who tries to calm him. On the second night the Dreamer, aged twenty-six, the same age as Dostoevskii when writing this story, and seventeen-year-old Nastenka exchange their life stories. The Dreamer begins his "ridiculous story . . . as though [he] were reading something that had been written down,"¹⁰ embellishing it with rhetorical flourishes and a profusion of literary and cultural allusions, which begins, significantly, with E. T. A. Hoffmann and ends with Aleksandr Pushkin (with multiple references to the novels of Walter Scott and many others in between). The allusion to Hoffmann is not by chance, as the narrator's philosophy and his escape from mundane reality by means of the imagination all point to his ties with German Romanticism. We must assume, however, that this dizzying display of erudition is beyond the understanding of Nastenka, whose story is as simple and straightforward as the Dreamer's was florid and grand. She lives a quiet life with her blind grandmother, who pins Nastenka to her dress so that she knows where she is. Everything changes with the arrival of a young lodger, who invites them to the opera to see Gioachino Rossini's *Barber of Seville* and loans them books (Pushkin and Scott). Nastenka, of course, falls in love with him and when he is about to leave for a year, she packs up her belongings and goes to his room. It is now a year since the Lodger has left, and Nastenka waits for him nightly on

the embankment. The second night ends with a "letter scene," borrowed from Rossini's *Barber*. The Dreamer suggests to Nastenka that she write the Lodger a letter. After discussing how it should be written, the Dreamer suggests that he return tomorrow to pick up the letter and deliver it. To which Nastenka, blushing, hands the Dreamer her letter, already composed. On the third night, Nastenka, full of expectation, is disappointed that her lover has not come. On the fourth night, the Dreamer declares his love for Nastenka. At first she rejects the proposal, but she gradually reconciles herself to the idea, even going so far as to plan their future life and where they will live. The Lodger then suddenly appears, Nastenka rushes to him, and the Dreamer is left behind, alone, as the two walk off together. On the next morning, the Dreamer receives a letter from Nastenka in which she begs the Dreamer to forgive her and to remain her friend. The Dreamer never sees Nastenka again. The story ends with a post-script from the Dreamer, delivered fifteen years after the events of the story:

May your sky be clear, may your sweet smile be bright and serene, may you be blessed for that moment of bliss and happiness that you gave to another lonely, grateful heart! My God! A whole minute of bliss! Is that really so little for the whole of a man's life?¹¹

This concluding rhetorical benediction highlights a few of the issues facing the director, namely, the self-conscious mode of narration, the dual time structure of the story proper framed by the narrator in the present, fifteen years later, and finally, how the Dreamer's abstractness can be translated into concrete visual detail, given the absence of physical description of both characters and place. Foremost, however, is the opportunity provided by the text's reflexivity and the way in which the director, who in all the films I will discuss is the author of the screenplay, chooses to transpose Dostoevskii's narrative voice.

VISCONTI'S *LE NOTTI BIANCHE*: THE DREAMER'S FIRST STOP ABROAD

In their screenplay for *Le notti bianche*, certainly the best-known film adaptation of "White Nights," co-authors Suso Cecchi d'Amico and Luchino Visconti make no attempt to transpose the reflexive nature of Dostoevskii's narrative, erasing all traces of the rhetorical first-person narrator as well as the story's bookishness: murder mysteries replace Scott and Pushkin. The film marked a departure for Visconti, one of the major directors of Italian neo-realism, which among other things was noted for its depictions of the lives of ordinary characters from the lower classes viewed from a Marxist aesthetic, promoted the use of non-professional actors, and eschewed the sound stage

for filming on location out of doors. *Le notti bianche*, much to the dismay of many, featured a love story absolutely devoid of politics, was shot entirely on a set deliberately made to look artificial, and cast experienced actors in the leading roles. Indeed, Visconti embraced the dream-like atmosphere of the source text, as the director describes in a 1959 interview:

We wanted to make a film, nothing very big or extravagant, which could tell its story in a comparatively short space of time, preferably realistic, yet which at the same time moves on the fringe of a dream. [...] For my own part, I must say I'm attached to this little story—very big the way Dostoevsky wrote it, little in the way I filmed it—attached because it offers this possible escape from reality.¹²

Visconti transposes Dostoevskii's tale to mid-century Livorno. Mario (the Dreamer, played by Marcello Mastroianni), like many men in post-war Italy, has traveled in search of a job. Mario disembarks from a bus with an older couple and their two children after spending a day in the country. He walks to his lodgings alone, stopping in a bar not so much for a drink as for company, but is hurried out, as the bartender wants to close up. He observes a young girl, Natalia (Maria Schell), sobbing on the canal bridge. Two men on a motorcycle with a roaring engine harass Natalia, whom Mario then claims as his girl in order to get rid of the motorcyclists, and then offers to walk home. They agree to meet the following evening. On the second night she confesses that she is in love with her grandmother's former lodger (Jean Marais) who went away a year ago and promised to return in a year's time. It is for him that she waits on the canal bridge. The "letter scene" ensues, resulting in Mario's reluctant agreement to deliver Natalia's letter to his rival, which he ends up shredding to bits in a rage as a prostitute looks on. On the third night, the pair meets once more, and this time they go to a small café and dance to Bill Haley and the Comets. Mario confesses his love, but she runs away to the bridge to stand watch for the lodger. Affronted, Mario walks off with the prostitute (Clara Calamai), who has been stalking him the past few nights, but he suddenly changes his mind, prompting a brawl with her pimp, which coincidentally involves the Lodger, whom of course he does not recognize. The entire episode with the prostitute is Visconti's invention and will be incorporated by Bhansali a half-century later. On his way home Mario sees Natalia standing alone. They commandeer a boat moored at the canal's edge and Mario rows them away in the still night. All of a sudden it begins to snow and the two become enraptured, feeling themselves to be chosen, for only they are awake to enjoy the fluffy white snow, falling in the black night. As they walk home they see the dark figure of the Lodger. Natalia rushes to him, leaving Mario all alone, save the dog that followed him in the opening

scenes of the film, thus turning the narrative full circle with Mario once again alone.

Visconti's film, shot on a set that emphasizes its man-made quality, is set amidst the ruins of bombed-out buildings. The small-scale set with its simple geography of two halves of the city center divided by the canal, but joined by the bridge where they meet, sets in stark contrast the lives of Mario and Natalia: The side where Mario lives hums with vibrant life, lights, bars, and cafés. What catches the viewer's eye in the opening scenes are the almost German Expressionist stage-set and the play of the neon illumination of Esso, Ristorante, Tabacchi, and Farmacia that pierces the dark inky blackness. This play of light and dark dominates the entire film right through to the end when it begins to snow. On the other side lives Natalia with her grandmother, amongst barely illuminated ruins and empty streets. Despite the visible ravages of war, Natalia's side of the canal has a fairy-tale quality about it, which engulfs Mario, too, when he is drawn there, but he never wholly becomes part of that dream world.¹³ The morning after the second night he says to his landlady: "These past nights ... I don't know myself what I was doing. I was dreaming. That's what I was doing. I was dreaming."¹⁴ Dreaming here takes on a negative connotation—Mario chastises himself for being made a fool.

The oneiric landscape, however, does not prepare the viewer for the startling noises that resound in the opening scene, as outlined in Visconti's screenplay: "the muffled sound of cars and buses" and "the strident screech of the brakes of a bus stopping at the end of the line and the voices of the few people who are getting off."¹⁵ A few minutes later, "preceded by an ear-shattering noise, a motorcycle with two boys riding on it now sweeps into the scene from a nearby street."¹⁶ This automotive noise finds its counterpoint in the dance scene and Bill Haley's "Thirteen Women," which opens with the lines: "Last night I



Figure 2.1 The neon illumination in *Le notti bianche* (1957) plays an important role in the interplay of light and dark, a neo-Realist intrusion in Visconti's dreamscape.

was dreamin' / Dreamed about the H-bomb." That the song opens with a dream cannot be coincidence, but the reference to the H-bomb squarely places the song in the 1950s. At moments when the couple is alone, particularly on that final snowy night, only Nino Rota's haunting musical score breaks the unearthly silence.

Several critics have commented on the film's "theatricality," pointing out that in addition to his film work, Visconti had a distinguished career in the dramatic theater and opera stage.¹⁷ Visconti himself responded in an interview that *Le notti bianche* is

theatrical in the sense that it was a story about two people shot entirely in a studio set. That gave a sort of depth or resonance to the backgrounds. [...] I know what people say about me every now and then: that my films are a bit on the theatrical side and my stage productions a bit filmic. I don't see anything very wrong in that.¹⁸

The studio set, grainy film stock, and lighting all contribute to the film's fairy-tale atmosphere and sense of theater. At certain points realism and fairy tale are superimposed: for example, Visconti sets Natalia's fairy-tale story of parting with the Lodger firmly in a "realist" setting, namely, the window ledge of a bombed-out building. The narrative shifts in point of view are handled deftly. For example, Mario and Natalia, sitting in the window, face each other as Natalia begins telling her story; her first-person account of the past seamlessly shifts to a flashback of events in the past, ending with the Lodger speaking in the present tense as he bids his farewell. We hear sobbing and then the camera closes in on Natalia's tear-stained face and she resumes her first-person narrative, which she finishes speaking to Mario once again—Marais has dissolved into Mastroianni.

In keeping with Italian neo-realism, the characters all come from humble circumstances, but the international cast provides an unusual counterpoint. Casting Schell to play a blond Slavic immigrant with a foreign accent in her Italian, instead of Dostoevskii's brunette, contributes to the dream-like quality of her appearance in the film, which is further enhanced by casting the swash-buckling French actor Marais, whose maturity provides a vivid contrast to Mastroianni's boyishness. In fact, Marais's massive physical presence seems almost menacing in his few scenes with Schell. Schell's foreignness, by contrast, serves to highlight the Italianness of Calamai as the prostitute, whose neo-realist roots place her outside the dreamscape.¹⁹

Mario is a man in love with a flesh-and-blood woman, not an ideal. He does not deliver Natalia's letter. He suffers for love, catching cold from standing in the rain with Natalia, and in one of the great comic scenes in the movie his boarding house landlady nurses him to health the next morning. As he

confesses to Natalia on that first night, he is "terribly timid. I mean with girls. I'm not used to them."²⁰ In the dance scene, after accepting the challenge of the rival dancer, a "thin young fellow who looks insistently at Natalia," Mario "with the courage of the timid ... begins to attempt to show off: he removes his hand from Natalia's waist and begins to jump about rather awkwardly, staring back defiantly at the other dancer."²¹ Natalia is delighted with Mario's performance and her first dance, and the couple settles down at a table in the café. Mario is lulled into hoping that she has forgotten her lover, but when she hears that it is past ten, she runs to her post on the bridge.

The film ends in a snowstorm—Natalia and the Lodger are reunited on the bridge as Mario looks on. No moral is drawn that Mario's fate has been sealed and he will never find happiness, though he does offer Natalia this parting benediction: "Go to him. Don't be sorry. I ... I was wrong ... to try to make you doubt. Go to him. And God bless you for the moment of happiness you've given me. (Natalia kisses Mario.) It's not a little thing."²² He happens upon the same stray dog as in the opening of the film, which follows him into the distance, not another soul to be seen.

The dream vs. reality dichotomy spelled out by the geography of the set fundamentally structures the film. Natalia and the Lodger inhabit the dream world; indeed, the Lodger is such a nebulous character that the viewer, like Mario, almost does not believe in his existence. Mario is a real-life character who happens to intrude in a fairy tale, but never becomes part of that realm. Although Visconti clearly cultivates the atmosphere of Dostoevskii's "White Nights," the forays into the real world, as epitomized by the dance episode and the scenes set in Mario's lodgings, mark some of the film's real strengths. More importantly, Visconti's film establishes a visual hypertext, one which asserts its own cinematic vocabulary (Italian neo-realism), that will be a starting point for future filmmakers working within their own national cinema genres—French New Wave, Bollywood, Hollywood, post-Soviet cinema, etc.

ROBERT BRESSON'S *QUATRE NUITS D'UN RÊVEUR*: THE DREAMER AS ARTIST

Bresson's *Quatre nuits d'un rêveur* came fourteen years after Visconti's hypertext of "White Nights," but Bresson's opinion of his predecessor's work is not on record, unless one takes his own screenplay and film to be a response to the Italian. Where Visconti erased almost all traces of Dostoevskii's reflexivity, filmed his work on a sound stage, embraced theatricality, and used professional actors, Bresson did the exact opposite through his careful transposition of the Dreamer's first-person narrative, making Paris almost a character in the film, eliminating any traces of the theater, and employing non-professional actors.

In an interview published after the release of *Quatre nuits d'un rêveur*, Bresson comments on his use of Dostoevskii's stories: "I try to avoid a simple rendering. Although the films keep to the plots of Dostoevskii, I try to communicate impressions that are mine and part of my experience."²³ Curiously, Bresson, like Visconti, states that he turned to the Dostoevskii short stories "partly because of lack of time." In that same interview he explicitly draws a distinction between Dostoevskii's short narratives and the novels, thus excluding his film *Pickpocket*, which clearly makes use of *Crime and Punishment*, from his Dostoevskii-inspired works,²⁴ saying that

[he] would never dare to adapt the novels (*The Idiot*, *The Brothers Karamazov*, *Crime and Punishment*, etc.), which are formally perfect and complete in themselves. The two [Dostoevskii] stories from which I made my films are rather skimmed, but perfect for my purpose.²⁵

That Bresson, the director of *Journal d'un curé de campagne* (1951), which ushered in his engagement with first-person narrative in film, should be drawn to Dostoevskii's confessors seems only natural. In that film the priest witnesses every event that we observe on screen, which Bresson emphasizes with brief scenes of the priest writing in his journal, accompanied by his voice speaking the words he is writing. These scenes may introduce the event or come afterwards, but in all cases they create a tension between the written text and the cinematic transposition.²⁶

In interviews Bresson would often lament that he found it difficult to finance his films on account of his practice of using "models," that is, non-professional actors. What interested him, above all, was the quality of the voice; therefore, the ideal audition situation took place over the telephone. Physical presence supposedly came second, though one should note that both Dominique Sanda and Isabelle Weingarten, the leads in *Une femme douce* and *Quatre nuits d'un rêveur*, were professional fashion models before their appearance in Bresson's films, and one cannot help but notice the passing resemblance between Guillaume des Forêts, who plays Jacques in *Quatre nuits d'un rêveur*, and Jean-Pierre Léaud, one of the most famous faces in the French New Wave (about which more later). Bresson's *Notes on the Cinematographer* has a great deal to say about the use of models: "No actors. (No directing of actors). No parts"; or, "Models. Letting themselves be led not by you, but by the words and gestures you make them say and do."²⁷ There are numerous accounts of Bresson putting his models through their paces, which included endless repetitions of gestures, lines, looks, all of which accounts for the reserved or flat delivery of lines and his characters' blank expressions.²⁸ One need only compare Mastroianni's winning performance with the strangely disconnected portrayal by des Forêts.

Hand in hand with his use of models is Bresson's absolute disdain for theatricality in the cinema. As he writes in *Notes on the Cinematographer*: "Two types of film: those that employ the resources of the theatre (actors, direction, etc.) and use the camera in order *to reproduce*; those that employ the resources of cinematography and use the camera *to create*"; or, "Nothing rings more false in a film than that natural tone of the theatre copying life and traced over studied sentiments."²⁹ Bresson's scorn for theatricality and big-name actors to support or even carry a movie could not be further removed from Visconti's *Le notti bianche*.

Bresson translates the Dostoevskii story to a very specific time and place: post-1968 Paris. Or to be more exact, a very small section of Paris, namely, the Pont Neuf, the oldest bridge in Paris, and the surrounding embankment, including the statue of Henri IV, and Boulevard St. Germain where they part on the fourth night. The river is a much more palpable presence in Bresson than in Dostoevskii's hypotext, where descriptions of the city, the river, and the embankment are dropped after the Dreamer's introductory stroll and his first meeting with Nastenka. When Jacques first sees Marthe she is contemplating suicide on the Pont Neuf—with the emphasis on contemplation: The studied removal of her shoes and her careful climb onto the parapet signal that she is waiting for someone to come to her aid. Curiously, at least one writer on Bresson has credited Dostoevskii with the suicide motif, thus ostensibly granting equal authority to the texts of Bresson and Dostoevskii.³⁰ It is as if Bresson had sensed the suicides that one encounters in Dostoevskii's mature works from the 1860s on from the vantage point of 1848, for example the woman who throws herself off a bridge in *Crime and Punishment*.

Jacques and Marthe meet on the bridge and walk along the riverfront on the following three nights, once walking past a group of hippies, singing; at other points excursion boats cruise down the river both in daylight and at night, and a small band plays Brazilian bossa nova music. The traffic on the river is complemented by the sound of vehicular traffic: honking horns, motorcycles revving, automobile motors running, more often than actual shots of traffic—the major exception being the humorous opening scene where Jacques is hitchhiking out of town, and the camera eventually pulls back so that we see three other hitchhikers, and are let in on the joke. Typically, when a car does stop and he is asked where he is going he literally throws his hands up in the air, but does not give a verbal answer. Throughout the film dialogue, indeed human speech, plays a minimal role—it is the world around the characters that contributes the soundtrack to this film.

In the narrative of his story, Jacques recounts an unexpected visit by a fellow student from art school, an episode from Dostoevskii's text not usually transposed to the screen. At the sound of the doorbell, Jacques clears away the dishes and ashtray, and turns all his paintings toward the wall, so that not

one is on view. But the colleague has not come to view Jacques's art, but to lecture him that "craftsmanship is dead"; painting is a "meeting of the painter and the concept": "what's crucial is not the object but the painter ... the gesture." The post-1968 rhetoric does not engage Jacques, whose apartness from the student is emphasized by the fact that throughout the entire episode there is not a single shot of the two together. We watch the visitor speak, followed by a reaction shot of Jacques that consists of a non-verbal response: a word mouthed, a shrug of the shoulders. The visitor's long hair, moustache, and sweatshirt set into high contrast Jacques's unwavering uniform of Oxford cloth shirt and brown corduroy jacket, which he wears even to the country, where he performs an awkward somersault.

As the title indicates, Bresson retains Dostoevskii's structure of four nights, each of which is introduced by an intertitle, as are the life stories of Jacques and Marthe, which are exchanged on the second night. Marthe and Jacques settle down on the embankment, and she asks him to tell his life story, to which Jacques replies:

"My story? I have no story. I see no one. I speak to no one."

The camera cuts to the intertitle "Histoire de Jacques" which appears above the street sign Rue Antoine Dubois. The camera then cuts to a shot of Jacques walking down this street, accompanied by the voice-over:

"I live at 6 Rue Antoine Dubois ... in a loft on the third floor."

The voice-over ends, and the next several scenes take place in silence, that is, in the absence of dialogue, though we hear the sounds of traffic, and shoes clacking on the street. We watch as he enters his building from the street, and in the next frame we see him enter his apartment, carrying a basket of produce. The scene then shifts to Jacques exiting the metro and walking down the street following women. He looks in the shop window and a woman notices him. He follows her once she is outside. Then he is taken by another woman, and follows her until she boards a bus, while he stands near a placard advertising the Opéra Comique—a telling commentary on Jacques's activities. The camera then cuts back to Marthe and Jacques sitting on the embankment, and Jacques admitting that he has fallen in love innumerable times, but "with no one, an ideal, the woman in my dream." Eventually, after following a couple as they leave their Rolls-Royce, Jacques does return to his loft and proceeds to record his dream on a tape recorder. Once he finishes taping this segment, he turns to painting. Bresson's solution of the tape recorder allows Jacques to tell his dreams only to the viewer.³¹ The events are not transferred to the screen, since he does not confide these dreams to Marthe. The dream itself is a variation on the rather long dream in Dostoevskii's story: "where they so often would walk together, where they

hoped, grieved, loved, loved each other for such a long time ... How innocent and pure was their love ..."³² Jacques will continue to record sounds and stories into his tape recorder to the film's very end. He records pigeons cooing, the incessant repetition of Marthe's name, and then listens to his recordings on the bus and in the park. The film's final scene shows Jacques alone in his loft, recording yet another fantasy: "I have suffered a thousand deaths, but it's you I love ... What strength makes your eyes shine ... ?" Once the recording is finished, he turns to his painting.

Dostoevskii's Dreamer is a loner of unspecified occupation, more than likely a government clerk in St. Petersburg's overgrown officialdom. He has been in the city for eight years but knows no one. His only "creations" are his ephemeral dreams, which even he realizes will fade. Even though he is a decade older than Nastenka, he is terribly bashful. Bresson's Jacques, on the other hand, is a painter. It surely is no coincidence that Bresson moved to Paris as a young man to study painting. In answer to Jean-Luc Godard's statement that Bresson seems to be "someone who loves painting very much," Bresson replies,

I am a painter. And perhaps it is there, precisely, that you find your idea. [...] I write as I put color: I put a little on the left, a little on the right, a little in the middle, I stop, I start again ...³³

Bresson here is describing in precise detail the manner in which Jacques paints. None of his several painting sessions lasts more than a few minutes. He works on several canvases simultaneously, but in each instance he fills in a bit of color here, draws part of a line there. And it is worth noting that the canvases are large, and the fields of color he paints are correspondingly large. Compare Jacques's painting with the tiny black spots the fellow student shows him during his visit.

Painting complements the act of recording, perhaps a metaphor for the sound and picture that go together to make a film. After delivering Marthe's letter to the Lodger's friends, he returns to his room. In a characteristic shot we see only a fragment of Jacques from the knees down as he enters the room. According to Bresson, "fragmentation ... is indispensable if one does not want to fall into *representation*. See beings and things in their separate parts. Render them in order to give them a new independence."³⁴ Jacques then proceeds to paint, and then lies down on his bed, where he listens to his recording of repetitions of the name Marthe over and over again, all the while holding his erect paintbrush at waist level. The viewer literally awaits his climax as the masturbatory chant of Marthe's name speeds up and reaches a crescendo.

Bresson's Jacques is straight out of the French New Wave and bears a strong resemblance to Jean-Pierre L aud, French New Wave actor par excellence

and the hero of François Truffaut's series of films about Antoine Doinel. In Bresson's universe, it would be difficult to choose someone more appropriate to represent the anti-"model." In the 1968 Truffaut film *Baisers volés*, the bumbling Doinel loses a succession of jobs, but does, ultimately, end up in bed with his girlfriend. Bresson, not a director of romantic comedies, follows Dostoevskii's lead and withholds a happy ending for Jacques. Nevertheless, Bresson unmistakably alludes to this Truffaut film, which had come out three years earlier.³⁵ Jacques's intoning of the name Marthe, which he records and plays back in his room, on the bus, and in the park, is a direct quotation from *Baisers volés*, where Doinel looks into the bathroom mirror and repeats over and over again the names of three women. The repetition of the name Marthe is complemented by visual repetition: Jacques passes a store named Marthe, and the barge cruising down the Seine, which cannot help but remind the filmgoer of Jean Vigo's *L'Atalante* (another intertextual quotation), bears her name. Jacques is clearly following in Doinel's footsteps, though he is not rewarded with the girl in the end. Nonetheless, he is not Dostoevskii's "sexless" Dreamer. He may be comical and may not end up with the girl, but not for lack of trying on his part. He flirts, he stares, he follows unknown women on the street.

Marthe's physical longings complement those of Jacques. She, too, is inexperienced sexually, but so anxious to leave behind her virginity and her mother's apartment that she falls in love with the homely Lodger, sight unseen. Marthe learns about the Lodger through the books he loans her mother, a selection that includes Louis Aragon's erotic novel *Irène*. Later he presents her mother with tickets to a film premiere (the twentieth-century equivalent of the opera), but does not accompany them. The film, tellingly titled *The Bonds of Love*, is an awful gangster movie that ends with a drawn-out death scene where the man who has been shot pulls out a photo of his girlfriend and kisses it. It would be difficult to picture a more un-Bressonian scene. And, indeed, Bresson admits to having fun with the interpolated movie:

In *Four Nights* I profited from the chance to poke fun at a certain kind of movie; it's just a mockery of passion and romanticism, of blood and violence. I also thought that all that exaggeration would contrast with the restraint of my character, which is not really restraint but simply a refusal to indulge in theatrics.³⁶

The romance of Marthe and the Lodger, a too serious, long-haired young man who is about to leave for Yale University, consists of tapping on the wall that separates their two rooms until the night she goes to him and they make love—all the while with her mother pacing about the apartment, calling her

name repeatedly (an analogue to Jacques's recording of her name on the tape recorder). Bresson employs parallel montage of the mother's calls and the unfolding scene of lovemaking in the Lodger's room to emphasize the thin membrane of walls and door that separate them.³⁷ We watch as he unhooks her bra, but we see only his hands and her torso, and then the bra lands on the bed, after which he places his glasses next to it—a metaphor of their two selves. When she does go to his room, she gives boredom and wanting to leave her mother's apartment as reasons for coming—quite prosaic when compared with Nastenka's Romantic longings. This is preceded, however, by the extended nude scene, in which Marthe examines herself in the mirror. Marthe's body is viewed in fragments—there is only a quick glimpse of her entire body—the camera does not pull back to linger on her body from head to toe.³⁸ The nude scene told in fragments is certainly one of the loveliest episodes in Bresson's entire oeuvre. The long shots—so atypical of Bresson—of river life, couples in the park, life on the streets of Paris, particularly on that final night when he asks Marthe to look at the moon, point to the film's special place in Bresson's oeuvre.

Quatre nuits d'un rêveur received the British Film Institute Award for 1971, although many viewed the award as one given for Bresson's work as a whole and not this particular film. Like Dostoevskii's text it represents something of an anomaly in the director's work. Where his previous film, *Une femme douce*, based on Dostoevskii's "The Meek One," opens with the title character's suicide (death and suicide haunt most of Bresson's oeuvre), *Quatre nuits d'un rêveur* begins with suicide averted. Bresson's story of Jacques's endearing longing and innocence is as charming as Dostoevskii's text. Until recently the film never achieved the recognition of Visconti's *Le notti bianche*, but with the passing of time the two films are now viewed as minor masterpieces in the work of the two directors. More importantly for my purposes, the two films continue to resonate today, not merely as works of art in their own right, but as important hypertexts in the history of adaptations of "White Nights." So important, in fact, that they almost supplant the hypotext in subsequent transpositions. Visconti and Bresson, each in his own way, brilliantly decontextualize Dostoevskii's reflexive mid-nineteenth-century tale of the eternal triangle and recontextualize the work in contemporary Europe and European cinematic culture (Italian neo-realism and French New Wave), thus paving the way for future recontextualizations and permutations of the Dreamer.

THE DREAMER IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY: SAAWARIYA AND EN LA CIUDAD DE SYLVIA

Two film adaptations of Dostoevskii's "White Nights" were released in 2007: Sanjay Bhansali's Hindi-language *Saawariya*, a flamboyant song-and-dance

spectacle, and *En la ciudad de Sylvia*, a French-language art film almost without dialogue, shot in the old part of central Strasbourg by the Spanish director José Luis Guerín. Despite the very different sensibilities of the two works, both films grapple with similar problems, for example transferring the action out of Russia and into the twenty-first century, utilizing the legacy of Visconti and Bresson and yet situating the film in their respective traditions (Bollywood and Catalan cinema). Both films present love stories, but the telling of their stories could not be more different. Gulab, the “princess of the streets,” is charged with the narration of the story of Raj, the would-be rock star, while *En la ciudad de Sylvia* opens wordlessly.

The plot of *Saawariya*, to a large extent, follows Dostoevskii by way of Visconti. The story opens in the red-light district of an unnamed town, a “dreamland,” presumably in India, but with attributes borrowed from the US and Italy, and perhaps St. Petersburg via Venice. Raj (Ranbir Kapoor), a musician newly arrived to town looking for work, meets the prostitute Gulab (Rani Mukherjee) in the RK Bar and sings for her his signature song “Saawariya” (“My Love”). She is taken by the handsome singer, but he just wants to be friends. On a rainy night he falls in love with Sakina (Sonam Kapoor), who, he learns the following night, when they exchange their stories, awaits her lover Imaan (Salman Khan) on the bridge. Sakina lives with her grandmother, a carpet weaver, who also takes in lodgers. Imaan, the lodger, invites them to the cinema, where he embraces her. He leaves the following day, but has promised to return on the night of the festival of Eid, which is fast approaching. Raj nevertheless continues his wooing, confiding in both Gulab and Lillian, his landlady who is allotted the role of the Bollywood mother figure. There is a letter scene, after which Raj, like Mario in *Le Notti bianche*, destroys the letter. But Lillian persuades him to go to the address and deliver the message in person. Raj reprises “Saawariya” for Sakina in his bar and becomes convinced that she loves him, which he announces to Lillian over the phone. Sakina, however, runs back to the bridge, where she finds Imaan, and the two walk off, leaving Raj alone.

Even this brief capsule of the plot shows ties to Visconti: for example, Raj is a recent arrival to the town; the grandmother’s carpet business; they take shelter by a building when caught in the rain and as in Visconti a man asks when the rain will stop; the prostitute witnesses Raj burning the letter; Raj sings and dances for Sakina at a bar in front of an audience and she briefly dances with him (her first dance), which reminds the viewer of the dance scene set in the café in *Le notti bianche*; it snows on the last night, and Raj scampers about. The general contours of the lavish set (bridge, canal, neon lights) clearly allude to Visconti’s more modest scenery, but whereas the Italian film is a study in chiaroscuro, Bhansali’s over-the-top production is awash in purples and royal blue, so much so that the viewer is blinded when a chorus dressed



Figure 2.2 The neon signs in *Saawariya* might be read as homage to *Le notti bianche*.

in white takes the stage. The English-language neon signs—and indeed all the signs are in Roman letters (Windermere, Lilianji, Ace, Capitol, Clifton Hotel, and most importantly, RK)—clearly represent a homage to Visconti, though they have more in common with twenty-first-century Las Vegas than Visconti's haunting neon illumination. The combination of closed set and the lavish song-and-dance numbers creates a theatrical atmosphere that verges on musical theater.³⁹

While recognizing the major influence of Visconti's film in shaping the plot and set design, however, the viewer is ever mindful that this is a Bollywood production; moreover, a production that makes frequent reference to its native roots. As Naman Ramachandran writes,

Saawariya introduces a pair of actors with film lineage into the Bollywood pantheon: Ranbir Kapoor (as Raj, the singer who falls for the mysterious Sakina on the bridge) is the fourth generation of the legendary Kapoor family, while female lead Sonam Kapoor (no relation) is the daughter of actor Anil Kapoor. Bhansali ignores Soman's lineage, but litters his film with references to Ranbir's family: *Saawariya* features a bar called RK after Ranbir's grandfather Raj Kapoor's well-known RK studios; there is imagery from the RK film *Shree 420* (1955); and Ranbir is made to ape his grandfather's mannerisms and mouth lines from his father Rishi Kapoor's iconic *Karz* (1980).⁴⁰

Bhansali's allusions to the Hindi cinema tradition, like Bresson's inter-textual reference to New Wave cinema, both comment on the present and situate his film not only in the history of adaptations of "White Nights," but also in the history of Indian film. For example, the entire episode with the umbrella that first night (first she is on the bridge under an umbrella, later they alternately walk under the umbrella, and finally they share it) alludes to

Kapoor's *Shree 420*, as Vijay Mishra points out in his discussion of Bhansali and Dostoevskii.⁴¹ The recognition of these intertextual references both complicates the film's reception and at the same time indigenizes the foreign story. The umbrella motif reappears in the film's final scene. As in *Le notti bianche*, snow falls on the final night, rendering the cityscape even more dreamlike. Raj scampers about, a snowball fight ensues, and he drapes his coat over Sakina's shoulders. Bhansali here follows Visconti to the letter—not Dostoevskii. In these few details, all scripted by Visconti, Bhansali clearly acknowledges his Italian predecessor. Visconti transposes Dostoevskii's mid-nineteenth-century reflexive narrative to war-ravaged, post-war Italy, and yet he manages to retain the story's dreamlike, fairy-tale aspect. The Lodger suddenly appears on the bridge, and she runs to meet him. In Bhansali's hypertext, Raj, left alone, discovers in the snow the anklet Sakina lost on their first meeting—and then the umbrella from their first meeting opens, a maneuver that allows Bhansali to bring to a close the “umbrella motif” and its allusions to the Bollywood cinematic tradition. The Dreamer does indeed speak Hindi, but the journey is by way of Italy.

José Luis Guerín's *En la ciudad de Sylvia*, on the other hand, subtly points to Bresson's film as its formative hypertext. The Dostoevskii story is all but gone, save the intertitles that announce the three nights—and not Bresson's four—even though most of the film takes place during the day. The film is set in the old city of central Strasbourg, which seems to be populated almost exclusively by handsome young people, women comprising an overwhelming majority, whom the protagonist studies, much as Jacques in *Quatre nuits d'un rêveur* follows women on the streets of Paris and observes them through shop windows. The importance of the urban setting is announced in the title, though it is Sylvia that defines this particular city. The film's single extended scene with dialogue takes place more than halfway through the film and is only ten minutes long. We hear the hum of human speech, voices in the hotel hallway, a few stray words, but nothing that helps the viewer build a narrative. Instead we hear the noises of the city: traffic, birdsong, church bells, the clack of shoes on cobblestone, wheeling suitcases, rolling bottles, music (e.g., female buskers at an outside café play a traditional Macedonian tune)—all of which puts Guerín firmly in the Bresson branch of “White Nights” versions.

The protagonist's occupation might be rendered as *flâneur*, a term that has been used to describe the roving Dreamer in the introductory pages of Dostoevskii's “White Nights.”⁴² Charles Baudelaire's disquisition in “The Painter of Modern Life” on the *flâneur*, whose element is the crowd, a spectator of the highest order who is both away from home and yet feels at home, perfectly describes Guerín's Dreamer.⁴³ Baudelaire sums up not only the Dreamer's character but also the film's “plot”: the observation of

beautiful women by a foreigner, which takes place amidst crowds, framed in part through mirrors, reflections, and kaleidoscopes.⁴⁴

The film opens with the camera panning a dark hotel room, curtains billowing in the breeze from the open windows. A handsome young man, the Dreamer, played by the French actor Xavier Lafitte, is asleep, his torso bared to the camera. On the bedside table lie a hotel key (Room 307), a color map of Barcelona, and a coaster from a bar named Les Aviateurs, on which another map has been drawn by hand. The next morning he sits on his bed, absolutely still, clutching a pencil. He is clothed, with tousled long dark hair, barefoot, a white loose shirt open at the neck exposing his chest. He writes in his notebook and then erases.

Later he exits the Hotel Patricia holding a map, saunters down the cobblestone street and eventually walks off camera, while the camera follows other pedestrians. The shot had been set up by the camera recording other pedestrians on the street: A man wheeling a suitcase, for example, walks down the street and takes a right turn, out of our view. Again, one is reminded of Bresson's tendency to record where the character has been rather than where he is going. The viewer is left to piece together these clues to the puzzle as the film progresses.

The Dreamer, an artist and writer, is in search of Sylvia, a woman he met in the Strasbourg bar Les Aviateurs six years ago. In a scene that lasts some twenty minutes, the Dreamer sits alone in the outside café at the Conservatory of Dramatic Arts and sketches the heads of the beautiful women (and they are all handsome) in a notebook titled "En la ciudad de Sylvia / Dans la ville de Sylvie." It is important that, as was the case in Bresson, we witness the Dreamer in the act of creation and see his works, even though he ruthlessly erases and scribbles over them. As David Bordwell writes,

The sequence is a pleasure to watch, partly because of the constant refreshing of the image with faces, nearly all of them gorgeous, most of them female. [...] Yet the scene builds curiosity and suspense too, thanks to Guérin's sustained and varied use of optical POV [point of view]. He gives us an almost dialogue-free exploration of a cinematic space through one character's viewpoint.⁴⁵

Bordwell further describes how the Dreamer is revealed in this scene only after a succession of six shots, slightly out of focus. Guérin then manipulates the point of view by obstructing the viewed object and playing with the reaction shots to create suspense and a narrative from a situation that can be succinctly summed up as: young man sits at table and sketches beautiful women around him.

Unsurprisingly, *La Ciudad de Sylvia* came in for sharp criticism at the 2007

Venice Film Festival for its objectification of women.⁴⁶ Rob Stone, however, counters this critique by asserting that this assumes that the film is exclusively shot from the Dreamer's perspective, which is clearly not the case. Be that as it may, one certainly senses a male gaze obsessively following the shapely non-Sylvia through the half-deserted streets of Strasbourg, very much in line with Bresson's Jacques who follows women through the streets of a much busier Paris. And yet it is not insignificant that the male body is the one that is disrobed and bared to the camera in the opening sequence and the final scene in the hotel room, where we dimly see the Dreamer's naked body alongside a woman wrapped in the sheets. In *Saawariya*, too, it is the male body that is displayed to the audience—I have in mind the song and dance sequence after Raj's meeting with Sakina when he dances in his lodgings, covered only by a towel. Charu Gupta, for one, is of the opinion that the "masculinity on display is almost 'feminine,' especially his shapely waxed legs ... His lean body, draped in a scanty towel, actively invited the viewer to linger over it."⁴⁷ By contrast, we do not see more than Sakina's ankle. The female or homoerotic gaze is also at work in the dance scene in Visconti's *Le Notti bianche*, with the male dancer seizing the spotlight in his tight pants and seductive moves on the dance floor—we barely notice his female partner. Tied to this phenomenon is the figure of the Lodger in Visconti, Bresson, and Bhansali, who in all cases is older, more mature and "more masculine"—the dreamers in these three instances are mere boys. Dostoevskii offers only the information that the Dreamer is "timid" with women, whereas the Lodger actively courts Nastenka and then promises to come back for her.

At long last, Guérin's Dreamer spies a woman through the café window (in a stunning bit of camera work, the window both mirrors the outside and refracts the images on the inside) whom he believes to be Sylvia (Pilar López de Ayala). He follows her closely for ten minutes in silence through the labyrinthine cobblestone streets of the old city, losing her at one point, but picking up her trail, eventually boarding the same tram as she, where he finally speaks to her, addressing her as Sylvie. The sequence on the tram is a tour de force: the windows on the tram and their reflection of the landscape and passengers while the tram is in motion continue the mirror effects at the conservatory café. She replies that she is not Sylvia, and that he is mistaken, to which he profusely apologizes. She prepares to leave the tram, warning him not to follow. When she alights, she turns around, blows him a kiss and then walks away. That night he goes to Les Aviateurs, where we first glimpse him in a mirror as he watches the barmaid. The combination of her looks and the physical set combine to achieve the impression that she has just stepped out of Edouard Manet's last painting, "A Bar at the Folies-Bergère" (1882); she then places a flower in her cleavage, thus emphasizing the resemblance even more, to the accompaniment of Blondie's seventies hit "Heart of Glass." The Dreamer

watches the women dance (women far outnumber men at Les Aviateurs, as is the case everywhere in this film) to "That Woman" (2007) a song by the Madrid-based group Migala, bringing the music into the twenty-first century. Later that same night the camera pans the dark hotel room, lit only by light from the street and traffic, just as in the film's opening scene, but now there are two naked bodies in bed: the Dreamer and a woman. Guerin's Dreamer is not the "sexless" being of Dostoevskii's creation. The next day finds the Dreamer once again visiting sites from earlier in the film, continuing his search for Sylvia. The film is as much about the city as it is about Sylvia, his muse, and in this respect Guerin is certainly following in the footsteps of his predecessor Bresson.

The Dreamer's quest for Sylvia belongs to the time-honored tradition of the artist and his muse.⁴⁸ The graffiti "LAURE JE T'AIME" that the Dreamer encounters so frequently in central Strasbourg alludes to Petrarch and his Sonnets to Laura, while the shots of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's statue—Goethe spent time in Strasbourg as a young writer—lead one to the novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774), a pre-Romantic epistolary novel in which the eponymous hero visits a village and falls in love with Lotte, who is already engaged to be married, much as Nastenka is betrothed. Like Werther, the Dreamer in Guerin's film is a stranger—a panhandler at the Conservatory café even calls Guerin's Dreamer a "dumb hick," thus branding him as an outsider. In fact, like Dostoevskii's Dreamer, the male protagonists in these four films are all strangers to the city where they live.⁴⁹ Guerin reinterprets and transposes the allusions to German Romanticism in Dostoevskii's text, which



Figure 2.3 Reflections in windows and mirrors comment on the Dreamer's vision throughout *En la ciudad de Sylvia*. Here the barmaid at Les Aviateurs and the Dreamer's reflection in the mirror behind her.

are used to justify and explain the Dreamer's fantasy dream life, along with references to other early nineteenth-century writers and artists, such as Scott, Pushkin, and Rossini. By replacing them with literary allusions that suit his interpretation and incorporation of the theme of artist and muse he actualizes a latent potential in Dostoevskii's text. In the other films under discussion, the Dreamer is left alone as he watches his "beloved" walk away with the Lodger. The Dreamer/Artist in *En la ciudad de Sylvia*, on the other hand, continues his quest for Sylvia, his muse. He cannot abandon his quest for inspiration if he is to remain an artist.

The combination of the familiar and the new, what Linda Hutcheon refers to as the pleasure that one derives from "repetition and surprise" is what drives transpositions.⁵⁰ It is surely this amalgam of fidelity and change that Visconti, Bresson, Bhansali, and Guerín each in his own way exploits in their transpositions of Dostoevskii's story. In so doing, they contribute not only to the story's "continuing life," but also to the lives of its transpositions. One need only look to James Gray's *Two Lovers*, released in 2008, the year after the films by Bhansali and Guerín, and interviews in which Gray credits Dostoevskii's "White Nights" as one of the inspirations for the film, along with "*Vertigo* and lots of Fellini from the 1950s."⁵¹ While the references to *Vertigo* and Fellini might startle on first glance, it is only natural that cinematic texts comprise the vocabulary of cinematic transpositions. The blogger on Not Just Movies more fully acknowledges Gray's indebtedness to Visconti, when he writes that *Two Lovers* is "based on a Visconti film in turn based on Dostoevsky's short story."⁵² In other words, "White Nights" is no longer merely a verbal text, but rather is one component of the "White Nights Text," which includes visual texts as well, the films under discussion here, but also, for example, Mstislav Dobuzhinskii's modernist black-and-white illustrations first published in 1922, which have firmly become a visual component to the Dostoevskii text in the Russian context.

Visconti and Bresson have forever altered the way we view "White Nights." The migration from a purely literary text into new visual territory, crossing the border from short story to the cinema with Visconti and Bresson as guides, has been accomplished. The twenty-first-century audience can no longer see "White Nights" without their films. Their works, together with those by Bhansali, Guerín, and Gray, among others, have created a new language for the "White Nights Text" that incorporates elements of Italian neo-realism, the French New Wave, Bollywood, and the contemporary *flâneur*.

NOTES

1. <<http://www.totallyfilmi.com/2011/03/ahista-ahista-dir-shivam-nair-2006.html>> (last accessed January 11, 2014). The blog is subtitled "West meets East—the musings of a Canadian fan of Hindi cinema."
2. The twelve films, in chronological order, are: 1934: *Peterburgskaia noch'* (Petersburg Night), dir. G. Roshal' and Vera Stroeva, USSR; 1957: *Le notti bianche* (White Nights), dir. L. Visconti, Italy; 1959: *Belye noch'i* (White Nights), dir. I. Pyr'ev, USSR; 1960: *Chhalia*, dir. Manmohan Desai, India; 1971: *Quatre nuits d'un rêveur* (Four Nights of a Dreamer), dir. Robert Bresson, France; 1991: *Belye noch'i* (White Nights), dir. Leonid Kvinikhidze, Russia; 2002: *White Nights*, dir. Farzad Motamen, Iran; 2006: *Shades of Day*, dir. Vitaly Sumin, USA; 2006: *Ahista Ahista* (Slowly Slowly), dir. Shivam Nair, India; 2007: *Saamariya* (My Love), dir. Sanjay Leela Bhansali, India; 2007: *En la ciudad de Sylvia* (In the City of Sylvia), dir. José Luis Guerín, Spain; 2009: *Two Lovers*, dir. James Gray, USA. This group does not take into consideration the animated version by Sulaiman Khan ("starring Johnny Depp as Jacques") and *Belye noch'i: Film-Ballet* (as opposed to a film of a ballet) with Bolshoi Ballet dancers Nina Timofeeva and Mikhail Lavrovskii (1972). Both of these works are available on YouTube at <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NQnFIYutlXA>> and <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SETSNsbVwAk&list=PLA582B4Eo8B32C950>> (last accessed January 29, 2014). I am grateful to Alexandra Smith for bringing the "film-ballet" to my attention. Even though these two works lay outside of my inquiry in this chapter, it is worth noting that the credit "starring Johnny Depp as Jacques" references Robert Bresson's *Quatre nuits d'un rêveur*, where Dostoevskii's nameless Dreamer is christened Jacques. For now, I want to draw attention to the fact that the animation short is an adaptation of Dostoevskii by way of Bresson.
3. The very small amount of dialogue in *En la ciudad de Sylvia*, by the Spanish director José Luis Guerín, is in French, as the movie is set in Strasbourg.
4. Only Pyr'ev's *Belye noch'i* is set in 1840s St. Petersburg. *Petersburg Night* opens with a scene of snow-swept countryside, while Kvinikhidze's 1991 film is set in contemporary Leningrad.
5. Venuti, "Adaptation, Translation, Critique," 30.
6. Burry, *Multi-Mediated Dostoevsky*, 34.
7. Benjamin, "The Translator's Task," 76. Readers may be more familiar with the earlier translation of this term as "afterlife."
8. The adjective belongs to Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Seeds of Revolt*, 343.
9. Dostoevsky, "White Nights," 8.
10. *Ibid.*, 17.
11. *Ibid.*, 57.
12. Doniol-Valcroze and Domarchi, "Visconti," 146.
13. Nowell-Smith, among others, discusses the "central spatial metaphor" and its thematic implications, 98.
14. Visconti, "White Nights," 56.
15. *Ibid.*, 3.
16. *Ibid.*, 12.
17. Visconti staged *Crime and Punishment* in 1946; his productions of Verdi's *La Traviata* and Bellini's *La Sonnambula* were both staged to tremendous acclaim at La Scala in 1955 with Maria Callas in the leading roles.
18. Doniol-Valcroze and Domarchi, "Visconti," 145.
19. See Hennessey, "Theatrical Space," 168–74.

20. Visconti, "White Nights," 17.
21. Ibid., 65.
22. Ibid., 89–90.
23. Clarens, "Four Nights of a Dreamer," 4.
24. See Chapter 3 by Olga Peters Hasty and Chapter 4 by S. Ceilidh Orr on Bresson and *Pickpocket* in this volume; see also Frazier, "Sun-bathed Steppes in French Prisons."
25. Clarens, "Four Nights of a Dreamer," 4.
26. See Sitney, "The Rhetoric of Robert Bresson," esp. 128–9.
27. Bresson, *Notes on the Cinematographer*, 14, 66.
28. See, for example, Jonathan Rosenbaum's account of working on Bresson's *Four Nights of a Dreamer*: "Two Nights of an Extra." See also Hanlon, *Fragments*, 115–24, for a discussion of Bresson's use of models and the effects he achieves.
29. Bresson, *Notes on the Cinematographer*, 15, 18.
30. See Stadler, "Bresson, Dostoevsky, Bakhtin": "Dostoevsky's dreamer ... meets a girl of seventeen, desperate and apparently ready to commit suicide," 17. The motif, displaced from girl to Dreamer, opens James Gray's *Two Lovers*, where the male protagonist throws himself into the freezing waters off Brighton Beach.
31. Bresson's strategy of the tape recorder as a means to convey Jacques's dreams looks forward to Gary Walkow's 1995 film *Notes from Underground*, where the Underground Man tells his story cum confession to a video camera. As Robert Stam writes, "The fact that we as an audience become Underground Man's interlocutors—by looking at the camera he is also looking at us—cinematizes the implied verbal interlocation of the written text. The camera (and therefore the spectator) takes the place of Underground Man's imaginary interlocutors." Stam, *Literature Through Film*, 204.
32. Dostoevskii, "White Nights," 24.
33. Godard and Delahaye, "The Question," 460.
34. Bresson, *Notes on the Cinematographer*, 93.
35. Keith Reader confirmed my surmise regarding the connection to *Baisers Volés*. Reader, *Robert Bresson*, 107.
36. Clarens, "Four Nights of a Dreamer," 3.
37. In general, there is an emphasis in *Quatre nuits d'un rêveur* similar to certain Dostoevskii works, *Crime and Punishment* being a good example, on liminal spaces. Many interior scenes in the film are introduced by the opening and shutting of doors and the accompanying rattle of the handle, buzz of the doorbell, and slamming of the door. This is particularly pronounced in this lovemaking scene, and earlier when Jacques goes to deliver Marthe's letter to the Lodger's friends, and visits them later to see if there has been a response. He enters the building, closing the door behind him, he ascends the stairs—and the camera remains stationary so that we see where he has been as opposed to where he has gone—and he then remains outside the apartment on the threshold as he speaks to the Lodger's friends.
38. See Hanlon, *Fragments*, 134, and Clarens, "Four Nights of a Dreamer," 3, for an analysis of the choreography of the nude scene.
39. More than one reviewer has noted the influence of Baz Luhrmann's *Moulin Rouge*. See, for example, Mishra, "News from the Crypt," 325; and Ramachandran, "Saawariya," 83.
40. Ramachandran, "Saawariya," 83. See Mishra, "Spectres of Sentimentality," for an extensive analysis of the Kapoor intertext in *Saawariya*.
41. Mishra, "Spectres of Sentimentality," 454.
42. See, for example, Fanger, *Dostoevsky and Romantic Realism*, 168.
43. According to Stone, the protagonist is named the Dreamer in the credits; this is not the

case in my Cinema Guild DVD, but it does nicely tie the character to the other Dreamers in this chapter. See Stone, "*En la ciudad de Sylvia*," 176.

44. Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life*, 9.
45. Bordwell and Thompson, "Three Nights of a Dreamer."
46. Stone, "*En la ciudad de Sylvia*," 177ff.
47. Gupta, "Visual Pleasures for the Female Gaze," 19.
48. This is clearly spelled out in Guerin's *Unas fotos ... en la ciudad de Sylvia* (Some Photos ... In the City of Sylvia), which some have called a preparatory work for the feature film, but which is probably better described as a companion film.
49. This is not made explicit in Bresson, though there is certainly no indication that Jacques has family in Paris. It is more likely that he moved to Paris from the provinces, like Bresson, to study art.
50. Hutcheon with O'Flynn, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 4.
51. "Relying on His Own Tastes."
52. Not Just Movies, available at <<http://armchairc.blogspot.com/2009/12/two-lovers.html>> (last accessed April 1, 2014).