

REVIEW ARTICLE

Adaptation Studies at a Crossroads

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After years of being stuck in the backwaters of the academy, adaptation studies is on the move. A decade's worth of pioneering work by Brian McFarlane, Deborah Cartmell, Imelda Whelehan, James Naremore and Sarah Cardwell on the relation between film adaptations and their literary antecedents culminated in the publication of Robert Stam's three volumes on adaptation, two of them co-edited with Alessandra Raengo, in 2004 and 2005. The monumental project of Stam and Raengo sought to reorient adaptation studies decisively from the fidelity discourse universally attacked by theorists as far back as George Bluestone to a focus on Bakhtinian intertextuality—with each text, avowed adaptation or not, afloat upon a sea of countless earlier texts from which it could not help borrowing—and this attempt was largely successful. If Stam and Raengo had any notion of settling the fundamental questions of adaptation studies, however, they must have been surprised to find that their impact was precisely the opposite. Instead of redrawing the field, they have stirred the pot, provoking a welcome outburst of diverse work on adaptation. This essay seeks to map this latest round of work in four categories: collections of new essays, textbooks, monographs focusing on the relation between adaptation and appropriation and more general monographs on adaptation.

Much of this latest work, as might be expected of writers on adaptation, is not wholly new. Ever since its inception half a century ago, adaptation studies has been haunted by concepts and premises it has repudiated in principle but continued to rely on in practice. The most obvious of these is prominently on display in the title of anthology by Cartmell and Whelehan, *The Cambridge Companion to Literature on Screen*. What, we might ask, is literature on screen? If it is on screen, is it still literature? If it is literature, how can it be cinema as well? And why would anyone want to claim that it is both?

Contemporary critics of adaptation who enshrine literature at the heart of their subject increasingly find themselves grappling with the consequences of that decision. Cartmell and Whelehan assert in their Introduction that 'it's vital that literature *and* film be distinguished from literature *on* film' and acknowledge that 'the latter, the subject of this book, has historically privileged the literary over the cinematic'. They salute the 'desire to free our notion of film adaptations from this dependency on literature so that adaptations are not derided as sycophantic, derivative, and therefore inferior to their literary counterparts' (1–2). Yet they seem not to recognize the extent of the logical problems the phrase 'literature on screen' evokes. If Cambridge issued a companion to cinema in literature, readers would probably expect a collection or an analysis of stories that cited movies, and not a collection of prose fiction that was at the same time cinema in another form. But 'literature on screen' suggests something more capacious and defining than citation: the possibility that literary adaptations are at once cinema and literature.

Beneath this contradictory notion of film adaptations as not merely hybrid texts but texts holding dual citizenship in two modes of presentation is an even more pervasive legacy that haunts adaptation studies: the assumption that the primary context within which adaptations are to be studied is literature. Even though a growing number of films eligible for Academy Awards for Best Screenplay Based on Material from Another Medium borrow that material from print journalism, franchise characters, television series, comic books, video games and toys, academic studies of adaptation remain stubbornly attached to literature as cinema's natural progenitor. It is as if adaptation studies, by borrowing the cultural cachet of literature, sought to claim its institutional respectability and gravitas even while insuring adaptation's enduring aesthetic and methodological subordination to literature proper.

The most notable contributions to the 1999 anthology of Cartmell and Whelehan *Adaptation: From Text to Screen, Screen to Text* included Will Brooker's essay on Batman films and Ken Gelder's on *The Piano*, which 'attracted the kind of sustained analytical criticism which worked to designate it as "literary," even though it was not actually an adaptation' (157). But their new collection, which concludes with a section titled 'Beyond the "Literary,"' consistently balances cinema against literature, as if the two terms carried equal weight. Because 'literature', unlike 'cinema', is already an honorific, however, any discussion of literature on screen, as opposed to journalism or comic books or video games on screen, will begin willy-nilly with a bias in favour of literature as both a privileged field (literary texts are what movies normally adapt) and an aesthetically sanctified field (literary texts have already been approved by a jury whose verdict on their film adaptations is still out).

Finally, despite the best efforts of Cartmell and Whelehan and virtually every other theorist of adaptation past and present, the field is still haunted by the notion that adaptations ought to be faithful to their ostensible sourcetexts. Reviewing a few of the many taxonomies of adaptation that seek to measure how closely the film follows the book, they acutely observe: 'Hidden in these taxonomies are value judgements and a consequent ranking of types, normally covertly governed by a literary rather than cinematic perspective. What fascinates us here is not so much the taxonomies themselves ... but this *will to taxonomize*, which is symptomatic of how the field has sought to map out its own territory' (2). There is no logical reason why a division of adaptations into borrowing, intersecting and transforming, to take Dudley Andrew's tripartite division (98) as typical, must involve relative value judgements. Certainly, Kamilla Elliott's six approaches to adaptation—psychic, ventriloquist, genetic, de(re)composing, incarnational and trumping (133–83)—carry no implication that any of them are better than the others. What is most remarkable in the will to taxonomize is two other tendencies. First is the frequency with which it gets entangled with gratuitous value judgements that are not required by the taxonomy but sneak in under its cover, as if the will to taxonomize were only a mask for the will to evaluate. Second is the continued determination of adaptation studies with the world all before it to define its field with primary reference to its closeness to literature. Of all the ways to classify adaptations, surely the decision to classify them as more or less faithful to their putative sources, especially by critics who insist that Julia Kristeva, Mikhail Bakhtin and Robert Stam have persuaded them that there is no such thing as a single source for any adaptation, is one of the most fruitless.

The challenge for recent work in adaptation studies, then, has been to wrestle with the un-dead spirits that continue to haunt it however often they are repudiated: the defining context of literature, the will to taxonomize and the quest for ostensibly analytical methods and categories that will justify individual evaluations. Adaptation theory cannot simply ignore these figures because they are to a great extent the material of the field, and new entrants cannot locate themselves without reference to them. So other strategies are necessary. Some recent theorists, seeking to turn their backs on these spirits by changing the subject, remain haunted by them. Others accept their presence more or less willingly and find their work accordingly limited. Still others attempt to manage the contradictions they raise, as Cartmell and Whelehan do with varying success in their Introduction and the organization of their collection. These contradictions between the desire to break new ground in adaptation studies and the constraints of a vocabulary that severely limits the scope and originality of new contributions are often frustrating, especially to readers who think that they are encountering the same essay over and over and over with only the names of novels and their film adaptations changed. Increasingly, however, the very same contradictions have generated productive debate.

Absent the silver bullet that will free adaptation studies from the dead hand of literature, taxonomies and evaluation, the temptation to succumb to these orthodoxies is greatest in the essays commissioned for collections because the orthodoxies are built into the premise of each collection. Just as *The Cambridge Companion to Literature on Screen* promises a focus on adaptations of canonical literary texts, the titles of two volumes edited by R. Barton Palmer, *Nineteenth-Century American Fiction on Screen* and *Twentieth-Century American Fiction on Screen*, strongly imply a disciplinary subordination of cinema to literature. Both the organization of each volume—the contributions are arranged chronologically in order of the literary originals' publication dates, not the dates of the films' release—and the focus of each essay on one or more adaptations of a single canonical literary work reinscribe this subordination. But it is not simply the organization of such collections or the likely topics of the essays they collect that establishes a fundamentally conservative, based-on-the-literary-text model for adaptation studies. The model goes far toward dictating the argument of each individual contribution.

At the same time, a growing number of theorists represented in each of five recent collections have been able to work within this model in ways that challenge its foundational assumptions. It is especially revealing to categorize a representative selection of the contributions to these five volumes according to the leading questions they raise, from the least to the most interesting.

1. Does the movie in question betray its literary source? This is the question David Lavery asks about adaptations of *Moby-Dick*, which he finds inadequate in fulfilling three prerequisites he lays down: 'It must be humorous .... It must make Ishmael a prominent character and tell the story from his point of view ... it must be faithful to *Moby-Dick's* metaphoric structure' (Palmer, *Nineteenth* 101, 102, 103) and James M. Welsh asks about modern-dress Shakespeare adaptations that jettison the Bard's poetry on the grounds that 'a film that presumes to adapt poetic drama should at the very least be "poetic" in style and substance' (Welsh and Lev 112).

2. Does a given adaptation seek to establish itself as a transcription or an interpretation of its source? Two contributions to Palmer's *Nineteenth-Century American Fiction on Screen* typify this approach: Paul Woolf's discussion of adaptations of 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue', which 'enter into debates over the issues raised in the original texts' (57–58), and Brian McFarlane's defence of Merchant Ivory's *The Europeans* (1979) as 'not so much tinkering with James but rather suggesting another way of reading him' (185).
3. Does the film depart from its literary source because of new cultural or historical contexts it addresses? This very common approach, which excuses lapses in fidelity as expressions of changing cultural mores rather than concessions to a crass commercial medium, is best represented by three essays in Palmer's *Nineteenth-Century American Fiction on Screen*: the reconsideration of Martin Barker and Roger Sabin of the studio pressures that shaped the 1936 *Last of the Mohicans*, Michael Dunne's overview of film adaptations of *The Scarlet Letter* and Tony Williams's account of adaptations of *The Sea-Wolf*.
4. If the movie transcends its original literary source, does that source, however fairly eclipsed by the movie, deserve closer consideration as interesting in its own right? Peter Lev's reading of Boileau-Narcejac's *D'entre les morts* (1954), the little-read source of Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958), uses its comparative reading to conclude that 'the most common paradigm for literature and film adaptation studies [that is, adaptations of canonical literary works whose value can be safely assumed] are not adequate to cover or explain many interesting cases' (Welsh and Lev 184).
5. Is it possible for a film to recreate what might be assumed to be specifically literary aspects of its source that challenge medium-specific models of adaptation by indicating unexpected resources the cinema brings to matters once thought the exclusive province of literature (almost always, in this case, the novel)? Wendy Everett's analysis of Terence Davies's 2000 adaptation of *The House of Mirth* contends that Davies not only seeks to recreate the surfaces and dialogue of Edith Wharton's novel but also 'explores the silences and spaces of the novel' as well, even to the blank page separating Books 1 and 2 (Welsh and Lev 162).
6. Is the movie as well as its source subject to cultural and historical contextualization? Two contributions to the collection of Welsh and Lev advance this argument: Linda Costanzo Cahir's essay on adaptations of Richard Condon's *The Manchurian Candidate* (1959) and C. Kenneth Pellow's on adaptations of Graham Greene's *The Quiet American* (1955). The crucial distinction between this approach and that in #3 above is that contextual forces, from biographical circumstance to ideological assumptions, are assumed to play a pivotal role in shaping the sourcetext as well as its adaptations, undermining its claims to stability and centrality in any debate about adaptations and their sources. Lindiwe Dovey's essay on Ramadan Suleman's 1997 adaptation of Mdebele's 1983 apartheid novella *Fools* explores this position further by contending that for many African filmmakers, the challenge of adaptation is 'not only ... how to transfer literature to cinema', but also 'how to represent a colonial past in a postcolonial present, thereby creating a history and identity' (Aragay 164).
7. What questions about different kinds of fidelity do adaptations of other sorts of texts than canonical literary works raise? Four essays in the new collection by Cartmell

- and Whelehan focus on exactly this question: Judith Buchanan's on silent adaptations of the Gospels, I.Q. Hunter's on the particular sort of fidelity Peter Jackson and his collaborators sought in adapting J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* (1954–55), Whelehan's essay on adapting women's novels like Olive Higgins Prouty's *Now, Voyager* (1941) to cinema and Cartmell's on the 'rivalry' (179) between children's books and their film adaptations.
8. How do television adaptations challenge assumptions about the formal and institutional differences between verbal and audio-visual texts that might be overlooked in discussions that restricted themselves to literature and cinema? Sarah Cardwell, who had already argued warmly for the distinctive aesthetic strategies of televisual adaptations in *Adaptation Revisited* (2002), offers a bracing polemic on the same subject in her contribution to Cartmell and Whelehan.
  9. How do adaptations based on non-literary or non-fictional sourcetexts similarly enlarge the range of adaptation studies by revealing the parochialism of theories that restrict their examples to films based on fictional texts? Three contributors to Welsh and Lev offer three different approaches to this question: Joan Driscoll Lynch through biography, Frank Thompson through history and, most trenchant and provocative of all, William Mooney through memoir.
  10. How are models of adaptation that assume the primacy of literary texts challenged by the phenomenon of novelizations based on cinematic sourcetexts? Jan Baetens, in Cartmell and Whelehan, argues that novelization challenges all binary, text-to-intertext models of adaptation and 'forces us to consider cinema and literature in the global (mass) media structure of our time and to tackle the various ways in which media complete and contaminate each other, without losing their specific features' (236–37).
  11. How must models of adaptation be modified to account for movies that demonstrably draw on other sources than their putative sourcetexts, some of them perhaps even more important in determining its textual strategies? Many recent essayists mention this problem, but three are especially noteworthy. Stephen Railton reveals the debt film adaptations of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) owe to 'the "Tom Shows"' (Palmer, *Nineteenth* 63), unauthorized dramatic adaptations that shaped Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel to their own ends. John Style suggests that Dirk Bogarde's 'queer performance as [Sydney] Carton' in Ralph Thomas's 1958 *Tale of Two Cities* expresses an indeterminacy in the hero's character more fully than Charles Dickens does and so 'is more faithful to Dickens's main source, Carlyle's account of the French Revolution', than the novelist himself (Aragay 85). In his essay on Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979), Donald Whaley extends this argument still further in his demand that 'fully illuminating the meaning of a text requires exploring all of the sources of the text, not only earlier texts but social sources as well' (Welsh and Lev 48).
  12. When films self-consciously raise questions about their own status as adaptation, what general implications do they offer adaptation studies? This is the specific appeal of adaptations that incorporate figures or features of the author or the author's biography (e.g., Patricia Rouzema's *Mansfield Park*, 1998). Steffen Hantke uses David Cronenberg's adaptation of *Naked Lunch*, which combines adaptation and biography more slyly and radically, to explore the consequent challenges the film poses for

- Cronenberg's contradictory status as a filmmaker with 'high modernist ambitions' who nonetheless 'work[s] within commercial cinema' (Palmer, *Twentieth* 176).
13. What implications do characteristic features frequently found in adaptations carry for more general theories of intertextuality? Aragay's collection includes three essays that address this question directly. Karen Diehl, extending the analysis of author-figures in adaptations, concludes that such adaptations recanonize the canonical texts they adapt even as they enable a critique of the original author's authority. Aragay and Gemma López, in their examination of elements of contemporary romance in Simon Langton's 1995 BBC adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* and Sharon Maguire's 2001 adaptation of Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* (1996), call adaptation 'a prime instance of cultural recycling, a process which radically undermines any linear, diachronic understanding of cultural history' (201). Celestino Delayo's essay on the cinematic narrators of *Bridget Jones's Diary* and Stephen Frears's *High Fidelity* (1999) poses questions about the fragmentary nature of film narrators and the different relations they have to genre imperatives and notions of identity that range far beyond adaptation studies.
  14. How do concepts commonly treated by adaptation theorists as universal change when they cross national and cultural borders? Eckart Voigts-Virchow enlarges and complicates the notion of heritage cinema by contrasting the valence of heritage in English culture with the German notion of *Heimat*, which 'smacks of anti-internationalism, anti-Marxism, anti-Enlightenment, anti-capitalism, anti-urbanism, and military aggression' (Cartmell and Whelehan 126).
  15. How must models of adaptation change to accommodate novels that formally and economically usurp the place traditionally accorded movies? Cartmell and Whelehan attack this problem by considering the ways in which Harry Potter novels have made successful adaptations virtually impossible because they 'have been marketed and constructed as if they *were* the films' and so have 'usurped the role of the film even before the film was released' (Aragay 39, 48), opening fascinating new lines of inquiry about what constitute the cinematic qualities of cinema and the bookishness of books.

Arranging these essays according to the increasingly pointed questions they raise suggests that the future of adaptation studies is best indicated by essays that either challenge the still prevailing model of book-into-film—a model which dictates most of the interchangeable titles of monographs and collections on film adaptation—or raise more interesting questions, questions that are more productive of further, still more probing questions. Essays that are organized around the question of whether or not a given film is better than the book on which it is based or whether its changes were dictated by concessions to a mass audience or expressions of changing cultural mores may be accomplished and persuasive in advancing their claims about the adaptation at hand, but they are unlikely to play a leading role in advancing adaptation studies as it struggles to emerge from the disciplinary umbrella of film studies and the still more tenacious grip of literary studies. They are limited not because they give incorrect answers to the questions they pose, but because those questions themselves are so limited in their general implications. Is the movie as good as the book? Hardly ever, but even if

it is, the question is still reducible to thumbs-up or thumbs-down. Even if the book won a decisive victory in any given competition, the cost would be great, for, as Pedro Javier Pardo Garcia points out, ‘very poor films ... can make for very interesting adaptations’ (Aragay 238) that could shed much-needed light on problems of adaptation if the films were not overlooked simply because they were unsuccessful. Does the movie attempt to replicate or interpret the book? Almost never simply the first; more often than not, a combination of the two. Is the movie subject to contextual pressures that inflect its meanings? Of course it is. So is the book.

If the future of adaptation studies is best illuminated by looking at the questions most likely to lead it away from its dependence on one-to-one comparisons between specific adaptations and works of literature, a category that provides both a repository of privileged intertexts and a touchstone of value for new texts, it is hardly surprising to find that two recent textbooks on adaptation aimed at undergraduate students more often look back toward this old model than forward to new questions. Their titles—*Adaptation: Studying Film and Literature* by John M. Desmond and Peter Hawkes and *Literature into Film: Theory and Practical Approaches* by Linda Costanzo Cahir—accurately indicate their dyadic approach to adaptation as ‘the transfer of a printed text in a literary genre to film’ (Desmond and Hawkes 1). Both follow years of theoretical practice in dividing adaptations into three categories—‘close, loose, or intermediate’ (Desmond and Hawkes 3) or ‘literal, traditional, or radical’ (Cahir 17)—depending on the degree of freedom with which they treat their sourcetexts. Both warn against the heresies of ‘faithfulness’ (Cahir 15) as an evaluative touchstone and encourage students to keep open minds in weighing adaptations against their sources. Both include material that enlarges the book-to-film model, Desmond and Hawkes brief chapters considering the narrative tropism of commercial cinema and reviewing common terms for the study of literature and film, Cahir more substantial chapters on the relation between literary and cinematic language, the collaborative nature of commercial cinema, and the different ways of writing about film. Both provide many useful lists of adaptations and many questions for study or debate. Yet because both are dominated by a transfer model that closes off alternative possibilities, neither offers either a model of adaptation superior to the fidelity discourse they reject or a mode of inquiry likely to lead to better questions or better models.

Desmond and Hawkes are at their best in discussions of what particular strategies filmmakers adapt when they attempt to put literature on screen. Novels have to be made shorter, short stories have to be made longer and stage plays have to be opened up. This much is obvious, but Desmond and Hawkes detail these processes in ways that are often illuminating. Cinematic adaptations of short stories, for example, can expand their material to feature length by one of three strategies. Filmmakers who follow the ‘concentration strategy’ (128) produce films like Robert Siodmak’s 1946 adaptation of *The Killers*, which begins by following Ernest Hemingway’s 1927 story almost line by line before going off for the rest of its length in a completely new direction. Those who adopt the ‘interweaving strategy’ retain the leading elements of the story at hand but ‘disperse those elements throughout the film ... and interweave either invented elements or expansions on already existing elements’ (133), as Frank Perry does in *The Swimmer* (1964). In the ‘point of departure strategy’ exemplified by Christopher Nolan’s adaptation of his brother Jonathan’s story ‘Memento Mori’ to *Memento* (2001),

‘the filmmakers drop most of the narrative elements from the short story ... and ... invent a new story’ based on the remaining elements (136, 137). After outlining these three approaches, Desmond and Hawkes conclude with an enlightening discussion of the ways Akira Kurosawa’s *Rashomon* (1950) and Michelangelo Antonioni’s *Blow-Up* (1966) combine them. Their requisite chapters on adapting novels, stories and plays are supplemented by welcome discussions of the challenges of adapting non-fiction to docudramas and literary texts to cartoons, and they conclude with a splendidly contentious discussion of ‘the failed adaptation’ (231), the one chapter that seems likely to incite productive disagreement about why adaptations fail and what counts as failure.

The certainty of Desmond and Hawkes about these questions, however, points to the principal limitation of their book: its conceptual timidity. Although they do not take sides in defining close, loose and intermediate adaptations—‘we use *fidelity* not as an evaluative term that measures the merit of films, but as a descriptive term that allows discussion of the relationship between two companion works’ (2–3)—they consider adaptations only in terms of their relationships to specific sourcetexts whose elements they simply ‘keep, drop, or add’ (51). Their laudable attempts to avoid categorical pronouncements about adaptation sometimes lead to waffling that undermines their authority without raising correspondingly provocative questions, as when they observe that ‘[a]lthough these adaptations [of Merchant Ivory] succeed in varying degrees, critics complain that some of them stress the visual splendor of costumes, houses, furnishings, and grand settings at the expense of drama’ (242). They offer a wealth of discussion questions, but many of these questions are coercively leading. ‘Take a descriptive sentence from any literary text’, they suggest. ‘Draw the scene .... Compare your version to other students’ drawings. What do the various versions say about the possibilities of faithful adaptation?’ (47). Such questions make it unlikely that students will learn anything about adaptation that Desmond and Hawkes do not already know.

Cahir’s textbook has several advantages over that of Desmond and Hawkes. It is more original, more literate and more ambitious in its aim: ‘to increase the skill with which its readers apprehend, appreciate, and express themselves about film, specifically films that are based on literary sources’ (7). She makes no bones about her own aesthetic critical orientation, which provides both her book’s most appealing strength and its sharpest limitation. It generates a rubric of four criteria she urges students to apply about every film adaptation:

1. The film must communicate definite ideas concerning the *integral* meaning and value of the literary text, as the filmmakers interpret it.
2. The film must exhibit a collaboration of filmmaking skills ....
3. The film must demonstrate an audacity to create a work that stands as a world apart, that exploits the literature in such a way that a self-reliant, but related, aesthetic offspring is born.
4. The film cannot be so self-governing as to be completely independent of or antithetical to the source material (263).

This is admirably direct, but it raises two problems. The first concerns several contradictions in which it ensnares Cahir when she fails to live up to the boldness of her own programme, the second the most important word in the programme itself.



Like Desmond and Hawkes, Cahir distinguishes three modes of adaptation—in her case, literal, traditional and radical—and like Desmond and Hawkes, she argues that each has its distinctive standards, rewards and pitfalls. Cahir’s rubric, however, makes it clear that she favours traditional adaptations over literal adaptations that lack ‘the audacity to create a work that stands as a world apart’ and radical adaptations that are ‘so self-governing as to be completely independent of or antithetical to the source material’. Hence, her analyses of both John Huston’s literal adaptation of *Moby-Dick* (1956) and Millard Webb’s radical 1926 adaptation *The Sea Beast* are both significantly more minatory than her more extended analysis of Franc Roddam’s traditional three-part 1998 adaptation for the USA Network. In practice, Cahir’s rubric establishes traditional adaptation as a norm from which literal and radical adaptations depart at their peril.

Cahir argues that ‘[t]he first step in exploring the merits of literature-based films is to see them as *translations* of the source material and to understand the difference between “adaptation” and “translation”’. Adaptation involves the changes in structure or function a given entity makes to survive in a new environment, translation the generation of ‘a fully new text—a *materially different entity*’—through ‘a *process of language*’ (14). It is not clear, however, what bearing this distinction would have on adaptation studies, because Cahir sometimes complicates or contradicts it, as when she observes that in the most successful adaptations, ‘the literary text is strip-mined for the riches the filmmakers can use to promote their own vision of the work’ (97), a figure few translators would apply to their own labours. Nor do most readers expect translations to a new language to ‘communicate definite ideas’ about the work at hand, as Cahir’s rubric demands. Adaptations engage in a wider variety of cultural tasks than the metaphor of translation can explain.

The most distinctive feature of Cahir’s praxis, however, is not her preference for any particular mode of adaptation or the occasional inconsistency of her analogy between film adaptation and translation, but rather her detailed demands about what adaptations ought to do. Her rubric, which she calls ‘a theoretical framework for understanding and evaluating any literature-based film’ (9), is dominated, like Lavery’s essay on adaptations of *Moby-Dick*, by the word *must*, and even Cahir’s most subtle and expansive analyses of individual adaptations, from Akira Kurosawa’s *Ran* (1985) to Martin Scorsese’s *The Age of Innocence* (1993), are everywhere informed by her judgements about whether they are toeing the mark. As a result, all the analytical skills she seeks to develop in students are subordinated to the comparative judgements she wants them to make more discriminatingly. Not surprisingly, then, many of Cahir’s study questions are simply evaluative, leading, or both: ‘The opening shots of *The Killers* compose a sequence that is generally regarded as one of the very best in movie history. Why?’ (223). Like Desmond and Hawkes, Cahir is most doctrinaire in her questions, which persistently lead backwards to aesthetic certitudes rather than forwards to more productive questions about the dynamics of adaptation.

The logical place to look for these questions is not in essays commissioned for book-to-film anthologies (although it is gratifying to find so many of them arising there) or introductory college textbooks but in full-length monographs. Several recent books hold the particular promise of exploring the relations between adaptation as a specific

practice and the wide array of activities commonly included within the notion of intertextuality—or, as Gérard Genette would call it, transtextuality. Two of them, both responding to Dudley Andrew's call for 'adaptation studies to take a sociological turn' (104), focus on the relation between adaptation and appropriation, though in profoundly different ways.

Julie Sanders's *Adaptation and Appropriation* is best thought of as a cornucopia of questions, terms, ideas, readings and suggestions for further research. Undergraduates searching its pages for the definition of adaptation that might seem to be implied by its status as the latest entry in Routledge's New Critical Idiom series, or indeed by a chapter titled 'What Is Adaptation?', will search in vain. Sanders brings up the notion of adaptations as 'cinematic versions of canonical plays and novels' (23) only to contend that the concept is far more elastic, encompassing non-cinematic examples from Shakespearean musicals like George Abbott's *The Boys from Syracuse* (1938), with its score by Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart, to the Darwinian model of evolution. The one constant she finds in all adaptations is an 'inherent sense of play, produced in part by our informed sense of similarity and difference between the texts being invoked, and the connected interplay of expectation and surprise' (25). But this sense of play, she readily acknowledges, is central to appropriations as well.

For Sanders, appropriation is a more general term than adaptation. Unlike adaptation, which 'signals a relationship with an informing sourcetext or original', appropriation 'frequently affects a more decisive journey away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural product and domain' that 'may or may not involve a generic shift' and may or may not explicitly acknowledge this relationship (26). Her distinction between 'embedded texts' (27) like Sam and Bella Spewack's *Kiss Me Kate*, with its Cole Porter score (1949, filmed 1953 by George Sidney), and the 'sustained appropriation' (32) of Graham Swift's *Last Orders* (1996) is less valuable as an act of categorization than as a springboard for further ruminations about how '*Kiss Me Kate* is both an adaptation and an appropriation' (29) and questions about whether Swift's relation to William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* (1930) is better described as appropriation or plagiarism.

As Sanders traverses examples from novels and plays, folktales and fairy tales, appropriations of Ovid and Shakespeare, and the novels of Graham Swift, to which she repeatedly returns, her argument, whose progression from chapter to chapter is always clear, begins to shimmer and dissolve within individual chapters, each of them an endless stream of provocative examples and aperçus about the rewriting of master narratives from new points of view, Peter Carey's appropriation of the Victorian era in *Jack Maggs* (1997), and the ways that the writing of history, itself 'a history of textualities', depends on appropriation (146). Arguing that adaptation studies would do well to replace its preferred model, 'the rather static or immobilizing discussion of source or influence' (154–55), with 'a more active vocabulary' (38), she proposes forward-looking models ranging from J.S. Bach's Goldberg Variations to jazz riffs to the genetic code of DNA that emphasize recreation and regeneration. Her sustained attempt to peer over the horizon is so compelling that even her omissions become productive. Why is there no mention of restagings or revivals of dramatic works? What place do performance media like music and dance have in her account of texts constantly renewed through acts of appropriation? What is the relation between the

copies of master paintings apprentice artists produce and the copies or inventions that forgers pass off as genuine? What place do adaptation and appropriation have in disciplines that fancy themselves progressive, like science and literary criticism? In raising questions like these, Sanders produces a stellar example of that rare species, a forward-looking handbook.

Sanders's opposite number is Jennifer M. Jeffers, who ends by describing herself with some irony as 'dangerously veer[ing] toward the ledge of Conservative Right-reading' (233). The organization of *Britain Colonized: Hollywood's Appropriation of British Literature* is as far from Sanders's fusillade of provocations, passing observations and loose ends as any editor could wish. The argument economically set forth in Jeffers's subtitle could not be clearer. Neither could her tone. From James Ivory's *Remains of the Day* (1993) to Neil LaBute's *Possession* (2002), she finds that the American perspectives and values typical of contemporary adaptations have colonized England and English literature, replacing the specifically nationalistic concerns of *Bridget Jones's Diary* and Nick Hornby's *High Fidelity* (1995) with American views of history, literature and sexual politics—or, even more insidiously, with a spuriously 'Americanized universality' (202).

Jeffers's reaction to this wholesale appropriation is incredulous outrage. In half a dozen closely reasoned chapters, she demonstrates that one British novel after another has been Americanized in its film adaptation, even if the adaptation, like Danny Boyle's *Trainspotting* (1996), is the work of British hands, for, as in heritage tours of Britain aimed at American tourists, 'Britain reterritorializes *itself* in the image of an American film-set on location in Britain' (233). Anthony Minghella's 1996 adaptation of *The English Patient* trades Michael Ondaatje's searching dramatization of colonial tensions in the figure of the Sikh sapper Kip for a single-minded emphasis on the doomed romance of Count Ladislaus de Almásy and Katharine Clifton, a romantic melodrama typical of 'the best Academy Award-winning "tear-jerkers"' (130). The casting of the American Renée Zellweger as Bridget Jones is only the most obvious sign of the film's surrender to the United States, beginning with its adoption of a romantic comedy formula designed specifically to appeal to Americans. And '[w]ith [Stephen Gyllenhaal's 1992 film adaptation of Graham Swift's] *Waterland*, but more so with *High Fidelity*, the British content is simply obliterated' (176).

This indictment is certainly true, but readers who do not share Jeffers's outrage are likely to find it unnecessarily detailed, repetitive and familiar from dozens of Sunday newspaper columns. As her frequent references to 'global capitalist axiomatics' (227) attest, Jeffers does not write like a columnist. But her capacity for moral dudgeon is equally great, as when she observes that 'Americans cannot really perform Shakespeare' (218) or that *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *High Fidelity* 'appear to fulfill a certain niche in a language, culture and society, but when deterritorialized for film, the reterritorialized product renders one of the novels as *not even British*' (193). Jeffers's critique of Hollywood's Americanization of contemporary British fiction is smartly observed, exhaustively supported and cogently argued. It is easy to sympathize with her furious denunciation of the ways John Madden's *Shakespeare in Love* (1998) remakes 'the greatest poet of the English language' as a "'commercial entertainment" writer' (221). But the very next sentence—'Shakespeare is the finest and noblest in the English language, not "entertainment"'—goes too far, establishing poetic drama and entertainment as not only distinct but mutually

exclusive. Jeffers's description of herself as 'a critical vigilante' whose book comes close to 'tak[ing] the law into its own hands' (228) shows an impassioned determination to turn back the clock on cultural appropriation (what gives someone the right to appropriate a novel clearly ordained to fill a specific niche for its original audience?) and implies a correspondingly conservative attitude toward adaptation studies far more backwards-looking than anything in Desmond and Hawkes or Cahir.

The pull between looking back and looking forward that produces both Jeffers's denunciation and Sanders's celebration of appropriation finds a more even-handed response in two more general surveys by Linda Hutcheon and Christine Geraghty. I have already reviewed Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* in *Literature/Film Quarterly*, but this essay would not be complete without some brief remarks about her book. Hutcheon, who approaches her subject not through a background in literature and film but from the context of earlier studies of parody, pastiche, opera and intertextuality, identifies herself less closely with a field than a method: 'to identify a text-based issue that extends across a variety of media, find ways to study it comparatively, and then tease out the theoretical implications from multiple textual examples' (xii). She looks backward in her unobtrusively displayed familiarity with earlier work in adaptation studies and in the rigorous topical organization of her volume into chapters that explore the who, what, when, where and why of adaptation (more precisely, in Hutcheon's case, the what, who, why, how, when and where). At the same time, her decision to organize her study around a series of interconnected topics rather than a series of readings is a novelty that sets her book apart from the field as clearly as the attention she gives such non-cinematic examples as theatrical and radio plays, graphic novels, operas and musicals.

Hutcheon is most forward looking in the arguments and assumptions she rejects: the emphasis on book-to-film adaptations, the aesthetic hierarchy that establishes literature as both the source of adaptations and the measure of their value and the definition of adaptations as a collection of products. She shares these positions with most recent writers on adaptation but sees their implications more clearly. If adaptation is not simply a series of transcriptions or imitations, what is it? Hutcheon defines it alternatively as a creative process and, in parallel with Sanders, as a receptive process whereby adaptations are recognized and enjoyed as adaptations by audiences who are constantly invited to shift back and forth between their experience of a new story and their memory of its progenitors.

Such a shift, of course, is common in the reception of many texts that are not adaptations, most notably in members of popular genres whose success depends on their audience's knowledge of the genre's rules and their expectation that a given text will both invoke those rules and play with them. Acknowledging that adaptations' intertextual strategies ally them with a vast number of other texts, perhaps with all texts, Hutcheon ends her survey not with a conclusion but with a pair of questions: 'What is *not* an adaptation?' (170) and 'What is the appeal of adaptations?' (172). Her emphasis on the ways readers and viewers enjoy experiences that combine familiarity with difference provides a compelling answer to the second question but not the first. Although Hutcheon offers her own breakdown of what counts as adaptation (remakes, literary translations, musical transcriptions, condensations, bowdlerizations, parodies, sequels, prequels, commentaries, reviews and academic criticism) and what does not (brief

allusions, music sampling, museum exhibits and presumably specific performances of musical and theatrical texts), her categorizations are not especially persuasive, but they do not need to be, because the question is more valuable than any answer.

The same talent for raising productive questions comes out more unexpectedly in Christine Geraghty's *Now a Major Motion Picture: Film Adaptations of Literature and Drama*. At first glance Geraghty's book seems just another collection of case studies that might just as well have been commissioned from diverse hands. But the assumptions with which Geraghty approaches her task, and the articles of faith she jettisons, distinguish her approach from the beginning. In developing the suggestions of Dudley Andrew and Robert Stam that adaptations are peculiarly layered texts, she implicitly agrees with Hutcheon that adaptation is a 'layering process [that] involves an accretion of deposits over time, a recognition of ghostly presences, and a shadowing or doubling of what is on the surface by what is glimpsed behind' (195). She proceeds to her analysis without the obligatory prologue reviewing earlier developments in adaptation study because such reviews 'too readily ... lead to methods of analysis that rely on comparisons between original source and film' and the attendant comparative evaluations (1). In a still more original stroke, she decides 'to remove the original book or play from the analysis' in order to examine the ways 'adaptations can be understood without the crucial emphasis on literary origin' (194).

This challenge sounds paradoxical, for how can adaptations be studied as adaptations without close attention to the novels and plays on which they are based? Geraghty's achievement lies in the variety of contextual frames—history, genre, space, performance, marketing, reception—she develops to accomplish this task. She considers the ways film versions of *David Copperfield*, *Oliver Twist* and *Pride and Prejudice* seek to establish their credentials as 'classic adaptations' (16) without any specific reference to textual fidelity. She examines the strategies films based on novels by Proust, Woolf and Joyce use to negotiate their double status as art films, which carry the cultural cachet of their originals, and heritage cinema, with its more commercial aspirations. Geraghty excels in close textual analysis, as she shows in examining the use of settings and camera setups to suggest or expand theatrical space in cinematic adaptations of Tennessee Williams's plays. But she is equally proficient in the contextual study demanded by her analysis of the generic positioning of two films based on contemporary novels by women, Wesley Ruggles's *Cimarron* (1931) and Sidney Franklin's *The Good Earth* (1937). Textual and contextual study meet in her discussion of the use of space, scene and publicity in two Westerns, Michael Mann's *The Last of the Mohicans* (1992) and Ang Lee's *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) and of the attempt by William Wyler's *The Heiress* (1949), Terence Davies's *The House of Mirth* (2000) and Martin Scorsese's *Gangs of New York* (2002) to recreate the look of nineteenth-century New York.

Like Hutcheon, Geraghty leaves readers with plenty of unresolved questions. Her suggestion that 'popular and much-adapted texts have to work with similarity and difference in a movement that refers to but does not rely on knowledge of previous versions' (42) opens the way to a debate about the relation between referring to previous texts, assuming some familiarity with them, and relying on viewers' having read them. Her approving citation of Catherine Grant's assertion that '[t]here is no such thing ... as a "secret" adaptation' (3, 197; cf. Grant 57) is bound to provoke further argument

about Hutcheon's premise that an adaptation must be perceived as an adaptation in order to work as an adaptation. Like Hutcheon, Geraghty extends the range of intertextual contexts for adaptations so dramatically that she must leave unresolved the question of adaptation's relation to other intertextual modes.

A new collection of essays from Germany offers a tantalizing glimpse of the more distant future. As its title suggests, *Intermedialities*, edited by Werner Huber, Evelyne Keitel and Gunter Süss, is not about adaptation. Of all its thirteen contributions, only two, Monika Seidl's essay on the relation between the sitcom *The Nanny* and nineteenth-century English governess novels and Keitel's essay on the parodistic treatment of Poe's poem 'The Raven' in the 'Treehouse of Terror' episode of *The Simpsons*, could be called adaptation studies. Instead, the contributors focus on an array of intertextual relations almost dizzying in their arbitrariness: the figure of Zorro, Baudrillard and the *Matrix* trilogy, Satanic and occult rock music, the reception aesthetics of audiobooks, the bogus commentary track Joel and Ethan Coen produced for the Director's Cut DVD release of *Blood Simple* (1984). In their Introduction, the editors note that the term *intermedium*, first coined by Coleridge 'to distinguish between person and personification in narrative allegory' (1), has, as *Intermedialität*, found wide acceptance in Europe but little in English language theory, even though it carries less unexamined metaphoric weight than *adaptation*. Their volume is not an attempt to break out of the imprisoning discourse that has often limited adaptation studies. Instead, it seeks to dig a tunnel from the opposite direction in the hopes of meeting the tunnel escapees like Sanders, Hutcheon and Geraghty who have been digging away from the prison-house of adaptation studies.

In the face of such a clouded crystal ball, it would seem the height of folly to make any predictions or prescriptions about the crossroads at which adaptation studies finds itself. Nonetheless, the temptation is irresistible. The most urgent item on the agenda is to shift evaluative problems the field has inherited from literary studies—fidelity, hierarchy, canonicity—from the praxis of adaptation studies to part of its subject. Instead of producing more anthologies of book-to-film analyses, which populate the field more and more densely without enlarging it, editors and publishers might consider collections that focus on specific problems in the production and reception of adaptations and the relations between adaptation and other intertextual modes. Theorists of adaptation could do a service to both themselves and their field by looking more closely at the ways adaptations play with their sourcetexts instead of merely aping or analyzing them. Finally, theorists of adaptation would do well to explore more deeply the one context that 'takes pride of place in Anglo-American discussions of "intermediality"' (Huber et al. 5): media literacy. If adaptation studies can make a decisive contribution to students' "ability to 'critically read and write with and across varied symbol systems'" (Huber et al. 6; cf. Semali and Paillotet 6), it will have succeeded where literary studies has increasingly failed.

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