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Beginning to Theorize Adaptation:

What? Who? Why? How? Where? When?

[C]inema is still playing second fiddle to literature.

—Rabindranath Tagore (1929)

Writing a screenplay based on a great novel [George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*] is foremost a labor of simplification. I don't mean only the plot, although particularly in the case of a Victorian novel teeming with secondary characters and subplots, severe pruning is required, but also the intellectual content. A film has to convey its message by images and relatively few words; it has little tolerance for complexity or irony or tergiversations. I found the work exceedingly difficult, beyond anything I had anticipated. And, I should add, depressing: I care about words more than images, and yet I was

> constantly sacrificing words and their connotations. You might tell me that through images film conveys a vast amount of information that words can only attempt to approximate, and you would be right, but approximation is precious in itself, because it bears the author's stamp. All in all, it seemed to me that my screenplay was worth much less than the book, and that the same would be true of the film.
>
> **—Novelist John North in Louis Begley's novel, *Shipwreck*** (2003)

Familiarity and Contempt

Adaptations are everywhere today: on the television and movie screen, on the musical and dramatic stage, on the Internet, in novels and comic books, in your nearest theme park and video arcade. A certain level of self-consciousness about—and perhaps even acceptance of—their ubiquity is suggested by the fact that films have been made about the process itself, such as Spike Jonze's *Adaptation* or Terry Gilliam's *Lost in La Mancha,* both in 2002. Television series have also explored the act of adaptation, like the eleven-part BRAVO documentary "Page to Screen." Adaptations are obviously not new to our time, however; Shakespeare transferred his culture's stories from page to stage and made them available to a whole new audience. Aeschylus and Racine and Goethe and da Ponte also retold familiar stories in new forms. Adaptations are so much a part of Western culture that they appear to affirm Walter Benjamin's insight that "storytelling is always the art of repeating stories" (1992: 90). The critical pronouncements of T.S. Eliot or Northrop Frye were certainly not needed to convince avid adapters across the centuries of what, for them, has always been a truism: art is derived from other art; stories are born of other stories.

Nevertheless, in both academic criticism and journalistic reviewing, contemporary popular adaptations are most often put down as secondary, derivative, "belated, middlebrow, or culturally inferior" (as noted by Naremore 2002b: 6). This is what Louis Begley's novelist-adapter is expressing in the epigraph; but there are more strong and decidedly moralistic words used to attack film adaptations of literature: "tampering," "interference," "violation" (listed in McFarlane 1996: 12), "betrayal," "deformation," "perversion," "infidelity," and "desecration"

(found by Stam 2000: 54). The move from the literary to the filmic or televisual has even been called a move to “a willfully inferior form of cognition” (Newman 1985: 129). Although adaptation’s detractors argue that “all the directorial Scheherazades of the world cannot add up to one Dostoevsky” (Peary and Shatzkin 1977: 2), it does seem to be more or less acceptable to adapt *Romeo and Juliet* into a respected high art form, like an opera or a ballet, but not to make it into a movie, especially an updated one like Baz Luhrmann’s (1996) *William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet*. If an adaptation is perceived as “lowering” a story (according to some imagined hierarchy of medium or genre), response is likely to be negative. Residual suspicion remains even in the admiration expressed for something like Julie Taymor’s *Titus* (1999), her critically successful film version of Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus*. Even in our postmodern age of cultural recycling, something—perhaps the commercial success of adaptations—would appear to make us uneasy.

As early as 1926, Virginia Woolf, commenting on the fledgling art of cinema, deplored the simplification of the literary work that inevitably occurred in its transposition to the new visual medium and called film a “parasite” and literature its “prey” and “victim” (1926: 309). Yet she also foresaw that film had the potential to develop its own independent idiom: “cinema has within its grasp innumerable symbols for emotions that have so far failed to find expression” in words (309). And so it does. In the view of film semiotician Christian Metz, cinema “tells us continuous stories; it ‘says’ things that could be conveyed also in the language of words; yet it says them differently. There is a reason for the possibility as well as for the necessity of adaptations” (1974: 44). However, the same could be said of adaptations in the form of musicals, operas, ballets, or songs. All these adapters relate stories in their different ways. They use the same tools that storytellers have always used: they actualize or concretize ideas; they make simplifying selections, but also amplify and extrapolate; they make analogies; they critique or show their respect, and so on. But the stories they relate are taken from elsewhere, not invented anew. Like parodies, adaptations have an overt and defining relationship to prior texts, usually revealingly called “sources.” Unlike parodies, however, adaptations usually openly announce this relationship. It is the (post-) Romantic valuing

of the original creation and of the originating creative genius that is clearly one source of the denigration of adapters and adaptations. Yet this negative view is actually a late addition to Western culture's long and happy history of borrowing and stealing or, more accurately, sharing stories.

For some, as Robert Stam argues, literature will always have axiomatic superiority over any adaptation of it because of its seniority as an art form. But this hierarchy also involves what he calls iconophobia (a suspicion of the visual) and logophilia (love of the word as sacred) (2000: 58). Of course, a negative view of adaptation might simply be the product of thwarted expectations on the part of a fan desiring fidelity to a beloved adapted text or on the part of someone teaching literature and therefore needing proximity to the text and perhaps some entertainment value to do so.

If adaptations are, by this definition, such inferior and secondary creations, why then are they so omnipresent in our culture and, indeed, increasing steadily in numbers? Why, even according to 1992 statistics, are 85 percent of all Oscar-winning Best Pictures adaptations? Why do adaptations make up 95 percent of all the miniseries and 70 percent of all the TV movies of the week that win Emmy Awards? Part of the answer no doubt has to do with the constant appearance of new media and new channels of mass diffusion (Groensteen 1998b: 9). These have clearly fueled an enormous demand for all kinds of stories. Nonetheless, there must be something particularly appealing about adaptations *as adaptations*.

Part of this pleasure, I want to argue, comes simply from repetition with variation, from the comfort of ritual combined with the piquancy of surprise. Recognition and remembrance are part of the pleasure (and risk) of experiencing an adaptation; so too is change. Thematic and narrative persistence combines with material variation (Ropars-Wuilleumier 1998: 131), with the result that adaptations are never simply reproductions that lose the Benjaminian aura. Rather, they carry that aura with them. But as John Ellis suggests, there is something counterintuitive about this desire for persistence within a post-Romantic and capitalist world that values novelty primarily: the "process of adaptation should thus be seen as a massive investment (financial and

psychic) in the desire to repeat particular acts of consumption within a form of representation [film, in this case] that discourages such a repetition" (1982: 4–5).

As Ellis' commercial rhetoric suggests, there is an obvious financial appeal to adaptation as well. It is not just at times of economic downturn that adapters turn to safe bets: nineteenth-century Italian composers of that notoriously expensive art form, opera, usually chose to adapt reliable—that is, already financially successful—stage plays or novels in order to avoid financial risks, as well as trouble with the censors (see Trowell 1992: 1198, 1219). Hollywood films of the classical period relied on adaptations from popular novels, what Ellis calls the "tried and tested" (1982: 3), while British television has specialized in adapting the culturally accredited eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novel, or Ellis' "tried and trusted." However, it is not simply a matter of risk-avoidance; there is money to be made. A best-selling book may reach a million readers; a successful Broadway play will be seen by 1 to 8 million people; but a movie or television adaptation will find an audience of many million more (Seger 1992: 5).

The recent phenomenon of films being "musicalized" for the stage is obviously economically driven. The movies of *The Lion King* or *The Producers* offer ready-made name recognition for audiences, thereby relieving some of the anxiety for Broadway producers of expensive musicals. Like sequels and prequels, "director's cut" DVDs and spin-offs, videogame adaptations based on films are yet another way of taking one "property" in a "franchise" and reusing it in another medium. Not only will audiences already familiar with the "franchise" be attracted to the new "repurposing" (Bolter and Grusin 1999: 45), but new consumers will also be created. The multinationals who own film studios today often already own the rights to stories in other media, so they can be recycled for videogames, for example, and then marketed by the television stations they also own (Thompson 2003: 81–82).

Does the manifest commercial success of adaptations help us understand why the 2002 film *The Royal Tenenbaums* (directed by Wes Anderson with a script by Owen Wilson) opens with a book being checked out of a library—the book upon which the film implicitly claims to be based? Echoing movies like David Lean's *Great Expectations* (1946),

which begins with a shot of the Dickens novel opened to Chapter 1, scene changes in Anderson's movie are marked by a shot of the Tenenbaums' "book" opened to the next chapter, the first lines of which describe what we then see on screen. Because, to my knowledge, this film is *not* adapted from any literary text, the use of this device is a direct and even parodic recall of its use in earlier films, but with a difference: the authority of literature as an institution and thus also of the act of adapting it seems to be what is being invoked and emphasized. But why would a film want to be seen as an adaptation? And what do we mean by a work being seen *as an adaptation*?

Treating Adaptations *as Adaptations*

To deal with adaptations *as adaptations* is to think of them as, to use Scottish poet and scholar Michael Alexander's great term (Ermarth 2001: 47), inherently "palimpsestuous" works, haunted at all times by their adapted texts. If we know that prior text, we always feel its presence shadowing the one we are experiencing directly. When we call a work an adaptation, we openly announce its overt relationship to another work or works. It is what Gérard Genette would call a text in the "second degree" (1982: 5), created and then received in relation to a prior text. This is why adaptation studies are so often comparative studies (cf. Cardwell 2002: 9). This is not to say that adaptations are not also autonomous works that can be interpreted and valued as such; as many theorists have insisted, they obviously are (see, for example, Bluestone 1957/1971; Ropars 1970). This is one reason why an adaptation has its own aura, its own "presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be" (Benjamin 1968: 214). I take such a position as axiomatic, but not as my theoretical focus. To interpret an adaptation *as an adaptation* is, in a sense, to treat it as what Roland Barthes called, not a "work," but a "text," a plural "stereophony of echoes, citations, references" (1977: 160). Although adaptations are also aesthetic objects in their own right, it is only as inherently double- or multilaminated works that they can be theorized *as adaptations*.

An adaptation's double nature does not mean, however, that proximity or fidelity to the adapted text should be the criterion of judgment or the focus of analysis. For a long time, "fidelity criticism," as it came to

be known, was the critical orthodoxy in adaptation studies, especially when dealing with canonical works such as those of Pushkin or Dante. Today that dominance has been challenged from a variety of perspectives (e.g., McFarlane 1996: 194; Cardwell 2002: 19) and with a range of results. And, as George Bluestone pointed out early on, when a film becomes a financial or critical success, the question of its faithfulness is given hardly any thought (1957/1971: 114). My decision not to concentrate on this particular aspect of the relationship between adapted text and adaptation means that there appears to be little need to engage directly in the constant debate over degrees of proximity to the "original" that has generated those many typologies of adaptation processes: borrowing versus intersection versus transformation (Andrew 1980: 10–12); analogy versus commentary versus transposition (Wagner 1975: 222–31); using the source as raw material versus reinterpretation of only the core narrative structure versus a literal translation (Klein and Parker 1981: 10).

Of more interest to me is the fact that the morally loaded discourse of fidelity is based on the implied assumption that adapters aim simply to reproduce the adapted text (e.g., Orr 1984: 73). Adaptation is repetition, but repetition without replication. And there are manifestly many different possible intentions behind the act of adaptation: the urge to consume and erase the memory of the adapted text or to call it into question is as likely as the desire to pay tribute by copying. Adaptations such as film remakes can even be seen as mixed in intent: "contested homage" (Greenberg 1998: 115), Oedipally envious and worshipful at the same time (Horton and McDougal 1998b: 8).

If the idea of fidelity should not frame any theorizing of adaptation today, what should? According to its dictionary meaning, "to adapt" is to adjust, to alter, to make suitable. This can be done in any number of ways. As the next section will explore in more depth, the phenomenon of adaptation can be defined from three distinct but interrelated perspectives, for I take it as no accident that we use the same word—adaptation—to refer to the process and the product.

First, seen as a *formal entity or product*, an adaptation is an announced and extensive transposition of a particular work or works. This "transcoding" can involve a shift of medium (a poem to a film) or genre

(an epic to a novel), or a change of frame and therefore context: telling the same story from a different point of view, for instance, can create a manifestly different interpretation. Transposition can also mean a shift in ontology from the real to the fictional, from a historical account or biography to a fictionalized narrative or drama. Sister Helen Prejean's 1994 book, *Dead Man Walking: An Eyewitness Account of the Death Penalty in the United States,* became first a fictionalized film (directed by Tim Robbins, 1995) and then, a few years later, an opera (written by Terrence McNally and Jake Heggie).

Second, as *a process of creation*, the act of adaptation always involves both (re-)interpretation and then (re-)creation; this has been called both appropriation and salvaging, depending on your perspective. For every aggressive appropriator outed by a political opponent, there is a patient salvager. Priscilla Galloway, an adapter of mythic and historical narratives for children and young adults, has said that she is motivated by a desire to preserve stories that are worth knowing but will not necessarily speak to a new audience without creative "reanimation" (2004), and *that* is her task. African film adaptations of traditional oral legends are also seen as a way of preserving a rich heritage in an aural and visual mode (Cham 2005: 300).

Third, seen from the perspective of its *process of reception*, adaptation is a form of intertextuality: we experience adaptations (*as adaptations*) as palimpsests through our memory of other works that resonate through repetition with variation. For the right audience, then, the novelization by Yvonne Navarro of a film like *Hellboy* (2004) may echo not only with Guillermo del Toro's film but also with the Dark Horse Comics series from which the latter was adapted. Paul Anderson's 2002 film *Resident Evil* will be experienced differently by those who have played the videogame of the same name, from which the movie was adapted, than by those who have not.

In short, adaptation can be described as the following:

- An acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works
- A creative *and* an interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging
- An extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work

Therefore, an adaptation is a derivation that is not derivative—a work that is second without being secondary. It is its own palimpsestic thing.

There is some apparent validity to the general statement that adaptation "as a concept can expand or contract. Writ large, adaptation includes almost any act of alteration performed upon specific cultural works of the past and dovetails with a general process of cultural recreation" (Fischlin and Fortier 2000: 4). But, from a pragmatic point of view, such a vast a definition would clearly make adaptation rather difficult to theorize. My more restricted double definition of adaptation as process and product is closer to the common usage of the word and is broad enough to allow me to treat not just films and stage productions, but also musical arrangements and song covers, visual art revisitations of prior works and comic book versions of history, poems put to music and remakes of films, and videogames and interactive art. It also permits me to draw distinctions; for instance, allusions to and brief echoes of other works would not qualify as extended engagements, nor do most examples of musical sampling, because they recontextualize only short fragments of music. Plagiarisms are not acknowledged appropriations, and sequels and prequels are not really adaptations either, nor is fan fiction. There is a difference between never wanting a story to end—the reason behind sequels and prequels, according to Marjorie Garber (2003: 73–74)—and wanting to retell the same story over and over in different ways. With adaptations, we seem to desire the repetition as much as the change. Maybe this is why, in the eyes of the law, adaptation is a "derivative work"—that is, one based on one or more preexisting works, but "recast, transformed" (17 USC §101). That seemingly simply definition, however, is also a theoretical can of worms.

Exactly What Gets Adapted? How?

What precisely is "recast" and "transformed"? In law, ideas themselves cannot be copyrighted; only their expression can be defended in court. And herein lies the whole problem. As Kamilla Elliott has astutely noted, adaptation commits the heresy of showing that form (expression) can be separated from content (ideas)—something both mainstream aesthetic and semiotic theories have resisted or denied (2003: 133),

even as legal theory has embraced it. The form changes with adaptation (thus evading most legal prosecution); the content persists. But what exactly constitutes that transferred and transmuted "content"?

Many professional reviewers and audience members alike resort to the elusive notion of the "spirit" of a work or an artist that has to be captured and conveyed in the adaptation for it to be a success. The "spirit" of Dickens or Wagner is invoked, often to justify radical changes in the "letter" or form. Sometimes it is "tone" that is deemed central, though rarely defined (e.g., Linden 1971: 158, 163); at other times it is "style" (Seger 1992: 157). But all three are arguably equally subjective and, it would appear, difficult to discuss, much less theorize.

Most theories of adaptation assume, however, that the story is the common denominator, the core of what is transposed across different media and genres, each of which deals with that story in formally different ways and, I would add, through different modes of engagement—narrating, performing, or interacting. In adapting, the story-argument goes, "equivalences" are sought in different sign systems for the various elements of the story: its themes, events, world, characters, motivations, points of view, consequences, contexts, symbols, imagery, and so on. As Millicent Marcus has explained, however, there are two opposing theoretical schools of thought on this point: either a story can exist independently of any embodiment in any particular signifying system or, on the contrary, it cannot be considered separately from its material mode of mediation (1993: 14). What the phenomenon of adaptation suggests, however, is that, although the latter is obviously true for the audience, whose members experience the story in a particular material form, the various elements of the story can and are considered separately by adapters and by theorists, if only because technical constraints of different media will inevitably highlight different aspects of that story (Gaudreault and Marion 1998: 45).

Themes are perhaps the easiest story elements to see as adaptable across media and even genres or framing contexts. As author Louis Begley said about the themes of his 1996 novel *About Schmidt* when the work was transcribed to the screen by Alexander Payne and Jim Taylor: "I was able to hear them rather like melodies transposed into a different key" (2003: 1). Many Romantic ballets were derived from

Hans Christian Andersen's stories simply, some say, because of their traditional and easily accessible themes, such as quests, magical tasks, disguise and revelation, and innocence versus evil (Mackrell 2004). Composer Alexander Zemlinsky wrote a "symphonic fantasy" adaptation of Andersen's famous "The Little Mermaid" (1836) called *Die Seejungfrau* (1905) that includes musical programmatic descriptions of such elements as the storm and musical leitmotifs that tell the story and its themes of love, pain, and nature, as well as music that evokes emotions and atmosphere befitting the story. A modern manual for adapters explains, however, that themes are, in fact, of most importance to novels and plays; in TV and films, themes must always serve the story action and "reinforce or dimensionalize" it, for in these forms, storyline is supreme—except in European "art" films (Seger 1992: 14).

Characters, too, can obviously be transported from one text to another, and indeed, as Murray Smith has argued, characters are crucial to the rhetorical and aesthetic effects of both narrative and performance texts because they engage receivers' imaginations through what he calls recognition, alignment, and allegiance (1995: 4–6). The theater and the novel are usually considered the forms in which the human subject is central. Psychological development (and thus receiver empathy) is part of the narrative and dramatic arc when characters are the focus of adaptations. Yet, in playing videogame adaptations of films, we can actually "become" one of the characters and act in their fictional world.

The separate units of the story (or the *fabula)* can also be transmediated—just as they can be summarized in digest versions or translated into another language (Hamon 1977: 264). But they may well change—often radically—in the process of adaptation, and not only (but most obviously) in terms of their plot ordering. Pacing can be transformed, time compressed or expanded. Shifts in the focalization or point of view of the adapted story may lead to major differences. When David Lean wrote, directed, and edited the film version of E.M. Forster's 1924 novel *Passage to India* in 1984, he altered the novel's focalization on the two men, Fielding and Aziz, and their cross-cultural interrelations. Instead, the film tells Adela's story, adding scenes to establish her character and make it more complex and interesting

than it arguably is in the novel. More radically, *Miss Havisham's Fire* (1979/revised 1996), Dominick Argento and John Olon-Scrymgeour's operatic adaptation of Dickens' *Great Expectations* (1860/1861), all but ignored the story of the protagonist Pip to tell that of the eccentric Miss Havisham.

In other cases, it might be the point of departure or conclusion that is totally transfigured in adaptation. For instance, in offering a different ending in the film version of Michael Ondaatje's novel *The English Patient*, Anthony Minghella, in his film script and in his directing, removed the postcolonial politics of the Indian Kip's response to the bombing of Hiroshima, substituting instead another smaller, earlier bomb that kills his co-worker and friend. In other words, a personal crisis is made to replace a political one. As the movie's editor Walter Murch articulated the decision: "The film [unlike the novel] was so much about those five individual people: the Patient, Hana, Kip, Katharine, Caravaggio—that to suddenly open it up near the end and ask the audience to imagine the death of hundreds of thousands of unknown people … . It was too abstract. So the bomb of Hiroshima became the bomb that killed Hardy, someone you knew" (qtd. in Ondaatje 2002: 213). And, in the movie version (but not in the novel), the nurse Hana actually gives her patient the fatal morphine shot at the end, undoubtedly so that she can be seen to merge with his lover Katharine in the patient's memory, as in ours. On the soundtrack, their voices merge as well. The focus of the film is on the doomed love affair alone. This change of ending may not be quite the same as Nahum Tate's making Cordelia survive and marry Edgar in his infamous 1681 version of *King Lear*, but it is a major shift of emphasis nonetheless.

If we move from considering only the medium in this way to considering changes in the more general manner of story presentation, however, other differences in what gets adapted begin to appear. This is because each manner involves a different mode of engagement on the part of both audience and adapter. As we shall see in more detail shortly, being shown a story is not the same as being told it—and neither is the same as participating in it or interacting with it, that is, experiencing a story directly and kinesthetically. With each mode, different things get adapted and in different ways. As my examples so far suggest, to

tell a story, as in novels, short stories, and even historical accounts, is to describe, explain, summarize, expand; the narrator has a point of view and great power to leap through time and space and sometimes to venture inside the minds of characters. To show a story, as in movies, ballets, radio and stage plays, musicals and operas, involves a direct aural and usually visual performance experienced in real time.

Although neither telling nor showing renders its audience passive in the least, they also do not engage people as immediately and viscerally as do virtual environments, videogames (played on any platform), or even theme-park rides that are, in their own ways, adaptations or "remediations" (Bolter and Grusin 1999). The interactive, physical nature of this kind of engagement entails changes both in the story and even in the importance of story itself. If a film can be said to have a three-act structure—a beginning in which a conflict is established; a middle in which the implications of the conflict are played out; an end where the conflict is resolved—then a videogame adaptation of a film can be argued to have a different three-act structure. The introductory material, often presented in what are called "movie cut-scenes," is the first act; the second is the core gameplay experience; the third is the climax, again often in filmed cut-scenes (Lindley 2002: 206). Acts one and three obviously do the narrative work—through showing—and set up the story frame, but both are in fact peripheral to the core: the second-act gameplay, with its intensity of cognitive and physical engagement, moves the narrative along through visual spectacle and audio effects (including music) and through problem-solving challenges. As Marie-Laure Ryan has pointed out: "The secret to the narrative success of games is their ability to exploit the most fundamental of the forces that move a plot forward: the solving of problems" (2004c: 349). Story, in this case, is no longer central or at least no longer an end in itself, although it is still present as a means toward a goal (King 2002: 51).

Although there has been a long debate recently about whether interactivity and storytelling are at odds with one another (see Ryan 2001: 244; Ryan 2004c: 337), what is more relevant in a game adaptation is the fact that players can inhabit a known fictional, often striking, visual world of digital animation. Nintendo's 3-D world of *Zelda*, for instance, has been described as "a highly intricate environment, with

a complicated economics, an awesome cast of creatures, a broad range of landscapes and indoor scenarios, and an elaborated chemistry, biology, geology and ecology so that its world can almost be studied like an alternative version of nature" (Weinbren 2002: 180). Though *Zelda* is not an adaptation, this description of its world fits so many games that are adaptations. Similarly, Disney World visitors who go on the Aladdin ride can enter and physically navigate a universe originally presented as a linear experience through film.

What gets adapted here is a heterocosm, literally an "other world" or cosmos, complete, of course, with the stuff of a story—settings, characters, events, and situations. To be more precise, it is the "*res extensa*"—to use Descartes' terminology—of that world, its material, physical dimension, which is transposed and then experienced through multisensorial interactivity (Grau 2003: 3). This heterocosm possesses what theorists call "truth-of-coherence" (Ruthven 1979: 11)—here, plausibility and consistency of movement and graphics within the context of the game (Ward 2002: 129)—just as do narrated and performed worlds, but this world also has a particular kind of "truth-of-correspondence"—not to any "real world" but to the universe of a particular adapted text. The videogame of *The Godfather* uses the voices and physical images of some of the film's actors, including Marlon Brando, but the linear structure of the movie is transmuted into that of a flexible game model in which the player becomes a nameless mafia henchman, trying to win the respect of the main characters by taking over businesses, killing people, and so on. In other words, the point of view has been changed from that of the mafia bosses to that of the underlings, who allow us to see familiar scenes from the film's world from a different perspective and possibly create a different resolution.

What videogames, like virtual reality experiments, cannot easily adapt is what novels can portray so well: the "*res cogitans*," the space of the mind. Even screen and stage media have difficulty with this dimension, because when psychic reality is shown rather than told about, it has to be made manifest in the material realm to be perceived by the audience. However, expanding the idea of what can be adapted to include this idea of a heterocosm or visual world as well as other aspects of the story opens up the possibility of considering, for instance,

Aubrey Beardsley's famous illustrations for Oscar Wilde's play *Salomé* as a possible adaptation or even Picasso's cubist recodings of some of the canonical paintings of Velásquez.

Are some kinds of stories and their worlds more easily adaptable than others? Susan Orlean's book, *The Orchid Thief*, proved intractable to screenwriter "Charlie Kaufman" in the movie *Adaptation*. Or did it? Linear realist novels, it would appear, are more easily adapted for the screen than experimental ones, or so we might assume from the evidence: the works of Charles Dickens, Ian Fleming, and Agatha Christie are more often adapted than those of Samuel Beckett, James Joyce, or Robert Coover. "Radical" texts, it is said, are "reduced to a kind of cinematic homogenization" (Axelrod 1996: 204) when they are adapted. But Dickens' novels have been called "theatrical" in their lively dialogue and their individualized, if broadly drawn, characters, complete with idiosyncratic speech patterns. Their strongly pictorial descriptions and potential for scenes of spectacle also make them readily adaptable or at least "adaptogenic" (Groensteen 1998a: 270) to the stage and screen. Historically, it is melodramatic worlds and stories that have lent themselves to adaptation to the form of opera and musical dramas, where music can reinforce the stark emotional oppositions and tensions created by the requisite generic compression (because it takes longer to sing than to speak a line). Today, spectacular special effects films like the various *The Matrix* or *Star Wars* movies are the ones likely to spawn popular videogames whose players can enjoy entering and manipulating the cinematic fantasy world.

Double Vision: Defining Adaptation

Given this complexity of what can be adapted and of the means of adaptation, people keep trying to coin new words to replace the confusing simplicity of the word "adaptation" (e.g., Gaudreault 1998: 268). But most end up admitting defeat: the word has stuck for a reason. Yet, however straightforward the idea of adaptation may appear on the surface, it is actually very difficult to define, in part, as we have seen, because we use the same word for the process and the product. As a product, an adaptation can be given a formal definition, but as a process—of creation and of reception—other aspects have to be

considered. This is why those different perspectives touched on earlier are needed to discuss and define adaptation.

Adaptation as Product: Announced, Extensive, Specific Transcoding

As openly acknowledged and extended reworkings of particular other texts, adaptations are often compared to translations. Just as there is no such thing as a literal translation, there can be no literal adaptation. Nevertheless, the study of both has suffered from domination by "normative and source-oriented approaches" (Hermans 1985: 9). Transposition to another medium, or even moving within the same one, always means change or, in the language of the new media, "reformatting." And there will always be both gains and losses (Stam 2000: 62). Although this seems commonsensical enough, it is important to remember that, in most concepts of translation, the source text is granted an axiomatic primacy and authority, and the rhetoric of comparison has most often been that of faithfulness and equivalence. Walter Benjamin did alter this frame of reference when he argued, in "The Task of the Translator," that translation is not a rendering of some fixed nontextual meaning to be copied or paraphrased or reproduced; rather, it is an engagement with the original text that makes us see that text in different ways (1992: 77). Recent translation theory argues that translation involves a transaction between texts and between languages and is thus "an act of both inter-cultural and inter-temporal communication" (Bassnett 2002: 9).

This newer sense of translation comes closer to defining adaptation as well. In many cases, because adaptations are to a different medium, they are re-mediations, that is, specifically translations in the form of intersemiotic transpositions from one sign system (for example, words) to another (for example, images). This is translation but in a very specific sense: as transmutation or transcoding, that is, as necessarily a recoding into a new set of conventions as well as signs. For example, Harold Pinter's screenplay for Karel Reisz's film *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1981) transposed the narrative of John Fowles' novel (1969) into a totally cinematic code. The novel juxtaposed a modern narrator and a Victorian story; in the equally self-reflexive movie, we have, instead, a Victorian scenario within a modern film that is itself a movie about the

filming of the nineteenth-century story. The self-consciousness of the novel's narrator was translated into cinematic mirroring, as the actors who play the Victorian characters live out the scripted romance in their own lives. The role-playing motif of film acting effectively echoed the hypocrisy and the schizoid morality of the Victorian world of the novel (see Sinyard 1986: 135–40).

The idea of paraphrase (Bluestone 1957/1971: 62) is an alternative frequently offered to this translation analogy. Etymologically, a paraphrase is a mode of telling "beside" (para) and, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, one of its first meanings is "a free rendering or amplification of a passage" that is verbal but, by extension, musical as well. John Dryden is quoted as defining paraphrase as "translation with latitude, where the author is kept in view …, but his words are not so strictly followed as his sense; and that too is admitted to be amplified." Perhaps this describes best what scriptwriter Robert Nelson Jacobs and director Lasse Hallstrom did in their 2001 cinematic adaptation of E. Annie Proulx's novel *The Shipping News* (1993). The novel protagonist's psychic world, which is amply explored, thanks to the omniscient narration, is freely rendered in the film by having him think in visualized headlines—a realistic device for a newspaperman. In a sense, even the novel's metaphoric writing style is paraphrased in the recurring visual imagery derived from his fear of drowning. Similarly, Virginia Woolf's densely rich associative language in *Mrs. Dalloway* is rendered or paraphrased in "associative visual imagery" in the 1998 film directed by Marleen Gorris (see Cuddy-Keane 1998: 173–74).

Paraphrase and translation analogies can also be useful in considering what I earlier called the ontological shift that can happen in adaptations of an historical event or an actual person's life into a reimagined, fictional form. The adapted text may be an authoritative historical rendering or a more indefinite archive (see Andrew 2004: 200), and the form can range from "biopics" to "heritage" films, from television docudramas to videogames, such as *JFK Reloaded* (by Traffic Games in Scotland), based on the Kennedy assassination. Sometimes the text being paraphrased or translated is very immediate and available. For example, the German television movie called *Wannseekonferenz* (*The Wannsee Conference*) was an 85-minute film adaptation scripted from

the actual minutes of the 85-minute meeting held in 1942 and chaired by Reinhard Heydrich, the Chief of the German State Police, in which the "Final Solution to the Jewish Question" was decided. In 2001, Loring Mandel did a further adaptation in English for BBC and HBO called *Conspiracy*.

At other times, the adapted text is more complex or even multiple: Sidney Lumet's 1975 film *Dog Day Afternoon* was a fictionalized adaptation of an actual 1972 bank robbery and hostage situation in Brooklyn that was covered live on television and was much discussed in the media. In fact, a *Life* magazine article by P.F. Kluge was the basis of the film's screenplay. But in 2002 artist Pierre Huyghe asked the real robber, John Wojtowicz, to reenact and narrate—in effect, to translate or paraphrase—the original event for his camera. In the process, a second-level adaptation occurred: as the perpetrator relived his own past, what became clear was that he could not do so except through the lenses of the subsequent movie version. In effect, the film became, for him, as much the text to be adapted as was the lived event preserved in either his memory or the media coverage. In ontological shifts, it makes little sense to talk about adaptations as "historically accurate" or "historically inaccurate" in the usual sense. *Schindler's List* is not *Shoah* (see Hansen 2001) in part because it is an adaptation of a novel by Thomas Keneally, which is itself based on survivor testimony. In other words, it is a paraphrase or translation of a *particular* other text, a particular interpretation of history. The seeming simplicity of the familiar label, "based on a true story," is a ruse: in reality, such historical adaptations are as complex as historiography itself.

Adaptation as Process

The Adapter's Creative Interpretation/Interpretive Creation Early in the film *Adaptation*, screenwriter "Charlie Kaufman" faces an anguished dilemma: he worries about his responsibility as an adapter to an author and a book he respects. As he senses, what is involved in adapting can be a process of appropriation, of taking possession of another's story, and filtering it, in a sense, through one's own sensibility, interests, and talents. Therefore, adapters are first interpreters and then creators. This is one reason why *Morte a Venezia*, Luchino Visconti's 1971 Italian film

version of Thomas Mann's 1911 novella *Der Tod in Venedig,* is so different in focus and impact from Benjamin Britten and Myfanwy Piper's English opera *Death in Venice,* which premiered only a few years later in 1973. The other reason, of course, is the adapter's choice of medium. E.H. Gombrich offers a useful analogy when he suggests that if an artist stands before a landscape with a pencil in hand, he or she will "look for those aspects which can be rendered in lines"; if it is a paintbrush that the hand holds, the artist's vision of the very same landscape will be in terms of masses, not lines (1961: 65). Therefore, an adapter coming to a story with the idea of adapting it for a film would be attracted to different aspects of it than an opera librettist would be.

Usually adaptations, especially from long novels, mean that the adapter's job is one of subtraction or contraction; this is called "a surgical art" (Abbott 2002: 108) for a good reason. In adapting Philip Pullman's trilogy of novels, *His Dark Materials*, from 1,300 print pages to two three-hour plays, Nicholas Wright had to cut major characters (for example, the Oxford scientist Mary Malone) and therefore whole worlds they inhabit (for example, the land of the mulefas); he had to speed up the action and involve the Church right from the start. Of course, he also had to find two major narrative climaxes to replace the three of the trilogy. He also found he had to explain certain themes and even plot details, for there was not as much time for the play's audience to piece things together as there was for those reading the novels.

Obviously, not all adaptations involve simply cutting. Short stories, in particular, have often inspired movies; for example, John M. Cunningham's 1947 "The Tin Star" became Fred Zinneman and Carl Forman's 1952 film *High Noon*. Short story adaptations have had to expand their source material considerably. When filmmaker Neil Jordan and Angela Carter adapted Carter's story "The Company of Wolves" in 1984, they added details from two other related tales in Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* (1979): "The Werewolf" and "Wolf-Alice." They took a contemporary prologue from Carter's own earlier radio play adaptation to set up the dream logic of the piece. Screenwriter Noel Baker similarly described his attempt to take "a whisper of a movie idea" and make it into a feature film. He had been asked to adapt not a short story but, in fact, Michael Turner's book *Hard Core Logo* (1993), but

this book is a fragmentary narrative about the reunion of a 1980s punk band that is made up of letters, songs, answering machine messages, invoices, photos, hand-written notes, diary entries, contracts, and so on. Baker said that he first felt the challenge of the fragmentation itself and then of the fact that it was "lean and spare, full of gaps and silences, the eloquence of things left unsaid" (1997: 10). In the end, he noted in his diary that this latter point was what made the task more fun, more creative: "Must thank Turner for writing so little yet suggesting so much" (14).

Of course, there is a wide range of reasons why adapters might choose a particular story and then transcode it into a particular medium or genre. As noted earlier, their aim might well be to economically and artistically supplant the prior works. They are just as likely to want to contest the aesthetic or political values of the adapted text as to pay homage. This, of course, is one of the reasons why the rhetoric of "fidelity" is less than adequate to discuss the process of adaptation. Whatever the motive, from the adapter's perspective, adaptation is an act of appropriating or salvaging, and this is always a double process of interpreting and then creating something new.

If this sounds somewhat familiar, there is good reason, given the long history in the West of *imitatio* or *mimesis*—imitation—as what Aristotle saw as part of the instinctive behavior of humans and the source of their pleasure in art (Wittkower 1965: 143). Imitation of great works of art, in particular, was not intended only to capitalize on the prestige and authority of the ancients or even to offer a pedagogical model (as the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* argued [I.ii.3 and IV.i.2]), though it did both. It was also a form of creativity: "*Imitatio* is neither plagiarism nor a flaw in the constitution of Latin literature. It is a dynamic law of its existence" (West and Woodman 1979: ix). Like classical imitation, adaptation also is not slavish copying; it is a process of making the adapted material one's own. In both, the novelty is in what one *does with* the other text. Indeed, for "Longinus," *imitatio* went together with *aemulatio*, linking imitation and creativity (Russell 1979: 10). Perhaps one way to think about unsuccessful adaptations is not in terms of infidelity to a prior text, but in terms of a lack of the creativity and skill to make the text one's own and thus autonomous.

For the reader, spectator, or listener, adaptation *as adaptation* is unavoidably a kind of intertextuality *if the receiver is acquainted with the adapted text.* It is an ongoing dialogical process, as Mikhail Bakhtin would have said, in which we compare the work we already know with the one we are experiencing (Stam 2000: 64). By stressing the relation of individual works to other works and to an entire cultural system, French semiotic and post-structuralist theorizing of intertextuality (e.g., by Barthes 1971/1977; Kristeva 1969/1986) has been important in its challenges to dominant post-Romantic notions of originality, uniqueness, and autonomy. Instead, texts are said to be mosaics of citations that are visible and invisible, heard and silent; they are always already written and read. So, too, are adaptations, but with the added proviso that they are also acknowledged as adaptations *of specific texts.* Often, the audience will recognize that a work is an adaptation of more than one specific text. For instance, when later writers reworked—for radio, stage, and even screen—John Buchan's 1914 novel, *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, they often adapted Alfred Hitchcock's dark and cynical 1935 film adaptation along with the novel (Glancy 2003: 99–100). And films about Dracula today are as often seen as adaptations of other earlier films as they are of Bram Stoker's novel.

The Audience's "Palimpsestuous" Intertextuality For audiences, such adaptations are obviously "multilaminated"; they are directly and openly connected to recognizable other works, and that connection is part of their formal identity, but also of what we might call their hermeneutic identity. This is what keeps under control the "background noise" (Hinds 1998: 19) of all the other intertextual parallels to the work the audience might make that are due to similar artistic and social conventions, rather than specific works. In all cases, the engagement with these other works in adaptations are extended ones, not passing allusions.

Part of both the pleasure and the frustration of experiencing an adaptation is the familiarity bred through repetition and memory. Depending on our relationship with any of the traditionally choreographed versions of Tchaikovsky's 1877 ballet, *Swan Lake* (and there are many of these, from the Petipa/Ivanov one to its reworkings by Ashton and Dowell), we will be either delighted or irritated by Matthew Bourne's

adaptation, with its updating and queer ironizing of the popular classical ballet. His muscular male swans and their homoerotic, violent, and sexually charged choreography allows, among many other things, the traditional *pas de deux* between the prince and the swan to be a dance of equals—perhaps for the first time. This prince is no athletic assistant to a ballerina star. Not everyone in the audience will enjoy this transgression of and critical commentary upon the sexual politics of the balletic tradition. But no matter what our response, our intertextual expectations about medium and genre, as well as about this specific work, are brought to the forefront of our attention. The same will be true of experiencing the Australian Dance Theatre's version, entitled *Birdbrain* (2001), with its hyperspeed edgy choreography, film clips, and mechanized music. As audience members, we need memory in order to experience difference as well as similarity.

Modes of Engagement

A doubled definition of adaptation as a product (as extensive, particular transcoding) and as a process (as creative reinterpretation and palimpsestic intertextuality) is one way to address the various dimensions of the broader phenomenon of adaptation. An emphasis on process allows us to expand the traditional focus of adaptation studies on medium-specificity and individual comparative case studies in order to consider as well relations among the major modes of engagement: that is, it permits us to think about how adaptations allow people to tell, show, or interact with stories. We can be told or shown a story, each in a range of different media. However, the perspective, and thus the grammar, changes with the third mode of engagement; as audience members, we interact *with* stories in, for instance, the new media, from virtual reality to machinima. All three modes are arguably "immersive," though to different degrees and in different ways: for example, the telling mode (a novel) immerses us through imagination in a fictional world; the showing mode (plays and films) immerses us through the perception of the aural and the visual—the latter in a way related to that Renaissance perspective painting and Baroque *trompe l'oeil* (Ryan 2001: 3); the participatory mode (videogames) immerses us physically and kinesthetically. But if all are, in some sense of the word, "immersive," only

the last of them is usually called "interactive." Neither the act of looking at and interpreting black marks—words or notes—on a white page nor that of perceiving and interpreting a direct representation of a story on the stage or screen is in any way passive; both are imaginatively, cognitively, and emotionally active. But the move to participatory modes in which we also engage physically with the story and its world—whether it be in a violent action game or a role-playing or puzzle/skill testing one—is not more active but certainly active in a different way.

In the telling mode—in narrative literature, for example—our engagement begins in the realm of imagination, which is simultaneously controlled by the selected, directing words of the text and liberated—that is, unconstrained by the limits of the visual or aural. We can stop reading at any point; we can re-read or skip ahead; we hold the book in our hands and feel, as well as see, how much of the story remains to be read. But with the move to the mode of showing, as in film and stage adaptations, we are caught in an unrelenting, forward-driving story. And we have moved from the imagination to the realm of direct perception—with its mix of both detail and broad focus. The performance mode teaches us that language is not the only way to express meaning or to relate stories. Visual and gestural representations are rich in complex associations; music offers aural "equivalents" for characters' emotions and, in turn, provokes affective responses in the audience; sound, in general, can enhance, reinforce, or even contradict the visual and verbal aspects. On the other hand, however, a *shown* dramatization cannot approximate the complicated verbal play of *told* poetry or the interlinking of description, narration, and explanation that is so easy for prose narrative to accomplish. Telling a story in words, either orally or on paper, is never the same as showing it visually and aurally in any of the many performance media available.

Some theorists argue that, at a basic level, there is no significant difference between a verbal text and visual images, that, as W.J.T. Mitchell outlines this position, "communicative, expressive acts, narration, argument, description, exposition and other so-called 'speech acts' are not medium-specific, are not 'proper' to some medium or another" (1994: 160). (See also Cohen 1991b.) A consideration of the differences between the modes of engagement of telling and showing, however,

suggests quite the contrary: each mode, like each medium, *has* its own specificity, if not its own essence. In other words, no one mode is inherently good at doing one thing and not another; but each has at its disposal different means of expression—media and genres—and so can aim at and achieve certain things better than others.

Consider, for example, the interesting technical task the British novelist E. M. Forster set himself at one point in his 1910 novel *Howards End*: how to represent *in told words* the effect and the meaning of *performed music*—music that his readers would have to imagine, of course, and not hear. He begins the novel's fifth chapter with these words: "It will be generally admitted that Beethoven's Fifth Symphony is the most sublime noise that has ever penetrated into the ear of man" (Forster 1910/1941: 31). Forster goes on to describe the effect on each member of the Schlegel family, whose ears this "sublime noise" penetrates. In a telling mode, a novel can do this: it can take us into the minds and feelings of characters at will. However, the focus of this episode, in which the family attends a symphony concert in Queen's Hall in London together, is specifically on one character, Helen Schlegel—young, newly hurt in love, and therefore someone whose response to the music is intensely personal and deeply tied to her emotional troubles at the time.

As the orchestra plays the third movement, we are told that she hears "a goblin walking quietly over the universe, from end to end" (32). In the first movement, she had heard "heroes and shipwrecks," but here it is terrible goblins she hears, and an "interlude of elephants dancing" (32). These creatures are frightening because of what Helen sees as their casualness: they "observed in passing that there was no such thing as splendour or heroism in the world" (32). Forster continues, telling us that: "Helen could not contradict them, for, once at all events, she had felt the same, and had seen the reliable walls of youth collapse. Panic and emptiness! Panic and emptiness! The goblins were right" (33). Totally moved, not to mention upset, by the end of the piece, she finds she has to leave her family and be alone. As the novel puts it: "The music had summed up to her all that had happened or could happen in her career. She read it as a tangible statement, which could never be superceded" (34). She leaves the hall, taking by mistake the umbrella

of a stranger, one Leonard Bast, who will play an important part in the rest of her life and, indeed, in the rest of the novel.

What happens when this told scene is transposed to the showing mode—in this case, to film—in the Merchant/Ivory production adapted by Ruth Prawer Jhabvala? The concert, in a sense, remains, but Helen attends alone. It is not a full orchestral concert this time, but a four-handed piano performance, accompanying a lecture on Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. A few of Forster's own words remain, but very few. Because we can only *see* Helen on film and not get into her head, we can only guess at her thoughts. So in the shown version, it is not she who experiences the "panic and emptiness" of the goblins; it is simply the lecturer who uses this as an image in his explanation of the piece in response to a question from a member of the audience. In fact, Helen, from what we can see, seems rather more bored than upset by the whole experience. We do get to hear the full orchestral version of the symphony on the soundtrack (nondiegetically), but only after she leaves the hall, pursued by the young man whose umbrella she has taken by mistake.

Although Forster uses this scene to tell us about the imaginative and emotional world of Helen Schlegel, the film makes it the occasion to show us Helen meeting Leonard Bast in an appropriately culturally loaded context. In terms of plot action, that is indeed what happens in this scene, and so this is what the film aims to achieve. Interestingly, what the showing mode can do that the telling one cannot is to let us actually *hear* Beethoven's music. We cannot, however, get at the interior of the characters' minds as they listen; they must visibly, physically embody their responses for the camera to record, or they must talk about their reactions. Of course, this film contains lots of performed talk about music, art, and many other things, and not only in this rather overt lecture form.

Interacting with a story is different again from being shown or told it—and not only because of the more immediate kind of immersion it allows. As in a play or film, in virtual reality or a videogame, language alone does not have to conjure up a world; that world is present before our eyes and ears. But in the showing mode we do not physically enter that world and proceed to act within it. Because of its visceral impact,

a scripted paintball war game would be considered by some to be a different kind of adaptation of a war story than, say, even the graphic violence of a film like *Saving Private Ryan* (1998). Civil War battle reenactments may involve role-playing, and new narrative media works may require database "combinatorics," but, in both cases, the audience's engagement is different in kind than when we are told or shown the same story.

Stories, however, do not consist only of the material means of their transmission (media) or the rules that structure them (genres). Those means and those rules permit and then channel narrative expectations and communicate narrative meaning *to someone* in *some context*, and they are created *by someone* with that intent. There is, in short, a wider communicative context that any theory of adaptation would do well to consider. That context will change with the mode of presentation or engagement: the telling mode can use a variety of material media, as can the live or mediated showing mode, just as each medium can support a variety of genres. But media distinctions alone will not necessarily allow the kind of differentiations that adaptations call to our attention. For instance, "machinima" is a form of filmmaking that uses computer game technology to make films within the virtual reality of a game engine. As such, it's a hybrid form, but basically the *medium* is electronic. The machinima adaptation of Percy Bysshe Shelley's 1817 poem "Ozymandias" (by Hugh Hancock for Strange Company) is indeed a digitalized visualization of the poem's "story" about a man walking across a solitary desert and finding a ruined statue of a king inscribed with a chillingly ironic message about worldly glory and the power of time. Even if the figure of the man on screen creates suspense by having to wipe the sand off the final line of the inscription ("Look upon my works, ye Mighty, and despair"), we experience little in the digital version of the frisson we feel reading the poem's devastating irony. Considering medium alone would not be useful to getting at the success (or failure) of this adaptation: although this machinima is in a digital medium, it is not interactive. If anything, the act of interpreting what is really a shown story here is even less actively engaging than reading the told version.

This is not to say that we do not engage differently with different media, but the lines of differentiation are not as clear as we might expect. The private and individual experience of reading is, in fact, closer to the private visual and domestic spaces of television, radio, DVD, video, and computer than it is to the public and communal viewing experience in a dark theater of any kind. And when we sit in the dark, quiet and still, being shown real live bodies speaking or singing on stage, our level and kind of engagement are different than when we sit in front of a screen and technology mediates "reality" for us. When we play a first-person shooter videogame and become an active character in a narrative world and viscerally experience the action, our response is different again. Medium alone cannot explain what happens when an interactive videogame is adapted into a museum-displayed digital work of art, for it becomes a way to show, rather than interact with, a story. For instance, in a piece by Israeli American video artist Eddo Stern called *Vietnam Romance* (2003), the viewer finds that the game's enemies have already been taken out by the artist-shooter, leaving us to watch—in other words, to be shown—only a series of empty sets that have been manipulated to recall classic shots from war films, from *M*A*S*H* to *Apocalypse Now*. In reversing the intended outcome by breaking all the rules of game action, the artist has ensured that the audience cannot and does not engage in the same manner as it would with the interactive game. Likewise, Stern's *Fort Paladin: America's Army* presents a scale model of a medieval castle within which a video screen reveals—again—the final results of the artist's mastery of the U.S. military's game used for recruiting, also called *America's Army*. The work and the pleasure of the observing audience here are different from the kinetic and cognitive involvement of the interactive gamer.

Framing Adaptation

Keeping these three modes of engagement—telling, showing, and interacting with stories—in the forefront can allow for certain precisions and distinctions that a focus on medium alone cannot. It also allows for linkages across media that a concentration on medium-specificity can efface, and thus moves us away from just the formal definitions of adaptation to consider the process. These ways of engaging with stories

do not, of course, ever take place in a vacuum. We engage in time and space, within a particular society and a general culture. The contexts of creation and reception are material, public, and economic as much as they are cultural, personal, and aesthetic. This explains why, even in today's globalized world, major shifts in a story's context—that is, for example, in a national setting or time period—can change radically how the transposed story is interpreted, ideologically and literally. How do we react today, for instance, when a male director adapts a woman's novel or when an American director adapts a British novel, or both—as in Neil LaBute's film version of A.S. Byatt's 1991 novel, *Possession*? In shifting cultures and therefore sometimes shifting languages, adaptations make alterations that reveal much about the larger contexts of reception and production. Adapters often "indigenize" stories, to use an anthropological term (Friedman 2004). In Germany, for instance, Shakespeare's works were appropriated through Romantic translations and, through an assertion of the Bard's Germanic affinity, used to generate a German national literature. However strange it may seem, this is why the plays of an enemy-culture's major dramatist continued to be performed—with major variations that could be called adaptations—throughout the two World Wars. The National Socialists, in fact, made these works both political, with private values stressed as being subordinated to public ones in the tragedies, and heroic, with leadership themes dominating (Habicht 1989: 110–15).

Even a shift of time frame can reveal much about when a work is created and received. Robert Louis Stevenson's 1886 novel, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, has been adapted many times for the stage and for the movie and television screens. (To get a sense of the whole range, see Geduld 1983.) The showing mode entails embodying and enacting, and thereby often ends up spelling out important ambiguities that are central to the told version—especially, in this case, Hyde's undefined and unspecified evil. Because of mode change, these various versions have had to show—and thus to "figure"—that evil physically, and the means they have chosen to do so are revealing of the historical and political moments of their production. In 1920, at the start of Prohibition, we witness a sexual fall through alcohol in John Robertson's silent film; in the 1971 Hammer film, *Dr. Jekyll and Sister*

Hyde (directed by Roy Ward Baker), we see instead Britain's confused responses to feminism after the 1960s (see McCracken-Flesher 1994: 183–94). For economic reasons, adapters often rely on selecting works to adapt that are well known and that have proved popular over time; for legal reasons, they often choose works that are no longer copyrighted.

Technology, too, has probably always framed, not to mention driven, adaptation, in that new media have constantly opened the door for new possibilities for all three modes of engagement. Lately, new electronic technologies have made what we might call fidelity to the *imagination*—rather than a more obvious fidelity to *reality*—possible in new ways, well beyond earlier animation techniques and special effects. We can now enter and act within those worlds, through 3-D digital technology. One of the central beliefs of film adaptation theory is that audiences are more demanding of fidelity when dealing with classics, such as the work of Dickens or Austen. But a whole new set of cult popular classics, especially the work of J.R.R. Tolkien, Philip Pullman, and J.K. Rowling, are now being made visible and audible on stage, in the movie theater, on the video and computer screens, and in multiple gaming formats, and their readers are proving to be just as demanding. Although our imaginative visualizations of literary worlds are always highly individual, the variance among readers is likely even greater in fantasy fiction than in realist fiction. What does this mean when these fans see one particular version on screen that comes from the director's imagination rather their own (see Boyum 1985)? The answer(s), of course, can be found in the reviews and the audience reactions to the recent adaptations of *The Lord of the Rings* stories and the Harry Potter novels. Now that I know what an enemy orc or a game of Quidditch (can) look like (from the movies), I suspect I will never be able to recapture my first imagined versions again. Palimpsests make for permanent change.

Nicholas Wright's dramatic adaptation of Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy had to cope with the fact that the books had sold three million copies and had been translated into thirty-six languages. The adapter had to find a way to visualize and then bring to physical life on stage—without the technological advantages of film—important elements that the fans would demand be done well: things like the novels' multiple

parallel worlds, the windows cut to move characters into each world, and especially the wondrous creatures known as "daemons"—animals of the opposite sex that embody the inner soul of characters. These were technical issues as well as imaginative ones, because Wright knew the novels' fans would be a demanding audience. The two plays that were finally seen in London at the National Theatre in 2003 and revised in 2004 were set within an elaborate "paratextual" context in order to prepare the audience and perhaps forestall any objections: the program was larger and much more informative than most, offering photos, interviews with the novelist and the adapter, maps, a glossary of places, people, things, and "other beings," and a list of literary intertexts.

As this suggests, a further framing of adaptation across all modes of engagement is economic. Broadway adapts from Hollywood; novelizations are timed to coincide with the release of a film. November 2001 saw the infamous simultaneous international release of the film and multiplatform videogame versions of the first installment of the story of Harry Potter. Book publishers produce new editions of adapted literary works to coincide with the film version and invariably put photos of the movie's actors or scenes on the cover. General economic issues, such as the financing and distribution of different media and art forms, must be considered in any general theorizing of adaptation. To appeal to a global market or even a very particular one, a television series or a stage musical may have to alter the cultural, regional, or historical specifics of the text being adapted. A bitingly satiric novel of social pretense and pressure may be transformed into a benign comedy of manners in which the focus of attention is on the triumph of the individual, as has happened in most American television and film versions of Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1848). Videogames derived from popular films and vice versa are clearly ways to capitalize on a "franchise" and extend its market. But how different is this from Shakespeare's decision to write a play for his theater based on that familiar story about two teenage lovers or, for that matter, from Charles Gounod's choice to compose what he hoped would be a hit opera about them? In their different ways, Giuseppe Verdi and Richard Wagner were both deeply involved in the financial aspects of their operatic adaptations, yet we tend to reserve

our negatively judgmental rhetoric for popular culture, as if it is more tainted with capitalism than is high art.

In beginning to explore this wide range of theoretical issues surrounding adaptation, I have been struck by the unproductive nature of both that negative evaluation of popular cultural adaptations as derivative and secondary and that morally loaded rhetoric of fidelity and infidelity used in comparing adaptations to "source" texts. Like others, I have found myself asking whether we could use any less compromised image to think about adaptation as both process and product. Robert Stam, too, has seen one intriguing possibility in the film *Adaptation,* despite all its ironies; because his focus is specifically on novel to film adaptation, he finds an analogy between these two media and the film's dichotomous screenwriting twins (or split personality). He is also attracted to the metaphor of adaptations as hybrid forms, as "meeting places of different 'species,'" like the orchid (Stam 2005b: 2). For Stam, mutations—filmic adaptations—can help their "source novel 'survive'" (3).

Because my focus is on modes of engagement rather than on two specific media or on "sources," different things have caught my attention. I was struck by the other obvious analogy to adaptation suggested in the film by Darwin's theory of evolution, where genetic adaptation is presented as the biological process by which something is fitted to a given environment. To think of narrative adaptation in terms of a story's fit and its process of mutation or adjustment, through adaptation, to a particular cultural environment is something I find suggestive. Stories also evolve by adaptation and are not immutable over time. Sometimes, like biological adaptation, cultural adaptation involves migration to favorable conditions: stories travel to different cultures and different media. In short, stories adapt just as they are adapted.

In his 1976 book on Darwinian theory called *The Selfish Gene*, Richard Dawkins bravely suggested the existence of a cultural parallel to Darwin's biological theory: "Cultural transmission is analogous to genetic transmission in that, although basically conservative, it can give rise to a form of evolution" (1976/1989: 189). Language, fashions, technology, and the arts, he argued, "all evolve in historical time in a way that looks like highly speeded up genetic evolution, but has really nothing to do with genetic evolution" (190). Nonetheless, he posits the

parallel existence of what he calls "memes"—units of cultural transmission or units of imitation—that, like genes, are "replicators" (191–92). But unlike genetic transmission, when memes are transmitted, they always change, for they are subject to "continuous mutation, and also to blending" (195), in part to adapt for survival in the "meme pool." Although Dawkins is thinking about ideas when he writes of memes, stories also are ideas and could be said to function in this same way. Some have great fitness through survival (persistence in a culture) or reproduction (number of adaptations). Adaptation, like evolution, is a transgenerational phenomenon. Some stories obviously have more "stability and penetrance in the cultural environment," as Dawkins would put it (193). Stories do get retold in different ways in new material and cultural environments; like genes, they adapt to those new environments *by virtue of* mutation—in their "offspring" or their adaptations. And the fittest do more than survive; they flourish.