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WHAT IS ADAPTATION?

'All matter is translated into other matter.'

Kate Atkinson, *Not the End of the World*

The processes of adaptation and appropriation that are the concern of this book are, as already indicated, strongly linked to work in cognate areas and practices such as intertextuality and translation studies. As mentioned in the Introduction, ideas of intertextuality are most readily associated with Julia Kristeva, who, invoking examples from literature, art and music, made her case, in essays such as 'The Bounded Text' (1980) and 'Word, Dialogue and Novel' (1986), that all texts invoke and rework other texts in a rich and ever-evolving cultural mosaic. The impulse towards intertextuality, and the narrative and architectural *bricolage* that can result, is regarded by many as a central tenet of postmodernism (Allen 2000).

The interleaving of different texts and textual traditions, which is manifest in that intertextual impulse, has also been linked to the now-contested postcolonial theory of 'hybridity'. Homi Bhabha's account of hybridity suggests how things and ideas are 'repeated, relocated, and translated in the name of tradition' (1995: 207),

but also how this process of relocation can stimulate new utterances and creativity. For Bhabha, however, only hybridity that respects essential difference enables innovation, whereas the cultural synthesis or homogenization of multiculturalism proves stifling (208). Science-led notions of hybridization regard cultural artefacts as irrevocably changed by the process of interaction. In the case of colonial cultures this is particularly problematic, since if the scientific notion of dominant and recessive factors (or genes) holds true for cultures, then the colonial or imperial tradition dominates over the indigenous in any hybridized form. This notion of the dominant and the recessive was an idea first posited by Gregor Mendel in the mid-nineteenth century (Tudge 2002), but in the literary field it has been adopted to articulate a debate about dominance and suppression that is crucial for any consideration of intertextual relationships. Studies of adaptation and appropriation intersect in this way not only with scientific idiom, which T. S. Eliot deployed in his essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' when he wrote of the chemical reaction that takes place between literary inheritance and the artist that creates a wholly new 'compound' (Eliot 1984: 41), but also with the critical and cultural movements of postmodernism and postcolonialism; indeed, as a result, the effort to write a history of adaptation necessarily transmutes at various points into a history of critical theory.

Adaptation studies throws up a rich lexicon of terms: version, variation, interpretation, continuation, transformation, imitation, pastiche, parody, forgery, travesty, transposition, revaluation, revision, rewriting, echo. But, as this list suggests, texts that come under this heading can possess starkly different, even opposing, aims and intentions; as a result adaptation studies necessarily favours a kind of 'open structuralism' along the lines proposed by Genette in *Palimpsests* (1997: ix). Readings in this context are invested not in proving a text's closure to alternatives but rather in exploring, even celebrating, ongoing interactions. Sequels, prequels, compression and amplification all have roles to play at different times in the adaptive mode.

Adaptation can be a transpositional practice, casting a specific genre into another generic mode, an act of re-vision in itself. It can parallel editorial practice in some respects, indulging in the

exercise of trimming and pruning: yet it can also be an amplificatory procedure engaged in addition, expansion, accretion and interpolation (compare, for example, Deppman *et al.* 2004 on 'genetic criticism'). Adaptation is nevertheless frequently involved in offering commentary on a source text. This is achieved most often by offering a revised point of view from the 'original', adding hypothetical motivation or voicing what the text silences or marginalizes. Yet adaptation can also continue a simpler attempt to make texts 'relevant' or easily comprehensible to new audiences and readerships via the processes of proximation and updating. This might, for example, be aimed at engaging with youth audiences or, through translation in its broadest sense, linguistic and interpretative, in global, intercultural contexts. This can certainly be seen as an artistic drive in many adaptations of so-called 'classic' novels for television and cinema. Shakespeare has also been a particular focus, beneficiary even, of these proximations or updatings. Providing the scaffolding for these approaches is, of course, the role of literature in educational contexts and this introduces the social as well as economic rationales for adaptation, themes and topics to which we will return.

The relevance of particular terms to a specific text and the moment in time when these become active culturally can provide some very focussed clues as to a text's possible meanings and its cultural impact, intended or otherwise, and the purpose behind an act of adaptation. As Robert Weimann stresses, appropriation as an activity 'is not closed to the forces of social struggle and political power or to acts of historical consciousness' (1988: 433). The intention here is to examine in detail these specific impulses and ideologies, personal and historical, at play in various adaptations. It seems useful therefore to begin by unpacking in some detail what we might understand by such umbrella terms as adaptation and appropriation, and to consider the different modes and methodologies involved. This will in turn connect us with a variety of disciplinary engagements behind literary studies, not least film studies, performance studies and translation studies, but also with musicology, computer science and digital humanities, law and economics, not least in the realm of intellectual property and copyright, cultural geography and the natural sciences.

In his richly informative study of 'hypertextuality', Genette described the act of writing a text, in whatever genre, with other texts in mind as a 'transgeneric practice' (Genette 1997 [1982]: 395). As any reading of this book will make clear, a vast range of genres and sub-genres are regularly involved in the kinds of hypertextual activity Genette interrogates. Adaptation is, however, frequently a highly specific process involving the transition from one genre to another: novels into film; drama into musical; the dramatization of prose narrative and prose fiction; or the inverse movement of making drama into prose narrative. It can also involve the making of computer games or graphic novels or be dispersed into modes such as music or dance.

We have already established that when we discuss adaptation in these pages we are often (though admittedly not always) working with reinterpretations of established (canonical or perhaps just well-known) texts in new generic contexts or perhaps with relocations of an 'original' or source text's cultural and/or temporal setting, which may or may not invoke a generic shift. And it is impossible to avoid the question of value or taste in this context. Modules on higher education programmes which examine the transition of literature into other forms, not least film, are now fairly commonplace and any student engaged in studying and theorizing adaptation is involved in thinking critically about what it means to adapt and appropriate, and sometimes is even engaging in creative work of their own as part of the assessment process or the learning outcomes. Intellectual or scholarly examinations of this kind are quite deliberately not aimed at identifying 'good' or 'bad' adaptations. On what grounds, after all, should such a judgement be made? Nor are they engaged in identifying where an adaptation has been faithful or unfaithful to its source, at least in the context of any value judgement. As I hope this volume demonstrates, my argument would be that it is at the very point of infidelity or departure that the most creative acts of adaptation take place. The sheer impossibility of testing fidelity in any tangible way comes to mind when we recognize that many of the so-called 'original' texts we are handling in such circumstances, Shakespeare's plays most obviously, are highly labile, adaptive patchworks themselves. Adaptation studies needs to be understood as a field engaged with

process, ideology and methodology rather than encouraging polarized value judgements.

Establishing some useful templates for studying cinematic interpretations of well-known novels, Deborah Cartmell argues for three broad categories of adaptation:

   i   transposition
  ii   commentary
 iii   analogue.

                                   (Cartmell and Whelehan 1999: 24)

On the surface, all screen versions of novels are transpositions in the sense that they take a text from one genre and deliver it into a new modality and potentially to different or additional audiences. But many adaptations, of novels and other generic forms, contain further layers of transposition, relocating their source texts not just generically but in cultural, geographic and temporal terms. Baz Luhrmann's 1996 *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* is a useful example: updating Shakespeare's early modern Veronese tragedy to a contemporary North American setting, Luhrmann retains the play-text's sense of urban gang feuding but accords it a troublingly immediate and topical resonance. Famously, the much-mentioned swords and rapiers of Shakespeare's play-script become in Luhrmann's vividly realized Verona Beach the engraved monikers for the modern era's weapon of choice, the handgun. Genette would describe this as 'movement of proximation' (1997: 304) and it is extremely common as an approach in screen adaptations of classic novels.

As mentioned, Shakespeare's *oeuvre* has proven to be a particularly rich seam to mine for such proximations: in 1999 Kenneth Branagh remade *Love's Labour's Lost* as a 1930s Hollywood film musical, embedding Shakespeare's competition of courtly wit and sonneteering within a *faux*-Oxbridge setting. The events of the film unfurl on the eve of the Second World War, providing audiences with a more recent (and therefore perhaps more accessible?) context for conflict than Shakespeare's late sixteenth-century interactions with the French Wars of Religion. Branagh added a deliberately nostalgic soundtrack of songs by George and Ira Gershwin and

Cole Porter to appeal to those audience members who would share the film's cultural associations. In a different move, Michael Almereyda's millennial *Hamlet* (2000) re-envisioned Elsinore as a Manhattan financial corporation with Claudius as a corrupt CEO. In an interesting twist, the disaffected young prince in this version was an anti-establishment art student, who created his 'play within a play' as a video montage to be submitted as a course assignment. There is an interestingly predictive aspect to this since the decade following the release of Almereyda's film witnessed the creation of YouTube, now home for many thousands of such assignments and short film versions of Shakespeare (Desmet 2014; O'Neill 2014).

The motive or compulsion behind this and many other updatings is fairly self-evident: the 'movement of proximation' brings the text closer to the audience's personal frame of reference, allowing always for variation between local contexts and audiences (cf. Burnett 2013: 11). Not all transpositional adaptations that make temporal shifts move forward towards the present day, however – Franco Zeffirelli's 1990 film *Hamlet* opted for a Gothic medieval setting – but it is certainly a common approach. In the example of Zeffirelli's *Hamlet* it could be argued that his casting was an embedded form of proximation since it brought to bear a self-conscious act of intertextuality with the world of contemporary film by casting Mel Gibson, best known for the *Mad Max* action movies (dir. George Miller, 1979, 1981, 1985), as a very particular kind of Hamlet, and playing on the associations of Glenn Close as Gertrude with the box office success of the film *Fatal Attraction* (dir. Adrian Lyne, 1987), with its particular emphasis upon female sexual desire.

Shakespeare is not the sole focus of transpositional adaptation, although, as we will see in Chapter 3, his works do provide a cultural barometer for the historically contingent process of adaptation. In 1998, director Alfonso Cuarón effected a similar shift of setting and context with Charles Dickens's *Bildungsroman Great Expectations*, relocating it to contemporary New York, with his Pip (Finn Bell) as a struggling artist. Comparable transpositions can be found being performed on the work of Henrik Ibsen, Jane Austen, Anton Chekhov and Joseph Conrad, among others. There is a case to be made that in some instances the

process of adaptation starts to move away from simple proximation towards something more culturally loaded. This constitutes Cartmell's second category of commentary, or adaptations that comment on the politics of the source text, or those of the new *mise-en-scène*, or both, usually by means of alteration or addition. Film versions of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, for example, which bring the Algerian witch Sycorax visibly onscreen, comment by means of this action on her absence from the play. In Shakespeare's text she is constructed solely by means of Prospero's negative word-portraits. Derek Jarman's 1979 film *The Tempest* and Peter Greenaway's *Prospero's Books* (1991) both featured an onscreen Sycorax. One film version of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* (dir. Patricia Rozema, 2000) made explicit that novel's minimally articulated contextual setting in the history of British colonialism and the practice of slavery on Antiguan plantations. Rozema made visible facts that the novel represses. In both these instances, the absence or gap in the original narrative being commented on in the transpositional films was one that had previously been highlighted by the work of postcolonial critics. Adaptation might in this instance be seen as responding directly to the work of critical theory.

In all these examples it can be argued that the full impact of the film adaptation depends upon an audience's awareness of an explicit relationship to a source text. In expectation of this the most formal adaptations carry the same title as their source or informing text. Shared titles mobilize complex understandings of similarity and difference and might seem to invite comparative analysis, and it is certainly true that the majority of reviews of a film adaptation of Thomas Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd* would likely make some direct reference back to the novel and perhaps point out similarities and difference, but an enjoyment of the film is not necessarily dependent upon knowing the novel at all. Indeed, such is the accretive nature of adaptation that reviews of a film adaptation in 2015 of that same novel (dir. Thomas Vinterburg and starring Carey Mulligan as Bathsheba Everdene) have more often seized the opportunity to draw comparison with a 1967 film adaptation directed by John Schlesinger and starring Julie Christie as Bathsheba which had become canonical in its

own right. So we learn from this example that the notion of the 'source' might actually shift over time or might fashion a multi-layered entity rather than a single original.

Knowledge of the adaptational work is not necessary for a satisfying experience of viewing such a film, then, but we might argue that such knowledge brought into play in the process of understanding could enrich the spectator's experience and may indeed enhance or complicate the pleasures involved. The 2007 adaptation of Ian McEwan's 2001 novel *Atonement*, itself a masterful pastiche of the work of Jane Austen, Elizabeth Bowen and twentieth-century wartime memoirs, made some brilliant generic shifts from the book's knowing and intricate explorations of textuality (and the unreliable nature of the same) to a series of knowing visual effects that drew as much upon the history of cinema (1940s films, war movies, documentary footage) as from direct textual prompts or cues in the book (Geraghty 2009: 107). This particular set of readings or understandings was not necessary to appreciate or even enjoy the film but it certainly made the knowing spectator approach the achievements of director Joe Wright and screenplay writer Christopher Hampton in a different way. Hampton is an established writer in his own right, and here we are introduced to another way in which adaptation can work in an accretive manner as we may start to see an interesting hybrid of both McEwan's novel and Hampton's style in the finished screenplay. It also confirms the collaborative work that film constitutes, with writer and director, alongside actors and technical team, bringing the complex whole to the screen. Similar multiplicity exists when we look at a film such as *The Hours* (dir. Stephen Daldry, 2002), adapted by playwright David Hare from Michael Cunningham's 1998 novel of the same name, which is itself a complex adaptation of Virginia Woolf's biography, her 1923 novel *Mrs Dalloway* and new creative input by Cunningham himself which brings into play contemporary queer politics and the AIDS epidemic (for a fuller discussion see Chapter 6).

Is there particular or distinct pleasure involved for those spectators who can mobilize these nuanced understandings of similarity and difference? There is a danger of over-complicating the sensations involved and there may be equal pleasure simply in seeing a

story on the screen that you have previously enjoyed reading in book format. Philip Cox has suggested something akin to this in relation to the huge popularity of stage adaptations of Charles Dickens's novels in the nineteenth century. These productions consciously staged tableaux, images of famous moments from the novels: 'The use of the illustration-tableau would suggest the expectation of audience familiarity with the serial instalments of the novels themselves; the pleasure to be gained through such acts of mimicry could only be brought about by an instant recognition of the similarities' (Cox 2000: 43–4). It is, of course, in this way among others that adaptations prove complicit in activating and in some cases reactivating the profile and popularity of certain texts, participating in canon formation in some respects. Similar mobilization of familiarity worked itself out in David Edgar's remarkable stage adaptation of Dickens's *Nicholas Nickleby* which premiered in the 1980s at the Royal Shakespeare Company; the onstage references were as knowing in their allusion to those earlier stage adaptations and tableaux as to the canonical novel. In none of these instances is familiarity with the source necessary, but the experience is certainly altered by that stance of familiarity.

In Cartmell's third and final category of adaptation, analogue, the case is more similar than it might at first seem. While it may deepen our understanding of the new cultural product to be aware of shaping intertexts, it may not be entirely necessary in order to enjoy the work independently. Examples of stand-alone works that nevertheless gain layers of meaning when their status as analogue is revealed might include: Amy Heckerling's *Clueless* (1995), a Valley-Girl variation on Jane Austen's *Emma*; Francis Ford Coppola's Vietnam film *Apocalypse Now* (1979) and its recontextualization of Joseph Conrad's dark nineteenth-century exploration of the colonial enterprise in the Congo, *Heart of Darkness*; and Michael Winterbottom's *The Claim* (2001), in which Thomas Hardy's 1886 *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is re-envisioned as a subtle variation on the Hollywood genre of the western, relocating the action to gold-rush America in the 1860s. Another example which actually exhibits a two-stage process of adaptation is William Reilly's *Men of Respect* (1990), a late twentieth-century US film about the Mafia, which reworks both a 1955 film about the British gangland scene,

Joe Macbeth (dir. Ken Hughes), and that film's own Shakespearean dramatic precursor, *Macbeth*. The complex question provoked by these examples as to whether or not knowledge of a source text is required or is merely enriching will recur throughout the readings proffered in this volume.

Globalization, as both cultural phenomenon and practice, further complicates this question of familiarity when the adapted text is translated not only into a different genre but into a different language from the perceived original. Mark Thornton Burnett (2013), writing on Shakespearean adaptations in the contemporary global cinematic context, rightly emphasizes the need for criticism to move away from labels such as 'foreign' and to think instead in terms of local and global and, indeed, in terms of channels of access. In this domain the understanding of adaptation becomes as much about social and cultural politics as about literary analysis. Linda Hutcheon has proposed the use of the term 'indigenization' to explore 'how meaning and impact shift radically' in trans-cultural adaptation processes and to register the dialogue that takes place between societies as a result (2013: xviii, 148–9). As we consider adaptations of Shakespearean plays that speak to new cultural geographies such as the Venezuelan Andes or contemporary Singapore (*Sangrador*, dir. Leonardo Henríquez, 2000, a reimagining of *Macbeth; Chicken Rice War*, dir. Chee Kong Cheah, 2000, a reworking of *Romeo and Juliet*), we are invited to attend to issues surrounding the 'current inequities of space and place' (Burnett 2013: 13). While questions persist about what 'kind' of Shakespeare is being circulated or promulgated by these non-Anglophone interpretations, Burnett stresses that we need a more capacious form of criticism that accepts there is 'no fixed hierarchy between a play and its surrogate language or languages' (Burnett 2013: 3, 4).

It would, of course, be misleading to apply adaptation studies theory solely to cinematic versions of canonical plays and novels, although that is perhaps its most common and easily understood manifestation. Another genre that is engaged in self-conscious adaptation on a regular basis is the stage and film musical. Intriguingly Shakespeare once again appears as a facilitating presence: as well as *The Boys from Syracuse*, which made *The Comedy of*

Errors into musical theatre, there is Jerome Robbins's and Robert Wise's *West Side Story*, with music by Leonard Bernstein and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, which reimagined *Romeo and Juliet* as a 1950s tale of gang violence in the streets and concrete playgrounds of New York. This in turn influenced Luhrmann's previously mentioned 1996 film adaptation of Shakespeare's romantic tragedy. And *Kiss Me Kate* famously riffs on *The Taming of the Shrew* by means of the songs of Cole Porter, perhaps an informing fact when Branagh turned to his songbook when translating *Love's Labour's Lost* into a film musical.

The musical genre finds much of its source material in the literary canon and now increasingly also the cinematic one: from Victor Hugo's epic novel *Les Misérables* to T. S. Eliot's *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* (which became the Andrew Lloyd Webber–Tim Rice blockbuster *Cats*); from *Billy Elliot* (initially a Stephen Daldry directed film in 2000, and now a long-running stage musical) to *Wicked* (a stage reimagining of Gregory Maguire's 1995 novel of the same name, which is itself a retelling, from the vantage point of the witches, of the 1939 movie of *The Wizard of Oz* and L. Frank Baum's 1900 novel). One musical which has achieved its own canonical status, both in its stage format and by means of George Cukor's 1964 film version, is *My Fair Lady*, Alan Lerner's version of George Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion*, which in its title glances even further back into the literary past for its influences, to the shape-shifting stories of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, where Pygmalion creates a statue with which he falls in love. We will explore other Ovidian adaptations in Chapter 4, but what already begins to emerge in the more kinetic account of adaptation argued for in the Introduction is that these texts rework texts that often themselves rework other texts. The process of adaptation is constant and ongoing.

A kinetic or dynamic account of adaptation is enhanced and exacerbated by what Henry Jenkins has described as the convergence culture in which we now operate, which brings old and new media into a new relationality and deliberately eschews conventional notions of hierarchies in favour of a new more conjoined participatory cultural politics (Jenkins 2006: 282). In this more fluid and relational context we are asked to rethink the dynamics

between so-called source and adaptation, and to read less in a linear than in a networked and connective mode. One of the best working examples of this comes from contemporary childhood, where, in Cathlena Martin's words, 'Adapted texts saturate children's culture – lining toy stores, pervading bookshelves, filling television time slots and permeating internet websites' (2009: 85). In her astute account, a young person playing the computer game version of E.B. White's *Charlotte's Web* (1952) may well not understand that experience in terms of a derivative or secondary adaptation but as simply one action or set of actions in a broader field of trans-media storytelling and experience. As André Bazin foretold as early as 2000, in the new convergence culture, texts or encounters may well be understood not in a linear or historicized hierarchy of original and adaptation but rather in terms of a single work refracted through different art forms, all of which are conceivably perceived as equal in the eyes of the user (Martin 2009: 88; Bazin 2000: 26). As Jim Collins has noted, shifts in cultural authority take place as a result, and we encounter new cues, codes and rituals of reception, many of which are no longer spatially defined by sites and institutions such as the library or even the university (2010: 79). Our ideas and concepts of adaptation are themselves necessarily adapting in the new technological era.

It is not entirely unconnected that some of the disciplinary domains in which the term 'adaptation' has been perhaps most resonant are from the natural sciences: biology, zoology, ecology and environmental science. Ever since Charles Darwin's presenta-tion of his controversial theories of evolution in the nineteenth century, the scientific community has been fascinated by the complex processes of environmental and genetic adaptation, from Darwin's famous finches on the Galápagos Islands, whose variation in bill and beak type was an indicator of the different foodstuffs they had adapted to eat in competition with one another; to the peppered moth in British industrial cities, a melanism or darker variation on the traditional species thought to have developed to blend in with the black surfaces caused by heavy industry in those areas. Adaptation proves in these examples to be a far from neutral, indeed a highly active, mode, far removed from the blander notion of substandard copying or repetition with which it is too

often allied. Adaptation has, perhaps, suffered from an over-emphasis in post-Romantic Western culture on a highly singular notion of creativity and genius but is finding new purchase in the era of global circulations and the digital age of reproduction and re-makings. Adaptation and appropriation now provide their own intertexts such that they often perform in cultural dialogue with one another, so perhaps it will increasingly serve us better to think in terms of complex filtration, and in terms of networks, webs and signifying fields, rather than simplistic one-way lines of movement from source to adaptation. In the latter model, certainly, the importance of audience, reception and contextualized production of meaning is made properly visible.

In all of these categorizations and definitions of adaptation, it remains crucial to keep in sight the pleasure principle. In a very suggestive account of film's impact upon our experience of canonical literature, John Ellis argues that adaptation enables a prolonging or extension of pleasure connected to memory: 'Adaptation into another medium becomes a means of prolonging the pleasure of the original presentation, and repeating the production of a memory' (1982: 4–5). Ellis's thesis is equally resonant in its application to the recent vogue for television adaptations of classic texts, perhaps best exemplified by the genre of BBC period drama in the UK: examples would include adaptations of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* or Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* (cf. Cardwell 2002). The practice extends beyond the realms of the nineteenth-century novel and into the domain of contemporary fiction with adaptations of Jonathan Coe's *The Rotters' Club* (2001) or Alan Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty* (2004). The latter examples proved as loving a reconstruction of Britain in the 1970s and 1980s, respectively, as the previous more overtly historically informed adaptations.

By prolonging the pleasure of the initial encounter with a text, Ellis suggests that 'adaptation trades upon the memory of [that text], a memory that can derive from actual reading, or, as is more likely with a classic of literature, a generally circulated memory' (1982: 3). He continues, 'This adaptation consumes this memory, attempting to efface it with the presence of its own images' (3). It is at this point that I part company with his otherwise persuasive

argument. For consumption need not always be the intended endpoint of adaptation: the adapting text does not necessarily seek to consume or efface the informing source or intertext. Indeed, as I will suggest, it is the very endurance and survival of the source text, alongside the various versions and interpretations that it stimulates or provokes, that enables the ongoing process of juxtaposed readings that are crucial to the cultural operations of adaptation, and the ongoing experiences of pleasure for the reader or spectator in tracing the intertextual relationships. It is this inherent sense of mutually informing play, produced in part by the activation of our informed sense of similarity and difference between the texts being invoked, and the connected interplay of expectation and surprise, that for me lies at the heart of the experience of adaptation and appropriation.