

INTRODUCTION

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A certain militancy underlies our title, “Expanding Adaptations”; it implicitly subverts the argument that film adaptation strips away crucial parts of the source text in order to retain only its narrative essence, which can then be applied to the dictates of narrative film. This is not a new idea – André Bazin said as much in his own writings on film adaptation – but just as the “the book was better” mentality persists in popular culture, so too does the need to refute it.

As such, we would like to offer a new version of the “less is more” philosophy, where the inevitable loss of certain aspects of a source text in translating it into a new medium becomes fertile ground for augmenting, enhancing, or subverting, be it nuances of character gleaned from the overtones of previous works of actors playing the different parts, directors revisiting their preferred themes, and of course a richness of physical details that literary description simply cannot match. Indeed, knowing this propensity to expand, filmmakers have often chosen to focus on short stories as source texts that can then be expanded into feature-length films, as recent successful examples like *Brokeback Mountain* or any of the short stories of Phillip K. Dick can attest. Recently, directors like Patricia Rozema or Mira Nair have also expanded on subtexts in classic sources like *Vanity Fair* and *Mansfield Park*, largely through critical readings of postcolonial aspects of the novels.

Likewise, critical theory on the adaptation phenomenon has gone one step further, insisting that we recognize that the very definition of “adaptation” must be expanded. Following in the footsteps of Deborah Cartmell, Imelda Whelehan, Brian McFarlane, or Thomas Leitch, who have long called for adaptation studies that go beyond the simple relationship between novel and film, expanding to examine less-studied media like video games or comic books, studies like those of Julie Sanders and Linda Hutcheon demonstrate that adaptation refers not only to filmmakers’ penchant for transposing popular or canonical texts to the screen, but participates in an entire culture of rewriting and reappropriation.

From a purely technical standpoint, there seem to be three possibilities for expanding adaptation:

One can expand the source text, pulling in biographical or historical context to add to the original storyline, or simply developing existing or new facets of the available story. This has long been the trend in Austen adaptations, for example, wherein the minimal physical descriptions of characters

and places have given way to sumptuous costumes and settings in film and television adaptations. Adaptations of canonical texts have often had to expand on the historical elements of period texts in order to make them more easily understood by the general public: to continue with Austen, Fanny Price's single reference to the "slave trade" in *Mansfield Park* was thus developed in Patricia Rozema's film into a series of scenes revolving around the issue of slavery. Even more didactically, Al Pacino attempted, in his *Looking for Richard*, to clarify the historical context of the war of the Roses, through discussions with historians and academics. Interpretations of the source text, critical or otherwise, can inform filmmakers' creative strategies, as in the recent adaptations of Sherlock Holmes (Guy Ritchie's film adaptations or Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss's television series), where the homosocial aspects of the relationship between the famed detective and his sidekick Watson are duly addressed.

One can expand the film itself. This may entail highlighting the cinematic elements of the adaptation, adding purely audio-visual elements (leitmotifs of images or musical themes, for example) or reflections on the nature of film or film adaptation (a noteworthy example being *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, which trades John Fowles's ironic narratorial commentary for a "film within the film" approach, since the screenplay revolved around the actors and crew during the shooting of the adaptation of Fowles's novel). However, simply fictionalizing a non-fiction book or event represents an expansion that conforms to film's narrative tendencies, as it oftentimes results in giving the events recounted a more rigorous plot structure, be it *The King's Speech* (based on George VI's actual speech in 1939) or *The Wire* (drawn from David Simon's experience as an embedded journalist in the Baltimore homicide department, previously conveyed in his nonfiction book *Homicide*).

Finally, one can expand the adaptation's possible reception. Thus conforming to public or industry expectations often involves reinforcing less central elements of the source text (the inevitable love interest, for example), or the literal expansion of images, as when filmmakers take advantage of 3D techniques. The transformation of a storyline to conform to current trends allows for the adaptation to be considered not only in relation to its source text, but also to other examples of the given trend, thus expanding both source and reception: Christopher Nolan's *Batman* films are set up in opposition to the previous adaptations by Tim Burton and Joel Schumacher, but in accordance with fans of the Frank Miller comic-book renditions in the wake of their popularity and the success of ultra-faithful adaptations of his work like *300* or *Sin City*. Finally, transmedia adaptations expand the diegetic world they refer to, with studios spending increasing amounts of time and money to create simultaneous multi-platform adaptations that will both capture a wider audience and encourage stronger fan loyalty.

Of course, as our contributors make clear, these different techniques for expansion are overlapping, and often inextricable. As such, we will see that the articles concentrate on the larger

implications of these expansions, rather than the simple techniques used to arrive at them, though some techniques may predominate in certain analyses.

It seems appropriate that our analyses begin with a study of myth and canon as it pertains to adaptation: as Roland Barthes tells us, it is in the very nature of myth to be reappropriated, and in a sense each of these expanded adaptations are an attempt to reintroduce the initial impact of the original. As such, the source text takes on the status of myth, a story that is already well-known, but which is told anew – rather than a source to which one must be absolutely faithful, it becomes a text which must be made both familiar and meaningful again to a new audience. In this sense, the very infidelity to sources ultimately expands them, giving them new avenues to explore with the same characters, a larger world to inhabit by transposing into a different historical context, or a different place for instance.

In our first article, Audrey Garcia compares Cocteau's play *Orphée* from 1927 and the film adaptation of 1950, and sees how both stem from a contemporary retelling of the Greek myth of Orpheus, emphasizing the mythic nature of adaptation. Garcia examines the extent to which Cocteau seeks to demonstrate the limitations of fidelity, exploring the avenues that are opened up by the film version of the myth, only to bring the spectator back to the confines of the myth that no longer can satisfy audience expectations: in so doing, the dissatisfaction with the ending of the film becomes a testament to the possibilities of cinema.

Myth, however, should not be limited to its strict definition here – in terms of fiction and film adaptation, one can but associate it with the canon, texts that have come to be so firmly anchored into the collective consciousness that they take on mythological status. One such story is that of Prosper Mérimée's short story "Carmen." Cécile Vendramini and Isabelle Le Corff's analysis of its many film adaptations is an intriguing example of the rich tapestry of intertextuality implicit in the act of adaptation. From short story to opera to Broadway musical and screen adaptation, "Carmen" has taken on mythic status, where the source texts becomes one among many tellings of a classic love story, and adaptation does not relegate itself to a simple relationship between source text and film, but as a new addition amongst the many possible retellings.

After the classical or literary mythology of our first group of authors, our second section deals with national myth, and how it shapes film adaptations. As in the analysis of *Carmen*, Amy Sargeant suggests that there is something "universal and timeless" about Il'f and Petrov's "12 Chairs"; here again we have the example of a specific text taking on mythic status, where fidelity becomes less important than the translation and transposition of the attractive qualities of the story to the screen (and more specifically to a given culture and time period). By using and subverting Medhurst's comments

on national identity through comedy, Sargeant suggests that the source text of the film *Keep Your Seats Please* actually expands the nature of the national identity in which it is circumscribed.

Nicole Cloarec describes Thorold Dickinson's use of a Russian literary source (Pushkin's *The Queen of Spades*) as an inspiration for "genuine British art cinema," where artifice allows for the exploration of film's aesthetic possibilities. Beyond the expansion of the original short story, both through dialogue and changing perspectives, the film also allows for the expansion of the aesthetic possibilities of its medium. Though the place may be Russia, as in Pushkin's original text, the context into which the film is placed is that of a specific moment in post-war British film.

Whatever the status of the source text, film adaptation must necessarily take into account the specificity of narrative film and its demands (in terms of tradition, genre, or even length). Classical Hollywood cinema has repeatedly fed on works of literature as a basic structure or even simply an idea to be developed. Thus our next three authors examine the ways in which source texts are subsumed to create the genre films that continue to be cinematic mainstays, with varying degrees of success. Alfred Hitchcock's filmography contains many adaptations, and Gilles Menegaldo chooses to focus on one of the most famous examples – his adaptation of Cornell Woolrich's short story "Rear Window" in 1954. His minute comparative analysis focuses on the details of Hitchcock's adaptation, which added to the characters, the storyline, the intertextual references, thus supplanting the textual with the cinematic, and reasserting his own status as auteur/author.

In a different genre, Mathieu Lacoue-Labarthe's survey of a corpus of Westerns that are adaptations of novels brings up the issue of time, a crucial aspect to be considered when dealing with film adaptation. Both the historical context of the film (meaning setting and time of production) and the length of time separating the film's release from the book's publication are important elements to consider when examining the ins and outs of adaptation. Lacoue-Labarthe distinguishes three different stances taken by filmmakers in their representations of the never-ending battle between cowboys and Indians, but suggests that very often, the filmmakers reinforced the racial aspects of the film adaptations, adapting a cinematic tradition more than specific novels, a mythos of the American West transmitted by the silver screen, rather than a text.

The very vastness of the corpus Dennis Tredy has chosen to tackle in his article on the many adaptations of Poe testifies to the canonical nature of the author, and to his marketability on the silver screen. Tredy's analysis provides an overview of adaptation techniques as well as a testament to the difficulty of successfully translating Poe's gothic atmosphere to the screen, whether this be due to practical difficulties (Corman's small budgets and requisite recycling) or to audience expectations

(recent adaptations incorporating horror film gimmicks and reducing Poe to generic stereotypes). Choosing the horror genre, of course, implies a certain reading of Poe that does not perhaps correspond to the source text, and points to a gap in the genres generally used in film: the Gothic, eerie without gore, suspenseful without sudden attacks, is a hard sell for contemporary commercial filmmaking.

The practicalities of low-budget adaptations and market expectations bring us to the theme of economy that runs through our next three articles. Whether it be the economy of the film industry, as in Joyce Goggin's analysis of *Avatar* and its spectacular predecessors, and H el ene Laurichesse's examination of blockbusters, from their creation to their commodification, or the larger question of how the global economy effects the cinematic retelling of a contemporary tale, as in Anna Fl ugge's analysis of *Up in the Air*, adaptation is decidedly an industry as well as an art.

Joyce Goggin's wide-spanning article on the cinema of attraction and *Avatar* is in and of itself an example of expanding adaptation, where James Cameron's latest spectacle becomes a lens through which Goggin is able to see the economics of spectacle from the 18th century onward, thus expanding our thoughts of what we consider to be an adaptation. Goggin points out the mythologized nature of the Pocahontas storyline, its easily appropriated nature that allows *Avatar* to reenvision it in fairly elliptical terms. In so doing, Goggin's analysis of a much-told tale becomes a unique approach to "explain adaptation as a matter of industry, technology and economy, rather than aesthetics and semantics."

In keeping with this logic, we need to take into consideration the fact that film adaptation is often just the first step in creating an array of merchandise and media for a given fictional world. Laurichesse takes on some of the most popular sagas in cinema today – *Harry Potter*, *Twilight*, and *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* – to try and discern exactly what makes a series susceptible to this kind of success and subsequent marketing, and how this translates into the next big hit.

Anna Fl ugge's analysis of *Up in the Air* reinforces the point made by Mathieu Lacoue-Labarthe about the importance of time. While Lacoue-Labarthe's corpus depended on the very timelessness of the Far West imagery to outweigh the influence of recent source texts, Fl ugge suggests that the very timely nature of the film can ultimately have the same transformative effect of distancing filmmakers from the source text. For Fl ugge, the movement from book to film also implies the widening of perspective of the source text, moving from the personal to the general, particularly with the expanded role of Natalie (Anna Kendrick's character), a necessary update given the changing economic and political climate between the book's original date of publication in 2001, and the film's release in 2009.

The emphasis on reinterpretation is at the very heart of theory, and our next group of authors chose to focus on the way in which critical readings informed the film adaptations of given works, and

the way the ensuing works could be characterized by their hybridity as well as their creativity. Monica Michlin demonstrates the vastness of the remediation in the many adaptations of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, first by Michael Cunningham in his novel *The Hours*, then in David Hare's screenplay, and finally in Stephen Daldry's film adaptation. Though limiting some of the queer aspects of the Cunningham novel may be seen by some critics as reducing it, it ultimately expanded the audience, making these aspects of the different source texts available to many for the first time.

David Roche applies the importance of theory in expanding adaptations to a very different genre: that of slasher films, particularly the recent remakes of *Halloween* and *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. In redefining the trope of the *final girl* (as examined by feminist critics like Carol Clover) for a contemporary audience, filmmakers Rob Zombie and Marcus Nispel show an awareness of their genre, its precedents, and its tropes, that allow them to remake the slasher film in their own image. This reconstruction, of course, is not without its own imperfections and misreadings of feminist texts, as Roche shows.

Finally, Robert Stam's work on the work of French New Wave critics and adaptation shows how Truffaut and Bazin, along with structuralist theoreticians like Barthes, essentially opened out adaptation studies, expanding the discipline itself as well as its subject of study, insisting on transtextuality rather than servile fidelity.

Our authors' emphasis on the possibilities of adaptation ultimately confirm Robert Stam's comments in another of his texts on adaptation: "Filmic adaptations, then, are caught up in the ongoing whirl of intertextual reference and transformation, of texts generating other texts in an endless process of recycling, transformation, and transmutation, with no clear point of origin." (Stam 66) As adaptation continues to proliferate in narrative (and even non-narrative) media, and as our fictional worlds continue to expand, be it through our contemporary reappropriation of timeless tales (*Once Upon a Time*, *Grimm*), television's radical expansion of literature (*Justified*, *Vampire Diaries*, *True Blood*, *Dexter*), or simply the viral marketing adaptations of upcoming films or television series, we find ourselves awash in the infinite potential of adaptation. Choosing to see adaptation in terms of expansion is also a way to acknowledge what these new works bring to what came before them, how they participate in their persisting relevance, and not just what is lost or forgotten as time goes by and the world changes.

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