know that ideas can adapt; sometimes even institutions can adapt. Or not. Various papers in this issue attest in exciting ways to precisely such adaptations and maladaptations. (See, for example, the articles in this issue by Lelia Green, Leesa Boniface, and Tammi McMahon, by Lexey A. Bartlett, and by Debra Ferreyda.)

Another is the assumption that what the writer put on paper is what we read. But entire doctoral programs in literary production and book history have been set up to study how this is not the case, in fact. Editors influence, even change, what authors want to write. Designers control how we literally see the writing of literature (and works like Harold Bloom’s famous study of the Anxiety of Influence) and toward considering our readerly associations with literature, the connections we (not the author) make—as we read. We, the readers, have become “empowered”, as we say, and we’ve become the object of academic study in our own right. Among the many associations we inevitably make, as readers, is with adaptations of the literature we read, be it of Jane Austen novels or Beowulf. Some of us may have seen the 2006 rock opera of Beowulf done by the Irish Repertory Theatre; others await the new Neil Gaiman animated film. Some may have played the Beowulf videogame. I personally plan to miss the upcoming updated version that makes Beowulf into the son of an African explorer. But I did see Sturla Gunnarsson’s Beowulf and Grendel film, and yearned to see the comic opera at the Lincoln Centre Festival in 2006 calledGrendel, the Transcendence of the Great Big Bad. I am not really interested in whether these adaptations—all in the last year or so—signify Hollywood’s need for a new “monster of the week” or are just the sign of a desire to cash in on the success of The Lord of the Rings. For all I know they might well act as an ethical reminder of the human in the alien in a time of global strife (see McGee, A4). What interests me is the impact these multiple adaptations can have on the reader of literature as well as on the production of literature.

Literature, like painting, is usually thought of as what Nelson Goodman (114) calls a one-stage art form. But illusion of originality is only one of the implications of seeing literature as a one-stage art form. We are looking at this phenomenon from the point of view of authorial influences on the writing of literature (and works like Northrop Frye offered as the first principle of the production of literature: “literature can only derive its form from itself” (15)).

But in the last several decades, what has come to be called intertextuality theory has shifted thinking away from looking at this phenomenon from the point of view of authorial influences on the writing of literature (and works like Northrop Frye offered as the first principle of the production of literature: “literature can only derive its form from itself” (15)). An “intertextual feast”, by Clarke’s own admission, this rewriting of Beatrix’s story—especially Percy Bysshe Shelley’s own verse play. The Cenci illustrates brilliantly what Northrop Frye offered as the first principle of the production of literature: “literature can only derive its form from itself” (15).

In Defence of Literary Adaptation as Cultural Production

In this book, I try to steer adaptation theory and analysis away from pure formal or aesthetic comparisons between the novel and the screen, instead, examining both as cultural productions that are influenced by, and help shape, cultural concerns.
on screen is a concerned, intrigued, but in the end rather blank face: Gabriel doesn’t alter his expression watches his wife listening, moved, to the singing of the Irish song, “The Lass of Aughrim,” what we see may not have realised it fully in making the film. When, in a central scene in the narrative, Gabriel in this particular case, Huston still arguably needs my imagination, or at least my memory—though he look and sound like—in my imagination, at least. Then along comes John Huston’s lush period piece colonised, my reader’s imagination. The literary “source” text, in my readerly, experiential terms, becomes adaptation, has become the second and even secondary text for me. And as I read, I can only “see” book appear, with stills from the movie adaptation on its cover. But if I buy and read the book after seeing (Post?)Colonialism”

I join many others today, like Stam, in challenging the persistence of this fidelity discourse in adaptation studies, thereby providing yet another example of what, in his article here called “The Persistence of Fidelity: Adaptation Theory Today,” John Connor has called the “fidelity reflex”—the call to end an obsession with fidelity as the sole criterion for judging the success of an adaptation. But here I want to come at this same issue of the relation of adaptation to the adapted text from another angle.

When considering an adaptation of a literary work, there are other reasons why the literary “source” text might be privileged. Literature has historical priority as an art form, Stam claims, and so in some people’s eyes will always be superior to other forms. But does it actually have priority? What about even earlier performative forms like ritual and song? Or to look forward, instead of back, as Tim Barker urges us to do in his article here, what about the new media’s additions to our repertoire with the advent of electronic technology? How can we maintain this hierarchy of artistic forms—with literature inevitably on top—in a world like ours today? How can both the Romantic ideology of original genius and the capitalist notion of individual ownership hold up in the face of the complex reality of the production of literature today (as well as in the past)? (In “Amen to That; Sampling and Adapting the Past”, Steve Collins shows how digital technology has changed the possibilities of musical creativity in adapting/sampling.)

Like many other ages before our own, adaptation is rampant today, as director Spike Jonze and screenwriter Charlie Kaufman clearly realised in creating Adaptation, their meta-cinematic illustration-as-send-up film about adaptation. But rarely has a culture denigrated the adapter as a secondary and derivative creator as much as we do the screenwriter today—as Jonze explores with great irony. Michelle McMerrin and Sergio Rizzo helpfully explain in their pieces here that one of the reasons for this is the strength of auteur theory in film criticism. But we live in a world in which works of literature have been turned into more than films. We now have literary adaptations in the forms of interactive new media works and videogames; we have theme parks; and of course, we have the more common television series, radio and stage plays, musicals, dance operas, and works. And, of course, we now have novelisations of films—and they are not given the respect that originary novels are given: it is the adaptation as adaptation that is denigrated, as Deborah Allison shows in “Film/Print: Novelisations and Genghis One”.

Adaptations across media are inevitably fraught, and for complex and multiple reasons. The financing and distribution issues of these widely different media alone inevitably challenge older capitalist models. The need or desire to appeal to a global market has consequences for adaptations of literature, especially with regard to its regional and historical specificities. These particularities are what usually get adapted or “indigenised” for new audiences—be they the particularities of the Spanish gypsy Carmen (see Ioana Furnica, “Subverting the ‘Good, Old Tune’”), those of the Japanese samurai genre (see Kevin P. Eubanks, “Becoming-Samurai: Samurai [Films], Kung-Fu [Flicks] and Hip-Hop [Soundtracks]”, of American hip hop graffiti (see Kara-Janem Lombard, “To Us Writers, the Differences Are Obvious: The Adaptation of Hip Hop Graffiti to an Australian Context”) or of Jane Austen’s fiction (see Suchitra Mathur, “From British ‘Pride’ to Indian ‘Bride’: Mapping the Contours of a Globalised (Post?)Colonialism”)

What happens to the literary text that is being adapted, often multiple times? Rather than being displaced by the adaptation (as is often feared), it most frequently gets a new life: new editions of the book appear, with stills from the movie adaptation on its cover. But if I buy and read the book after seeing the movie, I read it differently than I would have before I had seen the film: in effect, the book, not the adaptation, has become the second and even secondary text for me. And as I read, I can only “see” characters as imagined by the director of the film; the cinematic version has taken over, even colonised, my reader’s imagination. The literary “source” text, in my readerly, experiential terms, becomes the secondary work. It exists on an existential continuum, in other words, with its adaptations. It may have been created before, but I only came to know it after.

What if I have read the literary work first, and then see the movie? In my imagination, I have already cast the characters: I know what Gabriel and Greta Conroy of James Joyce’s story, “The Dead,” look and sound like—in my imagination, at least. Then along comes John Huston’s lush period piece cinematic adaptation and the director superimposes his vision upon mine; his forcibly replaces mine. But, in this particular case, Huston still arguably needs my imagination, or at least my memory—though he may not have realised it fully in making the film. When, in a central scene in the narrative, Gabriel watches his wife listening, moved, to the singing of the Irish song, “The Lass of Aughrim,” what we see on screen is a concerned, intrigued, but in the end rather blank face: Gabriel doesn’t alter his expression as he listens and watches. His expression may not change—but I know exactly what he is thinking. Huston does not tell us; indeed, without the use of voice-over, he cannot. And since the song itself is important, voice-over is impossible. But I know exactly what he is thinking: I’ve read the book. I fill in the blank, so to speak. Gabriel looks at Greta and thinks:

There was grace and mystery in her attitude as if she were a symbol of something. He asked himself what is a woman standing on the stairs in the shadow, listening to distant music, a symbol of. If he were a painter he would painh her in that attitude. … Distant Musichhe would call the picture if he were a painter. (210)

A few pages later the narrator will tell us:
This joy, of course, puts him in a very different—disastrously different—state of mind than his wife, who (we later learn) is remembering a young man who sang that song to her when she was a girl—and who died, for love of her. I know this—because I've read the book. Watching the movie, I interpret Gabriel's blank expression in this knowledge.

Just as the director's vision can colonise my visual and aural imagination, so too can I, as reader, supplement the literary text's inner knowledge. The question, of course, is: should I have to do so? Because I have read the book, I will. But what if I haven't read the book? Will I substitute my own ideas, from what I've seen in the rest of the film, or from what I've experienced in my own life? Filmmakers always have to deal with this problem, of course, since the camera is resolutely externalising, and actors must reveal their inner worlds through bodily gesture or facial expression for the camera to record and for the spectator to witness and comprehend. But film is not only a visual medium; it uses music and sound, and it also uses words—spoken words within the dramatic situation, words overheard on the street, on television, but also voice-over words, spoken by a narrating figure. Stephen Dedalus escapes from Ireland at the end of Joseph Strick's 1978 adaptation of Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man with the same words as he does in the novel, where they appear as Stephen's diary entry:

At last she turned towards them and Gabriel saw that there was colour on her cheeks and that her eyes were shining. A sudden tide of joy went leaping out of his heart. (212)

The words from the novel also belong to the film as film, with its very different story, less about an artist than about a young Irishman finally able to escape his family, his religion and his country. What's deliberately NOT in the movie is the irony of Joyce's final, benign-looking textual signal to his reader:

Amen. So be it. Welcome, O life! I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race. … Old father, old artificer, stand me now and ever in good stead. (253)

The first date is the time of Stephen's leaving Dublin—and the time of his return, as we know from the novel Ulysses, the sequel, if you like, to this novel. The escape was short-lived/Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man has an ironic structure that has primed its readers to expect not escape and triumph but something else. Each chapter of the novel has ended on this kind of personal triumphal high; the next has ironically opened with Stephen mired in the mundane and in failure. Stephen's final words in both film and novel remind us that he really is an Icarus figure, following his "Old father, old artificer", his namesake, Daedalus. And Icarus, we recall, takes a tumble. In the novel version, we are reminded that this is the portrait of the artist "as a young man"—later, in 1914, from the distance of Trieste (to which he has escaped). Joyce, writing this story, could take some ironic distance from his earlier persona. There is no such distance in the film version. However, it stands alone, on its own; Joyce's irony is not appropriate in Strick's vision. His is a different work, with its own message and its own, considerably more romantic and less ironic power.

Literary adaptations are their own things—inspired by, based on an adapted text but something different, something other. I want to argue that these works adapted from literature are now part of our readerly experience of that literature, and for that reason deserve the same attention we give to the literary, and not only the same attention, but also the same respect. I am a literarily trained person. So I want to return to it, to as unfinished business. Clarke is, by the way, clear in the verse drama as well as in articles and interviews that among the many intertexts to Beatrice Chancy, the most important are slave narratives, especially one called Celia, a Slave, and Shelley's play, The Cenci. Both are stories of mistreated and subordinated women who fight back. Since Clarke himself has written at length about the slave narratives, I'm going to concentrate here on Shelley's The Cenci. The distance from Shelley's verse play to Clarke's verse play is a temporal one, but it is also geographic and ideological one: from the old to the new world, and from a European to what Clarke calls an "Africadian" (African Canadian/African Acadian) perspective. Yet both poets were writing political protest plays against unjust authority and despotic power. And they have both become plays that are more read than performed—a sad fate, according to Clarke, for two—said Clarke, are so concerned with each other. We know that Shelley sought to calibrate the stylistic registers of his work with various dramatic characters and effects to create a modern "mixed" style that was both a return to the ancients and offered a new drama of great range and flexibility where the expression fits what is being expressed (see Bruhn).

Clarke's adaptation does not aim for Shelley's perfect linguistic decorum. It mixes the elevated and the biblical with the idiomatic and the sensual—even the vulgar—the lushly poetic with the coarsely powerful. But perhaps it's also a way of appropriate language fits, after all: Beatrice Chancy is a woman of mixed blood—the child of a slave woman and her slave owner; she has been educated by her white father in a convent school. Sometimes that educated, elevated discourse is heard; at other times, she uses the variety of discourses operative within slave society—from religious to colloquial. But all the time, words count—as in all printed and oral literature.

Clarke's verse drama was given a staged reading in Toronto in 1997, but the story's, if not the book's, real second life came when it was used as the basis for an opera libretto. Actually the libretto commission came first (from Queen of Puddlings Theatre in Toronto), and Clarke started writing what was
to be his first of many opera texts. Constantly frustrated by the art form's demands for concision, he found himself writing two texts at once—a short libretto and a longer, five-act tragic verse play to be published separately. Since it takes considerably longer to sing than to speak (or read) a line of text, the composer James Rolfe keep asking for cuts—in the name of economy (too many singers), because of clarity of action for audience comprehension, or because of sheer length. Opera audiences have to sit in a theatre for a fixed length of time, unlike readers who can put a book down and return to it later. However, what was never sacrificed to length or to the demands of the music was the language. In fact, the double impact of the powerful mixed language and the equally potent music, increases the impact of the literary text when performed in its operatic adaptation. Here is the verse play-version of the scene after Beatrice’s rape by her own father, Francis Chancy:

I was black but comely. Don’t glance
Upon me. This flesh is crumbling
Like proved lies. I’m perfumed, ruddy
Carion. Assassinated.
Screams of mucking juncos screamed
Over the chapel and my nerves,
A stickiness, as when he finished
Maculating my thighs and dress.
My eyes seep pus; I can’t walk: the floors
Are tizzy, dented by stout mauling.
Suddenly I would like poison.

The biblical and the violent meet in the texture of the language. And none of that power gets lost in the opera adaptation, despite cuts and alterations for easier aural comprehension.

Clarke has said that he feels the libretto is less “literary” in his words than the verse play, for it removes the lines of French, Latin, Spanish and Italian that pepper the play as part of the author’s critique of the highly educated planter class in Nova Scotia: their education did not guarantee ethical behaviour (“Adaptation” 14).

I have not concentrated on the music of the opera, because I wanted to keep the focus on the language. But I should say that the Rolfe’s score is as historically grounded as Clarke’s libretto: it is rooted in African Canadian music (from ring shouts to spirituals to blues) and in Scottish fiddle music and local reels of the time, not to mention bel canto Italian opera. However, the music consciously links black and white traditions in a way that Clarke’s words and story refuse: they remain stubbornly separate, set in deliberate tension with the music’s resolution. Beatrice will murder her father, and, at the very moment that Nova Scotia slaves are liberated, she and her co-conspirators will be hanged for that murder.

Unlike the printed verse drama, the shorter opera libretto functions like a screenplay, if you will. It is not so much an autonomous work unto itself, but it points toward a potential enactment or embodiment in performance. Yet, even there, Clarke cannot resist the lure of words—even though they are words that no audience will ever hear. The stage directions for Act 3, scene 2 of the opera read: “The garden. Slaves, sunflowers, stars, sparks” (98). The printed verse play is full of these poetic associative stage directions, suggesting that despite his protestations to the contrary, Clarke may have thought of that version as one meant to be read by the eye. After Beatrice’s rape, the stage directions read: “A violin mopes. Invisible shovelful of dirt thud upon the scene—as if those present were being buried alive—like ourselves” (91). Our imaginations—and emotions—go to work, assisted by the poet’s associations. There are many such textual helpers—epigraphs, photographs, notes—that we do not have when we watch the opera.

The flesh limps from my spine. My inlets crimp.
Vultures flitter, ghostly, without meaning.
I can see lice swarming the air.

His scythe went shick shick shick and slashed
My flowers; they lay, murdered, in heaps. (90)

My eyes seep pus; I can’t walk: the floors
Are tizzy, the sick walls tumbling,
Crumbling like proved lies.
His scythe went shick shick shick and cut
My flowers; they lay in heaps, murdered. (95)

Clarke’s work of literature, his verse drama, is a “situated utterance, produced in one medium and in one historical and social context,” to use Robert Stam’s terms. In the opera version, it was transformed into another “equally situated utterance, produced in a different context and relayed through a different medium” (45-6). I want to argue that both are worthy of study and respect by wordsmiths, by people like me. I realise I’ve loaded the dice: here neither the verse play nor the libretto is primary; neither is really the “source” text, for they were written at the same time and by the same person. But for readers and audiences (my focus and interest here), they exist on a continuum—depending on which we happen to experience first.

As Ilana Shiloh explores here, the same is true about the short story and film of Memento.

I am not alone in wanting to mount a defence of adaptations. Julie Sanders ends her new book called Adaptation and Appropriation with these words: “Adaptation and appropriation ... are, endlessly and wonderfully, about seeing things come back to us in as many forms as possible” (160). The storytelling imagination is an adaptive mechanism—whether manifesting itself in print or on stage or on screen. The study of the production of literature should, I would like to argue, include those other forms taken by that storytelling drive. If I can be forgiven a move to the amusing—but still serious—in concluding, Terry Pratchett puts it beautifully in his fantasy story, Witches Abroad: “Stories, great flapping
ribs of shaped space-time, have been blowing and uncoiling around the universe since the beginning of time. And they have evolved. The weakest have died and the strongest have survived and they have grown fat on the retelling.” In biology as in culture, adaptations reign.

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Citation reference for this article

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