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ADAPTATION: IS THE BOOK *REALLY* BETER THAN THE…TELEVISION SERIES?

by

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SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS

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Preface

Why look at adaptation?

What sparked the idea to write about adaptation, as it pertains to the fields of Literature and Media Studies, came to me during a conversation with a friend about the alarming rate at which pop-culture works of fiction, often book series, were becoming the foundation of mega franchises. The hysteria surrounding these franchises, including the books, the films, the paraphernalia, even the actors themselves, made me think about other works of adaptation and the effect these adaptations are having on our culture in regards to the desire to read versus the desire to watch.

While literary adaptations have always been a part of our culture, it saddens me to see the film adaptations of literary classics seeming to replace the act of reading the source text, while the popularity of recent pop-fiction adaptations are sparking the interest to read the series. As a Media Studies and English dual major, I have found an equal love for engrossing myself in a book, those of the canon as well as popular fiction, as well as losing sense of time and place in the dark space of the theatre or the comfortable surroundings of my room. Both experiences are valued, however they should be considered separately as each brings different elements to the table. This argument becomes even more

complex with the inclusion of television as a separate, younger media. With each medium come different limitations and opportunities, so how can they be compared as equals?

That being said, I in no way intent to impose a hierarchy in which one medium reins supreme; however it is clear that based on the historical foundations of adaptation studies, traditional attitudes or high and mass culture cannot be avoided. By pursuing this topic, my goal is to ask pertinent questions of the past, present, and future of each field, both individually and in relation to each other. Courses that I have taken thus far in each major, including a most recent course, Film and Literature, have provided a base for this discussion academically. While these courses focus on film as well as canonical literature, this paper will allow the opportunity for expansion. In addition, as an employee of the television series "The Closer," personal interest in this topic extends past the academic foundations built, which were focused around television, into the potential of a future career. My involvement in the world of television has also led me to consider the effect in which the medium of television has on adaptation studies. In addition, the current discourse surrounding the topic of adaptation is heavily focused on film and "classic," canonical literature. This paper will attempt to extend the discussion further into the newer medium of television, as well as the

appearance of pop-culture texts, areas that are much more recent and less explored.

Introduction: Defining Adaptation

When the topic of 'adaptation' is brought up, more often than not the coupling of a novel and its most recent Hollywood hit come to mind (*Hunger Games*, anyone?). Some have patiently awaited the release of the film, anxious to see the story in their head played out on a screen, while others may have decided to pick up the book post-movie, or skip the reading all together. Although it may not be at the forefront of the general population's mind, adaptation is something that we encounter often, and consciously or not, we all have our own theory on the subject. While it may seem that the evolution of book series, to film adaptation, to booming franchise may be recently trending with the acceleration of blockbusters such as the *Hunger Games*, *Twilight*, and *Harry Potter*, adaptation has been a fundamental part of the advancement of media.

What is an adaptation? A look into the meaning of the words used to define adaptation aids in opening a path of understanding the entirety of adaptations and the subsequent critiques of them. Merriam-Webster defines adaptation as follows:

1. the act or process of adapting: the state of being adapted
2. adjustment to environmental conditions: as a: adjustment of a sense organ to the intensity or quality of stimulation b: modification of an organism or its parts that makes it more fit for existence under the conditions of its environment
3. something that is adapted; specifically: a composition rewritten into a new form ("Adaptation")

Merriam-Webster defines the verb adapt as follows:

1. to make fit (as for a specific or new use or situation) often by modification ("Adapt")

Adaptation is necessary to the functionality of society; otherwise there would be no progress. The process of adaptation is not only inevitable but necessary and a product of evolution; those that don't adapt don't survive. Just as an organism modifies itself to "make it more fit for the conditions of its environment," adaptations cannot be created without being influenced by modernity. This includes technology, dress, language, culture; virtually any visual signifier determines the context in which an adaptation is regarded.

The process of adaptation is inescapable. It can be found everywhere, traversing across virtually all forms of media and art: novels, paintings, films, television programs and plays to name a few. What makes an adaptation such a multifaceted topic is its ability to incorporate numerous mediums. An adaptation can take many forms, as multiple adaptations can be derived from the same source text, and there are many approaches to creating an adaptation.

A common misconception is that the goal of an adaptation is to produce a copy of its source; this is, however, not always the case. The purpose of an adaptation dictates the final outcome. An adaptation is the final result of what

element of the source text the director/writer decides to focus on through the form of another medium. The medium of the adaptation determines what the limitations of the final product are, as different mediums provide different opportunities of expression. Despite the numerous mediums through which adaptation can be found, discourses surrounding the field of adaptation studies are often dominated by the relationship of film and literature.

Adaptation studies, in regards to literature and film, or television even, occupy a liminal place within the academic world as the field is "too literary for film studies and too film-based for literary studies" (Cartmell 1). When discussing literary adaptation, be it film or television, the analysis remains rooted in fidelity. Conversations surrounding what scenes were cut, what was taken too far, what was underplayed, or the poor casting choices often elicit the statement, "The book was better than the movie." This statement, or others like it, has been expressed at every level of audience, whether it be movie viewers, scholars, or historians. These discourses of fidelity should be challenged by the consideration of the cultural and historical contexts of the source text and adaptation as well as the medium through which the story is told.

When considering the historical context of adaptation studies, the common theme of literature acting as the "original" text and the adaptation as a "copy"

dominates discussion. This has established itself as the foundation upon which notions of what constitutes high culture and mass culture within the field of adaptations has been built upon. Looking at the evolution of adaptation, there has been a movement from the use of canonical literature to contemporary literature. This movement from prestige to pop, as well as a stronger emergence of television adaptations, challenges the domination of studies solely regarding the film adaptation of the novel. The medium-specific differences of film and television call for separate consideration of their subsequent adaptations, as each is capable of individual achievements.

This paper will look at these adaptations founded outside of the literary canon, exploring the discourse of what constitutes high or mass culture and how the medium of the adaptation fits or breaks the conventions that "classic" film adaptation has established. In addition, the medium-specific differences between film and television will be examined for how they limit or enhance a literary adaptation, whether it is a single novel or a series. What happens to the critique of an adaptation when it extends past the narrative created in the source text, opposed to the adaptation that begins and ends with the source narrative? Each adaptation should be considered separately, seen as an autonomous, specialized work in its media-specific form. In his anthology, "Film Adaptation," James Naremore states, "The end product of a novel and film represent different aesthetic

genera, as different from each other as ballet is from architecture" (Naremore 6). In addition, adaptations will be looked at through a contextual and historical lens, rather than a moralistic or hierarchical lens, producing a criticism that incorporates the differences among the media involved in adaptations.

In chapter one, a brief history of literary adaptation, as well as the development of high and mass culture, will provide base for understanding the problematic aspects of how adaptations are critiqued. This history, as it has grown in the fields of film and television, will be illustrated to show the progression of adaptation as it shifts from literary works of what was considered "classic," to that of more contemporary works. A further discussion defining high and mass culture will provide a foundation for how the notion that the evolution of adaptation has continually debased the literary works adapted was established.

Chapter two will delve further into these attitudes towards adaptation and the relationship of the source text to its adaptation. A Case study of Spike Jonze's film, *Adaptation*, will aid in presenting the hierarchies present in the field of adaptation studies. These hierarchies, created through the establishment of high and mass culture, have created a dominating focus of fidelity, and whether an adaptation has remained "true" to its source text.

In chapter three, the differences in medium will be discussed as they pertain to the limitations and opportunities they respectively provide for an adaptation. This battle of the medium will establish how crucial it is to consider what form the adaptation is taking and how these differences eliminate the ability for the source text and its adaptation to be considered on an even playing field. The novel, as well as film and television will be analyzed through case studies of *Harry Potter* and *True Blood*. The second part of the chapter will further this argument by considering the contextual elements of the adaptation. Modern adaptations of Shakespeare will be compared to the written works as well as those considered "classic" interpretations of the playwright to illuminate how the cultural and historical aspects of the source text and adaptation need to be encompassed in the overall critique of an adaptation.

1. History and Adaptation

The influence of history: looking back to understand the present

Academic consideration of adaptation can be traced back to as early as 1936. Renaissance scholar Allardyce Nicoll discussed the possibilities of film to warrant the same status as theatrical texts in *Theatre and Film*. In regards to film, however, Nicoll finds that film fails to reach its full potential because it "culls" or copies from literature. The first book-length study of adaptation was published in 1957. Overall, about thirty percent of narrative films were adapted from novels and short stories in Hollywood's classic era, stemming from around the 1920s to the late 1950s, early 1960s.

The roots of television adaptation began in 1930, when the BBC aired a screening of Pirandello's play, *The Man With a Flower in His Mouth*. Shortly following this, the first live television drama to be broadcast, *Journey's End*, a literary adaptation of R.C. Sherrif's play, was aired. In December of 1950, *Little Women*, which ran until January 1951, began as the first drama serial and was also an adaptation. Throughout the 1950s, many classic plays and literature were televised in the form of 'anthology dramas.' The works of great authors such as William Shakespeare, Emily Bronte and George Bernard Shaw were aired many

times during this period. In 1971 PBS began airing *Masterpiece Theatre*, now the longest running prime time drama in American television, which was and is well known for "bringing the best in literature-based drama" ("Masterpiece PBS"). The era of the mini-series, beginning in the late 1970s, ushered in a slew of adaptations from both historical as well as best selling pulp-fiction novels, such as *Rich Man, Poor Man* (1976). Today, many television series are based off of pop culture literary sources, such as *Boardwalk Empire* (2010-present), *Game of Thrones* (2011), and *True Blood* (2008-present), illuminating a shift from authors of the cannon to those of contemporary writers.

The history of adaptation is the foundation on which critiques today base their arguments. An earlier emphasis on high-culture or prestige adaptation however, as seen in *Masterpiece Theatre*, has changed in more recent decades to a more pop culture approach to the use of prior sources. It is due to the value on the adaptation of canonical literature that many of the adaptations of pulp-fiction novels of the seventies were met with resistance. The value that has been placed on canonical literature stems from the establishment of high and mass culture, creating categorical levels into which any art produced was placed.

Bias towards classic literature: What constitutes high vs. mass culture?

Before the introduction of high and low, or mass, culture, there was folk culture and high culture. Folk culture focused on the family and community. It was organic, and unrestrained by an audience appeal. High culture, on the other hand, was for the personal fulfillment of the creator. With the introduction of mass culture came the idea of the culture industry, which is subversive and profit-driven, focusing on homogeneity. The main goal of the culture industry is to reach the masses with a standardized product that will appeal to the majority. It is believed that mass culture has negative effects on its audience, even if they are not participating, because it is lowering standards.

In regards to the high versus low culture debate, it is often a way to distinguish among people, not necessarily product. High culture is exclusive and edifying, believing that it is a benefit to society. People that associate themselves with high culture are not trying to appeal to anyone, however there are standards that must be met. The elites maintain dominance and their profit is achieving prestige, while low culture's aim is to make money. Low culture is popular amongst the masses, and because of this aims to meet the needs of its audience. Socially, high and low culture has functioned as a way to distinguish class.

What defines the line between high and popular culture? In their essay "Defining Popular Culture," Henry Jenkins, Tara McPerson, and Jane Shattuc have found that the concept of "popular culture" has had a constantly changing definition, always subjected to the historical context of the era. Despite the varied influences contributing to its conceptualization, one commonality can be found: "the concept has been used as an instrument by the educated and middle classes to maintain their ideological authority by defining 'good' and 'bad' culture" (Jenkins, McPherson, and Shattuc 27).

With so many definitions in existence, what is "popular culture"? Eluding all clear cut categories of historically good and bad culture, popular culture can be defined as:

> a self-conscious term created by the intelligentsia and now adopted by the general public to mark off class divisions in the generic types of culture and their intended audiences. Yet the decisions have structured a cultural battlefield where the educated standards of the upper class have often been imposed as universal on other classes (Jenkins, McPherson, and Shattuc 28)

What may be considered popular culture at one point in time could eventually be considered high culture later on. Take the works of Shakespeare as an example. Taught in every educational institution as high culture, Shakespeare's works were "played to the educated and lower classes as both wordplay and spectacle"(Jenkins, McPherson, and Shattuc 28) in the end of the sixteenth century.

This suggests that these standards based on good and bad, high and popular, are subjective to social standing and historical circumstance.

This critique of popular culture has been in existence for quite some time. In his book, *Popular Culture and High Culture: An Analysis and Evaluation of Taste*, Herbert Gans highlights four major themes within this critique:

1. The negative character of popular culture creation
2. The negative effects on high culture
3. The negative effects on the popular culture audience
4. The negative effects on the society (29)

These four points emphasize the argument that popular culture should be considered undesirable because, unlike high culture, is mass produced to fit a generic audience for the sake of a profit. Borrowing from high culture, popular culture takes away from the creation of high culture, debasing it. Because of this, it is argued that popular culture is diminishing "the level of cultural quality-or civilization-of the society"(Gans 29), therefore negatively affecting our society and culture as a whole. This argument sees the high culture creator being turned into a mass culture worker, forgoing individual expression to gain a profit from the masses.

On the other side of the argument, "many people have experienced popular culture as a form of liberation from the top-down strictures of high culture - a subversion of dominant notions of taste" (Jenkins, McPherson, and Shattuc 27). High culture can be viewed as mass-produced, for example its books; however, there are only a few high culture consumers who can afford to buy an original painting, limiting the size of high culture's audience.

It is because of these views established around high and mass culture that an underlying attitude has been aligned with adaptations. Discourses surrounding the critique of adaptations start to take on a moralistic tone, becoming more and more focused on the notion of fidelity, and focusing on the relationship between the source text and the adaptation rather than the adaptation as it stands on its own.

2. Fidelity in Adaptation

Attitudes towards Adaptation and the relationship of the adaptation to its source text: Are they a couple or do they stand-alone?

The historical approach to adaptation, and the focus on the value of the source text, has established the notion that literature exists as the primary or "original" text, and anything created after the literary work is a copy. Therefore, the products of Hollywood cannot be as good as the original text in which the film found inspiration from. All "imitative"(Naremore 13) films are threatened with being labeled as low culture or art, as it has become easy to assume that the purpose of a film adaptation is to capture the same images that the literary work evokes in the imaginations of its audiences through a different medium. This is impossible, as there is no one way to envision or interpret a piece of writing so that it mimics the imaginative, individual experience of the reader. Each reader has a distinct relationship with a work of literature.

There is a "standard of value against which [the] success or failure [of a film adaptation] is measured" (Naremore 6), which is based off of ideologies of high and mass culture and the viewing of adaptation as equal to that of a copy of an "original" into another form. Two works, James Naremore's book *Film Adaptation* and Spike Jonze's film *Adaptation* (2001), express similar attitudes towards

adaptation. Despite their different mediums, both challenge discourses of adaptation, finding fault in the foundations of how this topic has been approached and the conventions that have been established out of that history.

In his book *Film Adaptation*, Naremore discusses the limitations of adaptation critiques, approaching the common discourses surrounding the topic of adaptation. He argues that these critiques boil down to, "Personally, I liked the book better" or, "The book is better than the movie" (Naremore 2). Naremore delves into the historical backgrounds surrounding adaptation, criticizing discourses of fidelity and expressing the need for cultural hierarchies of forms of media to be broken down by addressing the already established theories surrounding the topic, questioning and challenging those foundations. Naremore identifies the inadequacies of existing academic works on adaptation as follows:

> Even when academic writing on the topic is not directly concerned with a given film's artistic adequacy or fidelity to a beloved source, it tends to be narrow in range, inherently respectful to the "precursor text," and constitutive of a series of binary oppositions that poststructuralist theory has taught us to deconstruct: literature versus cinema, high culture versus mass culture, original versus copy. Such oppositions are themselves the production of the submerged common sense of the average English department, which is composed of a mixture of Kantian aesthetics and Arnoldian ideas about society (2)

The result of the Arnoldian defense of high culture, stating that culture is referring to "the best that has been thought and said" (Naremore 2), and the Kantian aesthetic movement, believing in making art for the sake of art, is the misunderstanding that Hollywood debases the value of literature, and that all art is made and appreciated individually based on its media-specific form. While Naremore believes that art cannot be properly criticized without the consideration of form, we also cannot replace the reading of great literary works with the viewing of their film counterparts.

A major source, this work defines the field of adaptation studies, yet it remains partial because it is focused only on the adaptations of literature into film, despite Naremore's own critique of such limitations. In an essay included in Naremore's anthology "Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation," Robert Stam addresses the issues of fidelity surrounding the adaptation of novels into film, finding that this moralistic language is limiting when approaching the analysis of adaptations. Terms such as "infidelity, betrayal, deformation, violation, vulgarization, and descecration" (Stam 54) carry a negative connotation. Stam believes the solution to moving beyond these limitations is to provide the most effective criticism and analysis "more rooted in contextual and intertextual history" (75). He would "like to move beyond a moralistic approach" (54), to a

style of critique that is more concerned with "readings, critiques, interpretations, and rewritings of prior material" (76).

Exploring the phenomenon of the adaptation of novels into film, Naremore discusses these binary oppositions and challenging the theory that Hollywood inevitably debases the value of the "original" work. Naremore is alluding to the influence of modernism on the commercial and industrial conventions that were established, creating a hierarchy of the mediums and casting a negative light on film adaptations. Since modernism was a movement that occurred in all of the arts except for the cinema, because it was tied to a mass culture industry, it is easy to see how the language of criticism that Stam discusses came to carry "its specific charge of outraged negativity" (Stam 54) towards film adaptations of novels.

Naremore concludes his introduction as follows:

> The study of adaptation needs to be joined with the study of recycling, remaking, and every other form of retelling in the age of mechanical reproduction and electronic communication. By this means, adaptation will become part of a general theory of repetition, and adaptation study will move from the margins to the center of contemporary media studies (15)

Naremore wants to address the cultural contexts of each text and film. Just as the ideologies surrounding the academia of adaptation were products of their time, responding to the demands of the period in which they emerged, works of film and literature are also influenced by the current culture in which they are created.

Case Study: Adaptation, The Film

Released in 2002, *Adaptation* is a film based on Susan Orlean's non-fiction book, "The Orchid Thief." As an adaptation itself, the film follows the story of Charlie Kaufman as he struggles to adapt *The Orchid Thief* into a film.

Spike Jonze's film *Adaptation* not only addresses the topic of adaptation through its plot structure, but also displays his own commentary on adaptation through its form and presentation. Overall, the film can be seen as "indie," working against prevailing conventions of style and storytelling and developing an outsider status from the conventional Hollywood blockbuster film. There is an apparent stylistic strain, which can be seen through the use of fast motion photography and breaks in the story. The use of the handheld camera breaks narrative convention of the fourth wall. The opposition of the handheld camera filming the set of a Hollywood film illuminates the films underlying tones of animosity towards the convention of the Hollywood movie.

There are three cultural domains present in the film: Indie, Hollywood, and The New Yorker. "Indie" is embodied through the character of John Laroche. Laroche is an unprivileged outsider, whose value system and ways of thinking are non-institutional, going against the grain of the 'norm.' Hollywood is embodied through Valerie Thomas and the institution for which Charlie Kaufman is adapting

the book into a film. Hollywood is a machine, it is privileged, and appears as false, or a sham in the film. The New Yorker, a symbol of cultural standards, is embodied initially through Susan Orlean, however that shifts to her group of friends during the dinner party scene. This group represents high culture, is elitist, and like Hollywood, is also very privileged. In *Adaptation*, Hollywood and The New Yorker triumph, however it is the Indie domain of the film that is valued. This can be seen through the shift in the last third of the film, undermining the first portions of the adaptation. This shift is when the film turns into a parody of a horror or thriller genre film in such a way that emanates a feeling of the quintessential "bad" that a film can become or be perceived as.

The three domains within *Adaptation* are most apparent in the dinner party scene. Susan and her husband are having dinner with their friends, and everything within the scene, from the camera angle, lighting and even prop placement, suggests a feeling of viewing an 'insider group.' The topic of discussion is John Laroche, the focus of Susan's current story, alluding to the 'Indie' that Laroche represents as holding value, however not enough value to live up to the standards of this elite, privileged group. When speaking about his appearance, one of the guests asks why Laroche doesn't get his front teeth fixed. This comment clearly stems from the group's association with the upper class's access to dental care.

This elite group representative of The New Yorker and Hollywood as an institution may see Laroche as a "goldmine" however he needs to get fixed to be enough.

This focus on appearance parallels with Laroche's hobby. His obsession with orchids does not fit into the Darwinian concepts set up in the film. In the race of the survival of the fittest, orchids hold no value outside of their beauty. This is trivial, as Hollywood prevails as the fittest. The discussion around the dinner table illuminates the attitudes of 'the fittest' such as The New Yorker and Hollywood towards those outside of the established conventions as trivial, and deemed to be laughed at and dismissed. This meaning that Adaptation seeks to place on Laroche and therefore "Indie," is emphasized when Susan removes herself from the group and goes to the bathroom. There is a change in tone where the audience can see that Susan feels guilty for targeting Laroche, and that she indeed finds value in him and what he stands for.

This triumph of Hollywood in the end is exactly the attitude that *Adaptation* has towards the topic of adaptation, focusing on the history that has been established and which Naremore wants to debunk. While Naremore's tone is much more straightforward, presenting multiple angles and ideologies that have been established in regards to film adaptation, he is making the same points that Jonze

establishes in his film through the portrayal of Hollywood, The New Yorker and the Indie movie. Both works show a frustration with the discourses surrounding adaptation, seeking new discussion and ideologies to define the topic to include and examine the current cultural influences when critiquing an adaptation.

Most critics find an adaptation "unfaithful" because they feel the "film adaptation fails to capture what we see as the fundamental narrative, thematic, and aesthetic features of its literary source" (Stam 54). The analysis of the adaptation and the source remains centered on how they are different, deducing the adaptation as "bad." There is a hidden analogy that the source text and the adaptation are a couple, and therefore should be faithful to each other. This grouping of the two works together as one brings about this moralistic language, which is further emphasized by the notion that high culture is more valued. Audiences want to see their personal adaptation, and when they do not, they feel betrayed. Absolute fidelity is impossible to achieve because of the differences between the novel and film as separate mediums, the intertextuality of all novels and films, and the lack of one true and correct reading of a novel.

3. Contextualizing Adaptation

Battle of the medium: Anything film can do, television can do differently

When critiquing an adaptation, it is essential to consider the possibilities available to the specific medium. A literary work does not have to consider elements such as a production schedule or budget; its only limitation is the imagination of the writer. Film and television do have to consider a budget, however the ability to put a specific visual image to written text separates those mediums apart from their literary sources. Stam states:

> The shift from a single-track, uniquely verbal medium such as the novel, which, 'has only words to play with,' to a multitrack medium such as film, which can play not only with words (written and spoken), but also with theatrical performance, music, sound effects, and moving photographic images, explains the unlikelihood – and I would suggest even the undesirability – of literal fidelity…The demand for fidelity ignores the actually process of making films [or television] "(56)

While studies of film adaptations are plentiful, varying across multiple literary genres, the scope suddenly narrows when considering the world of small screen adaptations. "The making of film out of an earlier text is virtually as old as the machinery of cinema itself," states Dudley Andrew in his essay titled *Adaptation*, also part of Naremore's anthology. "Well over half of all commercial films have

come from literary originals-though by no means all of these originals are revered or respected"(Andrew 29).

What about television? As seen in the history of film adaptation, only certain canonical books or culturally validated bestsellers were typically chosen for the big screen during cinema's classic era. Discussions around television adaptations usually refer to prolific "classic serials," for example, Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, in which nineteenth-century literature is featured.

More common in contemporary television is the selection of modern literary works of pop-culture to translate onto the small screen. Unlike its cinematic counterpart, television allows the story to grow past the boundaries of its literary base. "It is crucial that television adaptations are considered independently of film adaptations, and that the powerful influences of medium-specific technologies, institutions, and ideals are recognized as determinants of aesthetic practices"(Cartmell 183). Television adaptations seem like a branch of film adaptations; while they are under the same umbrella of adaptation discourse, critics must be aware of the different resources, conventions and styles that are specific to their separate mediums. In many cases, the medium of television benefits the "quality" of the adaptation because of its serial form. It is because of their differences in medium that their adaptations should be considered separately

and not compared to each other. Each has different resources and styles, which separate them from each other and effect the treatment of their adaptations. While film is engaged in the act of compression, television is expanding its source text. The treatment of two well know book series, J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter*, and Charlaine Harris' *The Southern Vampire Series*, and their subsequent adaptations shows this opposition.

Case Study: Harry Potter and the franchise that took over the world

J.K. Rowling's seven book series began with the release of the first book, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* in September of 1998. About a year after, in June of 1999, the second book, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* was published. The third, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* was published in September of 1999, and the fourth was released a year later in July, 2000 under the title, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire. Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, the fifth and longest book at 766 pages, was published in June 2003. The sixth of the series, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* was published in July of 2005 and the final book, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* was published in July 2007.

Sharing the same titles as their literary counterparts, the franchise expanded to films with the release of the first, directed by Chris Columbus, a little over a year after the release of the fourth book in November 2001. A year later, the second film, also directed by Chris Columbus, reached theatres in 2002. Fans had to wait almost two years for the third, Alfonso Cuaron's *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, to be released in June of 2004. The fourth film of the series was directed by Mike Newell and began screening in November of 2005. David Yates directed both the fifth and the sixth films, which were released to the public in July of 2007 and 2009. The seventh and final book was divided between two films, part one releasing in November 2010, followed by part two in July of 2011.

The *Harry Potter* series follows the adventures of Harry Potter, an adolescent wizard, as he and his two best friends, Ron Weasley and Hermoine Granger, attend school at the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. The main conflict throughout the series is Harry's quest to defeat Lord Voldemort, an evil wizard who will stop at nothing to kill Harry and take over the wizard world. Set in an environment parallel to reality, each book records one year of Harry's life, one for every year of school he has at Hogwarts.

Distributed in over two hundred territories and translated into 69 languages, *Harry Potter* has become an active member of popular culture. The franchise as a whole has extended beyond the literary and film series. The recent opening of The Wizarding World of Harry Potter, a theme park at Universal Studios in Orlando, Florida, is a prime example of *Harry Potter's* impact on popular culture. The attraction, dubbed 'Harry Potter Land,' is a cut and paste life size replica of the world created in the films.

The works of *Harry Potter* have not been readily accepted and revered by all, however. Many religious groups found the series appalling, stating they were promoting the practice of witchcraft in children. Literary critics have debated whether the writing is too complex and inappropriate for children, or too simple for adults. Regardless, it can be said that it was not until after the books had generated a passionate following worldwide did the film adaptations come into play.

Harry Potter is a strong example of how film as a medium actively works to condense its source text to accommodate the length of a feature film. With the exception of the final text, each book of the series is adapted into one film, complete with matching titles and overall plot lines. The compression that occurs during the adaptation is essential and obvious, as it takes only a few hours to get

through an entire year of Harry's life at Hogwarts in one film. If the source text weren't condensed during the screenwriting process, it would be very difficult to cover the hundreds of pages comprising the source texts in a timely fashion. If this were to be ignored, then the conventions of the film as a medium would be broken. When asked about her opinions on the adaptation of her work to film, Rowling replied:

> I am fine with it. It is simply impossible to incorporate every one of my storylines into a film that has to be kept under four hours long. Obviously films have restrictions novels do not have, constraints of time and budget; I can create dazzling effects relying on nothing but the interaction of my own and my readers' imaginations ("Everything You Might")

It is the restrictions of time and budget that limit the possibilities of a film adaptation, often resulting in plotline changes and cut backs of scenes. Copious examples can be found in the *Harry Potter* series. In *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, Harry is supposed to begin at the Dursleys' house and get picked up by the Weasleys; however this scene was completely cut from the film, starting with Harry already at the Weasley home. While a scene like this may be minor to the overall plotline, there are many instances where details are left out in order to build the suspense or surprise of the audience when elements are revealed later on in the film. An example of this is apparent in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. The hints that are left about Ginny acting strangely leading up to her involvement with the Chamber of Secrets in the book are omitted in the film,

leaving the audience shocked to discover that all along she was the one behind all of the problems. Despite the restrictions that the medium of film presents in compressing the books into screenplays, they instead turned a fantastical world into a filmic reality.

Case Study: True Blood: Taking a bite out of a book series…and then some

The Southern Vampire Mysteries, also known as *The Sookie Stackhouse Novels*, is a book series written by Charlaine Harris. The first of the series, *Dead Until Dark*, was published in 2001. Each of the following eleven books was published annually; the most recent, *Dead Reckoning*, was published this year. Still unfinished, the series is contracted for a thirteen books in total. In 2008, the first season of the television adaptation, *True Blood*, aired on the Home Box Office channel (HBO). Created by Alan Ball, the show has completed four seasons and will be commencing its fifth the summer of 2012.

Narrated in the first person by protagonist Sookie Stackhouse, Harris's books chronicle a world in which humans and vampires coexist. Prior to the beginning of the first book, Japanese scientists have created a synthetic blood, called Tru Blood, and now vampires have "come out of the coffin" and

mainstreamed into society alongside humans. Averaging around three hundred pages each, the series follows Sookie, a telepathic waitress living in the fictional Bon Temps, Louisiana as she encounters mythological and supernatural beings.

While the popularity of the show has not reached the expansive global levels that can be seen with the *Harry* Potter franchise, *True Blood* has been HBO's most popular series since *Sex and the City* and *The Sopranos*. *True Blood* has joined *Harry Potter* in today's pop culture, becoming yet another vampire-related production, along with the CW's *Vampire Diaries* and the *Twilight* saga. As a product of HBO, *True Blood* has the freedom to be as explicit and racy as cable will allow. This is an interesting intersection when considering high versus mass culture; while the content may be considered mass culture, as a program of HBO, viewers must pay a fee to tune in.

Unlike film, the medium of television allows for the opposite treatment of an adaptation's source text to occur. Instead of making cuts or altering plotlines and dialogue to condense the text, television adaptations allow for the development of scenes, dialogue and plotlines. "Adaptation for cinema assumes a concentration of narratives into a short length whereas television adaptation thrives on the multiplication of incidents that characterizes the classic novel"(Ellis

3). This is due to the serial nature of the medium. While one film can barely cover the contents of one novel, a television series can cover multiple books. In the case of *True Blood*, each season has loosely covered about one book, following chronological order. Where it may take eight pages to fully get through an event, television could introduce a conflict, and not have it completely resolved until the end of the season. In addition, the episodic nature of television allows multiple cliffhangers to be inserted into the adaptation.

Examples within the series of how the medium has expanded on its literary source are littered throughout the show. In the novels, Tara Thornton is considered an almost acquaintance of Sookie's, however the series has implemented her character as Sookie's absolute best friend, which has opened up the opportunity for the show to follow Tara's story as well, even her romance with Sam, a relationship that does not occur in the books, and when she leaves Bon Temps temporarily. Another main character in the series, Lafayette Reynolds, who also has his own story line, can only be connected to a character named Lafayette in the books, however the literary character has no where near the impact or involvement that the series character has. While so far each season seems to follow the course of one novel, there have been characters and events from later books

that have been brought in early. In addition, the four series to four books ratio does not match up evenly.

So we have a wizard and a telepath to read about and watch…Now What?

Based off of the immense popularity that both *Harry Potter* and *True Blood* have attained, it is safe to say that as adaptations, they are generally successful. In his introduction, *The Literary Adaptation*, John Ellis quotes Morris Beja on his thoughts regarding the use of film adaptations for education:

> The focus is neither on film nor on written literature, but on understanding and appreciating each form on its own and in relation to the other. The premise behind the entire book-like that of most of the courses for which it is intended-is that there is a great value in looking at the two genres [sic] together; such a pairing enables us to get a sense of all that they share, to be sure, but also of all the traits that they do not, so that one may grasp as well what is unique about each form…At such times the 'book addict' or the movie fan' - either one a fine thing to be - becomes as well a student of literature, or of film, or of both. Surely at least as fine a thing to be (5)

Incorporating the full picture, that is every form or medium involved in an adaptation, is the most complete way to critique an adaptation. Differences in medium as well as cultural context are extremely influential elements in the production and final result of an adaptation. Moralistic language, as Stam mentions, should be cast aside as it only stems from past opinions regarding the

hierarchy of high and mass culture, as well as the notion that an adaptation can fulfill the memory associated with the source text for each individual viewer.

Battle of the medium, round two: Same fight, same source texts, different contexts.

As stated previously, discourses surrounding the topic of adaptation typically maintain a narrow focus on the novel as the source text. What are sometimes overlooked are other formats within literature such as the short story or the play. In addition to this, the consideration of the cultural and historical context during which the adaptation is made and set during is crucial.

Shakespeare's plays have a long history in the world of adaptation, having been adapted for both film and television numerous times. Shakespearean film adaptations range from overtly theatrical, staying true to the time period of the source text, to modern interpretations adapted into a Disney cartoon. Stam's argument, that when critiquing an adaptation it is essential to consider the cultural and historical context during which the adaptation and the source text originated, may work for most adaptations, especially the novel, this is not always the case. Contemporary adaptations of Shakespeare fall outside of Stam's argument.

Regardless of the cultural context through which it is being considered, modern film adaptations of Shakespeare lose the elements that are quintessentially Shakespearean, leaving a film with the bare skeleton of the source play's plot line. Modern adaptations of Shakespeare that keep their scripts faithful to the source text also fall outside of this argument. Examples of these adaptations include Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* (1996) and Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet* (2000).

Case Study: Shakespeare, past and present: the outlier of adaptations.

The works of Shakespeare stand apart in their own literary canon. Initially written for the masses, Shakespeare's plays have now been subsumed by the academic. It is virtually impossible to complete an English curriculum at the high school or college level without a strong exposure to the works of Shakespeare. There is even a special section of the website, *Sparknotes*, dedicated to his works, titled, *No Fear Shakespeare*. Due to this distinct evolution in Shakespearean study, the majority of film adaptations are heavily influenced by the legacy of the stage. In addition, the style of language through which Shakespeare wrote his plays is unique in Western literature, displaying an emphasis on puns and word play. It can be argued that most modern adaptations of Shakespeare were created as an attempt to share Shakespeare with current and varied generations by transposing the work into a contemporary or fantastical setting. These adaptations include

Andy Fickman's *She's the Man* (2006), Gil Junger's *10 Things I Hate About You* (1999), Roger Aller's *The Lion King* (1994) and Kelly Asbury's *Gnomeo & Juliet* (2011).

Stam's argument challenges the notion of fidelity when critiquing adaptations, stating, "When we say an adaptation has been 'unfaithful' to the original, the term gives expression to the disappointment we feel when a film adaptation fails to capture what we see as the fundamental narrative, thematic, and aesthetic features of its literary source" (54). Stam argues that as critics we need to move past evaluating the adaptation on how we perceive the source text and consider the bigger picture of how and when the adaptation was made. "Our statements about films based on novels, or other sources need to be less moralistic, less panicked, less implicated in unacknowledged hierarchies, more rooted in contextual and intertextual history" (Stam 75). Granted these ideas would broaden the narrow scope under which film adaptations are examined, Shakespearean adaptations must remain under their own lens, as they lose what is essentially 'Shakespeare' when certain aspects are cut out or disregarded.

In the article, "Welles/Shakespeare/Film: An Overview," Michael Anderegg states that "Shakespeare's plays are in some essential way 'cinematic'" (157). What

makes them cinematic is they were intended to be performed in front of and viewed by an audience. Unlike a play, a film can incorporate a moving camera, background music, and the opportunity for editing. While both a film and stage director can control what is being seen by the audience, a film director is able to specifically emphasize what he decides is vital in the shot. The technology of film has opened up the restrictions on the passage of time and change of place that were previously set by the theatre. It is when Shakespeare is placed in a contemporary setting, void of Shakespeare's verse, that the film adaptation is problematic. In his article, "Adaptation, or the Cinema as Digest," Andre Bazin states that "faithfulness to a form, literary or otherwise, is illusory: what matters is the *equivalence in meaning of the forms*" (20). Bazin also argues "modern technology and modern life now more and more offer up an extended culture reduced to the lowest common denominator of the masses" (22). When too many Shakespearean tropes are altered or left out, the adaptation can no longer be considered a Shakespearean adaptation.

This can be seen in *She's the Man*, a 2006 adaptation of *Twelfth Night*. Directed by Andy Fickman and written by Karen McCullah Lutz, Kirsten Smith, and Ewan Leslie, *She's the Man* took the comedy and placed it in a modern day high school setting. When her brother, Sebastian, decides to go to London for a few

weeks, and her women's soccer team gets cut, Viola decides to impersonate her brother Sebastian at his new boarding school, Illyria, to try-out for the men's team. This quickly stirs up multiple love 'triangles' of sorts when Viola falls in love with her roommate, Duke. The chaos continues when Sebastian suddenly returns to school, unaware that his twin sister has replaced him.

While the film maintains the character and setting names, there is very little acknowledgement or mention of Shakespeare or the play. There is no incorporation of any Shakespearean dialogue, thus eliminating the depth of the main issues presented in the source text and are therefore lost in the adaptation. This can be seen in the adaptation of act two, scene four of *Twelfth Night*, when the Duke and Viola, disguised as Cesario, are speaking about love. Orsino says:

> There is no woman's sides/ Can bide the beating of so strong a passion/As love doth give my heart; no woman's heart/ So big to hold so much; they lack retention./ Alas, their love my be called appetite,/ No motion of the liver but the palate,/ That suffers surfeit, cloyment, and revolt;/ But mine is all as hungry as the sea/ And can digest as much. Make no compare/ Between that love a woman can bear me/ And that I owe Olivia (Shakespeare II.iv.93-103)

The Duke is expressing his unrequited love for Olivia, arguing that women do not have the ability to love in the same way that men do. A woman's love is weak and

shallow, while a man's is deep and unchanging. Whatever Olivia is feeling cannot compare to the Duke's emotions. The irony is that the Duke easily transfers his feeling for Olivia to Viola, and it is Viola's love for the Duke that remains the same.

This commentary on love, as well as the characters deep emotional turmoil over their emotions, is lost under superficial, crass slang and common gender stereotypes in *She's the Man*. This scene is adapted into the film as an exchange between Duke and Viola, disguised as Sebastian, however, Duke is debating his emotions about both Olivia and Viola, attempting to choose between the two. Their conversation labels males as needing to be insensitive and chauvinistic with Viola asking Duke, "Which one would you rather see naked?" (*She's The Man*). The only appearance of unrequited love is that Olivia likes Viola (as Sebastian), instead of Duke, however Duke never pines over that, just struggles with making a decision between the two women. In comparison, this scene in Trevor Nun's *Twelfth Night* (1996) produces the heartfelt agony that the Duke is feeling over his unrequited love for Olivia. With the storming, violent coastline as the backdrop, the Duke and Cesario passionately shout the lines as they are seen in the original text.

While the order of parts of the scene are re-arranged to accommodate the different plot-lines in the film, Nun's adaptation as a whole fully gets across the

major themes of the play. In addition, Viola's decision to dress as a man is forced upon her by the need to survive in a foreign land, as she cannot get work as a woman. In *She's the Man*, Viola seizes the opportunity to prove the point that she can play on the men's soccer team, purely motivated by personal gain. Overall, the adaptation is masked by a stereotypical interpretation of masculinity as Viola's character portrays Sebastian by excessive crotch-grabbing, a hard to place accent (Southern, perhaps?) and copious slang. Off the bat, Viola's character is less than feminine, as she is often confused with her brother and lacks manners and class, shown through her inability to blend at meetings for her Debutante ball. The attempt to achieve a comedic film changes the message from portraying love as a cause of suffering to displaying the stereotyped conflicts of Hollywood's vision of high school. All that is left of Shakespeare's original play is the plot-line structure of a girl impersonating her brother and a complicated web of displaced love ensuing. This occurs in such an extreme way that unless the viewer is very well read in Shakespeare, there is no way that the connection would be made to the source text.

The same issues can be seen in Disney's *The Lion King*. Drawing from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, *The Lion King* is also a skeletal adaptation of the basic plotline of Shakespeare's initial work. While it could be argued that *The Lion King*

takes a Shakespeare play and adapts it into a film appropriate for children, therefore spreading the work of Shakespeare to younger generations, it is more common that anyone, despite their age, is successfully able to see the connection. When introducing Shakespeare, there is a culture behind his works that cannot be separated. Placing *Hamlet* in the African wilderness, and using animals as characters belittles the plights that Shakespeare's original characters experience. Ophelia's suicide is left out, and is instead replaced with Nala, a much stronger, more aggressive female character who encourages Simba to return to the Pride Lands after he has run away.

While these adaptations are not advertising themselves as such, it is still very important to acknowledge what is occurring when the works of Shakespeare are stripped of most if not all Shakespearean conventions to create a modern adaptation. Reading and viewing Shakespeare is an experience unique to itself, therefore it is not possible to critique a contemporary adaptation the way Stam's argument urges viewers to do.

What can be seen as one of the more successful adaptations of Shakespeare is Gil Junger's *10 Things I Hate About You* (1999). Adapted from *The Taming of the Shrew*, this film incorporates Shakespeare into the film, despite its modern setting. Like *She's the Man*, it is also placed in high school, directed at the same audience.

What makes this adaptation successful is its ability to acknowledge the changes the play made from its source text to the modern film. An example of this is when the English teacher translates Shakespeare's love sonnets into a rap. Even the tagline plays off of Shakespearean sonnet #43 with, "How do I loathe thee? Let me count the ways" (*10 Things I Hate*). While this adaptation still falls outside of Stam's argument as *She's the Man* does, it does illustrate ways through which Shakespearean tropes can still be included in modern adaptations, proving that not every element that makes Shakespeare what it is has to be discarded to become modern.

An example of another successful contemporary adaptation is Kelly Asbury's *Gnomeo & Juliet* (2011). Adapted from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, this cartoon film, as advertised in the trailer, invited audiences to, "experience Shakespeare's legendary tale as you've never seen it before" (*Gnomeo and Juliet).* Maintaining the family and character names, the film substitutes Shakespeare's world into two backyard gardens that are inhabited by gnomes that come to life. Red gnomes have always hated blue gnomes, and vice versa. What is interesting to note is that the protagonists' voices are British, possibly a tie back to Shakespeare's origins. In addition, the text has been re-written in a manner that reflects Shakespeare's poetic style. In the classic balcony scene, Juliet says:

> Oh, Gnomeo, Gnomeo, are we really doomed to never see each other again? Why must you wear a blue hat? Why couldn't it be red like my father, or green like… like a leprechaun… or purple like, ummm, like some weird guy - I mean what's in a gnome? Because you are blue, my father sees red, and because I am red, I am feeling blue. Oh, at any rate that shouldn't be the thing to keep us apart, should it? (*Gnomeo and Juliet*)

This homage to Shakespearean verse show the effort made to bring the Shakespearean poetic experience to a younger, modern audience. Opening the film with the line, "The story you are about to see has been told before. A lot" (*Gnomeo and Juliet*), it is the outward advertising as a family friendly take on a Shakespearean tragedy that lends the ability for critics to consider the cultural and historical contexts of each individual text separately, and Stam's argument can therefore be applied to this film.

In the field of adaptation studies, discourses surrounding the critique of film adaptations have been limited to the notion of fidelity. Robert Stam argues that the historical and cultural context of both the text and the adaptation need to be considered to fairly evaluate the success of an adaptation, freeing the film from its source. When considering the works of Shakespeare however, Stam's argument cannot be applied because to completely abandon the Shakespearean tropes, which come from the cultural context of his time, would sever ties with the elements that create the experience of Shakespeare's work.

Conclusion: Final Thoughts

> "Adaptation is repetition, but repetition without replications."
> – Linda Hutcheon (2002)

Many academics argue that in the field of adaptation studies, literature will always be regarded as superior, finding any adaptation debasing because of its established seniority in both the academic and art world. This is due to the historical establishment of high and mass culture, which has created a foundation for which critical studies of adaptations have been founded on. This foundation has led to discourses of fidelity, essentially setting adaptations up to fail. There is an underlying assumption of critics, academics, and audiences alike that an adaptation needs to be a "copy" of the "original." This is problematic for many reasons, as "we retell—and show again and interact anew with—stories over and over; in the process, they change with each repetition, and yet they are recognizably the same" (Hutcheon 177).

With the rise in television adaptations, a proverbial wrench has been thrown into the ways in which adaptations have been critiqued. A film, like a novel, is a complete thought, a story from beginning to end. Television, on the other hand, survives through the ability to leave its audiences wanting more and

watching each consecutive episode and season. This is why each medium must be considered separately. The notion that an adaptation and its source text are a pair, one a copy of the other, immediately limits the success or appreciation of the adaptation. Each medium has different capabilities unique to itself, which what makes the ability for adaptation so interesting.

It is due to the intertextuality of all novels and film, the difference in mediums between novel and film and the inability to coin one reading of a text as absolutely correct that true fidelity in film adaptations of novels is impossible. It is because of this inability that Stam's argument is correct; the language used by many critics should be steered more towards the contextual and intertextual backgrounds of adaptations rather than focusing on the moralistic and negative language that seems to dominate. Naremore argues, "The problem with most writing about adaptation as translation is that it tends to valorize the literary canon and essentialize the nature of cinema" (Naremore 8). Stemming from modernist ideals, this approach is what lens through which film adaptations are viewed. In order to widen this lens and get a much fuller picture of these film adaptations, the aim of language used to critique these works must change to include current conditions during which the film was created.

In her book, "A Theory of Adaptation," Linda Hutcheon states, "If adaptations are, by this definition, such inferior and secondary creations, why then are they so omnipresent in our culture and, indeed, increasingly steadily in numbers?" (Hutcheon 4). This question is crucial, as adaptations are a fundamental part of today's culture. Thankfully, there has been a shift in thought, as discussions within the field of adaptations studies are changing from moralistic language of fidelity to appreciations of the adaptation as and expansion or addition to the source text. Hutcheon presents a much less problematic definition of adaptation:

- 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 (8)

With this new approach, adaptations can be seen as "a derivation that is not derivative—a work that is second without being secondary" (Hutcheon 9). This opens up the opportunity for an adaptation to be seen and critiqued as it is on its own, eliminating hierarchical notions and allowing elements such as it medium and context to be considered; which were excluded in earlier academic critiques.

As the world of media continues to grow and develop, more opportunities will become available for adaptation. What remains integral to the growth of

adaptations as well as adaptation studies is the ability for the grounds on which adaptations are critiqued to adapt as well.

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