

WHO? WHY?

(Adapters)

Playwrights like to think that they're the sole author of everything that happens on stage. But in this case I knew that I would be sharing the driver's compartment with many others. Like the book-writer of a big musical, or the screenwriter of a film, I would be referring constantly to the designer, the movement director, the composer and every other member of the creative team. I would be working with the producer and the director, both united in the form of Nick Hytner. And I would be working with Philip Pullman.

—Dramatist Nicholas Wright, about adapting
Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* for the stage

Do other screenwriters feel like this when they're adapting books? I'm aware of needing the approval of the director, producer, and funding bodies, as in getting the script "approved" for production, but this is a practical, political need, not a personal one. Such

vanity—not only in wanting the work to measure up to the original creation, but in the desire to measure up to the original creator.

—Screenwriter Noel S. Baker, about adapting Michael Turner's *Hard Core Logo* for film

Who Is the Adapter?

The answer to this question is simple for Noel Baker. But it is also easy when an author like Alexandre Dumas, *filis* transposes his own novel, *La dame aux camélias* (1848), to the stage (1852). The author and adapter here are one and the same person. The question can sometimes also be answered easily when the author and the adapter differ, as when Helen Edmundson does a stage dramatization (1994) of George Eliot's novel *The Mill on the Floss* (1860). In the case of a musical or an opera adaptation, however, matters become more complicated. Dumas' play was made into the opera *La Traviata* (1853), but was it the librettist, Francesco Maria Piave, who was the adapter, or was it the composer, Giuseppe Verdi? Or must it be both? The complexities of the new media also mean that adaptation there too is a collective process.

Obviously, the move to a performance or interactive mode entails a shift from a solo model of creation to a collaborative one. The transition from the one to the other is often fraught with difficulties: witness Arthur Miller's suit against the Wooster Group for adapting only the basic structure of his play *The Crucible* in their work, *L.S.D.*, in the early 1980s. Given that this group is known for its collaborative and improvisatory ethos and its challenge to theater as individual property, both the ironies and the problems of adaptation as a collaborative practice became evident in this legal encounter (see Savran 1985).

In interactive digital installations and Internet-connected work, a collective model of creation best describes the web of interlinkages that are constantly being reorganized by the various participants both before and during the interaction itself. This fluid collaboration is more like that of an ongoing stage play than a finished product like a film or video. Live stage and radio plays, dance, musicals, operas—all are forms of repeated performances by groups of people, and when they are the site

of adaptations from a prior work there is always contention over exactly who of the many artists involved should be called the actual adapter(s).

Film and television are perhaps the most complicated media of all from this point of view. Is the major adapter the often underrated screenwriter who “creates or (creatively adapts) a film's plot, characters, dialogue, and theme” (Corliss 1974: 542)? Although this seems the most obvious answer in one sense—as Noel Baker would agree—it is not the one most people would offer. One of the reasons why not is the possible complexity of a script's “authorship.” In Steven Spielberg's 1987 film adaptation of J.G. Ballard's novel, *Empire of the Sun*, the first shooting script/adaptation was written by Tom Stoppard; it was subsequently reworked by Menno Meyjes and changed once again in the editing room (Reynolds 1993b: 7). Who then is the adapter?

The name of the music director/composer does not usually come to mind as a primary adapter, although he or she creates the music that reinforces emotions or provokes reactions in the audience and directs our interpretation of different characters, perhaps solo violins for sweet innocence or a snarling bass clarinet to make us uncomfortable around ambivalent characters. But it is also the case that, although the music is of obvious importance to the success of the adaptation, composers usually work from the script, not from the adapted text, because they have to write music specifically to fit the production's action, timing, and budget. Costume and set designers are other possibilities for the role of adapter, and many admit that they turn to the adapted text, especially if it is a novel, for inspiration; however, what they feel immediately responsible to is the *director's* interpretation of the *film script* (see the interviews in Giddings, Selby, and Wensley 1990: 110–28, especially). The same sense of responsibility is often felt by cinematographers.

On the question of whether the actors can be considered as adapters, the case is no simpler. As in staged works, the performers are the ones who embody and give material existence to the adaptation. Although clearly having to follow the screenplay, some actors admit that they seek background and inspiration from the adapted text, especially if the characters they are to play are well-known literary ones. But does this make them conscious adapters? Certainly in interviews, novelists often comment on their surprise when actors—through gesture, tone

of voice, or facial expression—interpret through incarnating characters in ways the initial creator never envisaged (see Cunningham 2003: 1): actors can bring “their individual sense and senses to the characters and give them those glances and gestures that come from their own imaginations” (Ondaatje 1997: ix). But in a more literal sense, what actors actually adapt in this sense is the screenplay (Stam 2005b: 22).

There is yet another rarely considered candidate for the role of adapter: the film and television editor, whose craft, as Michael Ondaatje has insisted, is “mostly unimagined and certainly overlooked” (2002: xi). As editor Walter Murch puts it, “When it works, film edition—which could just as easily be called ‘film construction’—identifies and exploits underlying patterns of sound and image that are not obvious on the surface” (qtd. in Ondaatje 2002: 10). The editor sees and creates the whole in a way no one else does. Yet none of these artists—screenwriter, composer, designer, cinematographer, actor, editor, and the list could go on—is usually considered the primary adapter of a film or television production:

It is hard for any person who has been on the set of a movie to believe that only one man or woman makes a film. At times a film set resembles a beehive or daily life in Louis XIV’s court—every kind of society is witnessed in action, and it seems every trade is busy at work. But as far as the public is concerned, there is always just one Sun-King who is sweepingly credited with responsibility for story, style, design, dramatic tension, taste, and even weather in connection with the finished product. When, of course, there are many hard-won professions at work. (Ondaatje 2002: xi)

That Sun-King, of course, is the director. Peter Wollen has argued that the director as *auteur* is never just another adapter: “The director does not subordinate himself to another author; his source is only a pretext, which provides catalysts, scenes which use his own preoccupations to produce a radically new work” (1969: 113). This is certainly the case with Peter Greenaway’s 1991 adaptation of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, which he renamed *Prospero’s Books*, a work clearly marked by his own postmodern aesthetic of self-referentiality and citation. All that this Prospero knows, he has learned from books; therefore, the magic world he creates is a very bookish—and painterly—one. Like Prospero,

Greenaway literally creates his cinematic island world through books, inspired by those of Athanasius Kircher. This is a world that the audience members first hear about orally, then watch being written by a human hand in a visual pun on the idea of “digital,” and finally see with their own eyes in digitally enhanced form. Using the Paint Box and Japanese Hi-Vision videotape technologies then available, Greenaway electronically manipulates images, animating the books of the title. But no matter how much he or she is the magus and controller, the director is also a manager, an organizer of other artists upon whom he or she must rely to produce that new work. Performance arts like film are, in fact, resolutely collaborative: as in the building of a Gothic cathedral, there are multiple makers and therefore arguably multiple adapters.

These various adapters, however, stand at different distances from the adapted text. Zadie Smith’s response to the televising of her novel *White Teeth* gives a good sense of the complexity of this process: “Telly is watching a creative idea make its excruciatingly slow progress from script-writer to producer to actor to third and second assistant directors to the director himself to the camera man, to that poor maligned fellow who must hold the huge, furry gray Q-tip up in the air if anything is to be heard by anyone. Telly is group responsibility” (2003: 1). There is an increasing distance from the adapted novel as the process moves from the writing of the screenplay to the actual shooting (when the designers, actors, cinematographer, and director move in) and then to the editing when sound and music are added and the entire work as a whole is given shape. The script itself is often changed through interaction with the director and the actors, not to mention the editor. By the end the film may be very far from both the screenplay and the adapted text in focus and emphasis. William Goldman sees the finished film as the studio’s adaptation of the editor’s adaptation of the director’s adaptation of the actors’ adaptation of the screenwriter’s adaptation of a novel that might itself be an adaptation of narrative or generic conventions (in Landon 1991: 96).

Adaptation for performance on stage can be almost as complex as this process, but without the structuring intervention of the film editor, it is the director who is held even more responsible for the form and impact of the whole. Because, in stage productions as in cinema,

the characteristic preoccupations, tastes, and stylistic trademarks of the director are what stand out and become identifiable, perhaps all directors should be considered at least potential adapters. Audiences come to learn that a Harry Kupfer production of an opera is one that self-reflexively places in the foreground the work's underlying violence and sexual tension. The same is true for film, of course: at one point, a Ridley Scott adaptation would have focused on the marginalized and the powerless, and a David Lean version of a classic novel, almost any classic novel, would stress the theme of romantic repression and sexual frustration (Sinyard 1986: 124). In these cases, the directors make the adaptation very much their own work: *Fellini Satyricon* (1969) is 80 percent Fellini and 20 percent Petronius, according to the director himself (qtd. in Dick 1981: 151).

The adapted text, therefore, is not something to be reproduced, but rather something to be interpreted and recreated, often in a new medium. It is what one theorist calls a reservoir of instructions, diegetic, narrative, and axiological, that the adapter can use or ignore (Gardies 1998: 68–71), for the adapter is an interpreter before becoming a creator. But the creative transposition of an adapted work's story and its heterocosm is subject not only to genre and medium demands, as explored in Chapter 2, but also to the temperament and talent of the adapter—and his or her individual intertexts through which are filtered the materials being adapted. French writer Michel Vinaver calls his own adapting process one of substitution—of his intentions for that of the prior text (1998: 84). When film director Bernardo Bertolucci and screenplay writer Gilbert Adair adapted Adair's novel, *The Holy Innocents* (1988), into the film, *The Dreamers* (2004), the romance's gay sex gave way to straight, as Bertolucci's intentions substituted for those of Adair.

The film and the opera made from Thomas Mann's *Der Tod in Venedig* differ for obvious reasons of medium and genre conventions, but they also differ because they are presented by their creators through what we might call different personal artistic filters. Visconti echoes not only Gustav Mahler's music but also paintings by Monet, Guardi, and Carrà, as well as his own film *Senso* (see Carcaud-Macaire and Clerc 1998: 160), thereby creating a lushly sensual visual and aural

film world. This has an utterly different impact than does the opera's more intellectualized and verbalized account of the Dionysian body's triumph over the Apollonian control of the mind. But the librettist, Myfanwy Piper, had gone back to Mann's text and been influenced, like him, by both Plato and Nietzsche. In addition, Britten's modern, Balinese-inspired music could hardly be more different from the late Romanticism of the *adagietto* from Mahler's Fifth Symphony, which is used repeatedly in the film version.

Films are like operas in that there are many and varied artists involved in the complex process of their creation. Nevertheless, it is evident from both studio press releases and critical response that the director is ultimately held responsible for the overall vision and therefore for the adaptation *as adaptation*. Yet someone else usually writes the screenplay that begins the process; someone else first interprets the adapted text and paraphrases it for a new medium before the director takes on the task of giving this new text embodied life. For this reason, as in a musical in which the composer and the book-writer share authorship (e.g., Rodgers and Hammerstein), in a film the director and the screenwriter share the primary task of adaptation. The other artists involved may be inspired by the adapted text, but their responsibility is more to the screenplay and thus to the film as an autonomous work of art.

Why Adapt?

Given the large number of adaptations in all media today, many artists appear to have chosen to take on this dual responsibility: to adapt another work and to make of it an autonomous creation. Giacomo Puccini and his librettists were expected to do so in their operas; Marius Petipa was lauded for doing so in his ballets. But when filmmakers and their scriptwriters adapt literary works, in particular, we have seen that a profoundly moralistic rhetoric often greets their endeavors. In Robert Stam's vivid terms: "*Infidelity* resonates with overtones of Victorian prudishness; *betrayal* evokes ethical perfidy; *deformation* implies aesthetic disgust; *violation* calls to mind sexual violence; *vulgarization* conjures up class degradation; and *desecration* intimates a kind of religious sacrilege toward the 'sacred word'" (2000: 54). Like Stam and

many others today, I too feel that the time has come to move away from this kind of negative view.

However, there is another even more important question that this use of pejorative terms poses for me: why would anyone willingly enter this moralistic fray and become an adapter? What motivates adapters, knowing that their efforts will be compared to competing imagined versions in people's heads and inevitably be found wanting? Why would they risk censure for monetary opportunism? For example, Jane Campion was attacked for ostensibly giving up her independent feminist and artistic vision to do a traditionally lavish heritage-film adaptation (1996) of Henry James' *Portrait of a Lady* (1881). Like jazz variations, adaptations point to individual creative decisions and actions, yet little of the respect accorded to the jazz improviser is given to most adapters. Need a prospective adapter therefore be a masochist, as well as having all the other qualities said to be ideal: humility, respect, compassion, wit, and a sharp razor (as listed by J.A. Hall 1984: 1 and Sheila Benson in Brady 1994: 2)? In adapting the opera *Aida* for the Broadway stage, Elton John did admit that "the fact that it had already been done by Verdi was playing with fire It appealed to my sense of masochism" (qtd. in Witchell 2000: 7).

Over 20 years ago Donald Larsson called for a "theory of adaptation based on an accurate history of the motivations and techniques of adaptations" (1982: 69), but few seem to have shared his interest in motivations, except to dismiss them as mercenary and opportunistic. Although the monetary appeal cannot be ignored, perhaps there are a few other attractions.

The Economic Lures

Despite the less moralistic but equally strongly held view among players that a superb computer game cannot be made from an adaptation, videogame adaptations of films proliferate and can be found on many platforms. It is obvious that on one level they are attempts to cash in on the success of certain movies and vice versa, as the popularity on film (2001; 2003) of the *Tomb Raiders* game character, Lara Croft, has shown. However, not all film adaptations of games have had as great commercial or critical success, despite the fact that the same

media corporations (e.g., Sony Corporation) control both film (Sony Pictures) and videogame (PlayStation) producers and distributors. We should remind ourselves that games are not alone in this commercial exploitation: films are often made of Pulitzer Prize-winning books like Alice Walker's 1982 *The Color Purple* (in 1985) or Toni Morrison's 1987 *Beloved* (in 1998) in part because, as one handbook for screenwriters claims, "an adaptation is an *original screenplay* and, as such, is the sole property of the screenwriter" and thus a source of financial gain (Brady 1994: xi; his italics).

From another economic angle, expensive collaborative art forms like operas, musicals, and films are going to look for safe bets with a ready audience—and that usually means adaptations. They are also going to seek ways to expand the audience for their "franchise," of course, though they have not been in the habit of thinking about it in quite those terms. Operas are usually commissioned by an opera company well in advance, but a Broadway musical has to survive in a commercial market. Producers raise money from outside investors, readings and workshops are held, out-of-town tryouts follow, and then there are pre-views before a paying public (see Lachiusa 2002: 15). Films and television series, likewise, have restricted budgets:

When you are writing a TV script, it is like sitting in a taxi; the meter is always running, and everything has to be paid for. You can always see the price turning over everywhere you go, or the difficulties of performance and production; that is the art of writing for the medium. But the novel has the meter switched off; you can write what you like, have Buenos Aires, have the moon, have whatever you want. That is part of the wonder of the novel, the wonder of being a novelist. (Bradbury 1994: 101)

With film adaptations, the studio system has meant that there have been close allegiances between investment banking and corporate production from the start (Bluestone 1957/1971: 36): the law of the marketplace is at work for both investors and audiences. The star system and all its attendant glamor may not be enough, however, to guarantee a financial or artistic success: witness Guy Ritchie's unsuccessful 2002 remake of Lina Wertmüller's *Swept Away* (1974) as a vehicle for his wife, Madonna.

What does happen as a result of the particular economic structure of the film world—big money = big stars, and big directors—is that the screenwriter becomes a decidedly secondary or tertiary figure, but so does the often unknown writer of the adapted text. Film option fees for novels are small, because so few works are actually made into films. Well-known writers will make lots of money (often millions), however, because studios realize the name alone will sell the movie (Y'Barbo 1998: 378). By contrast, novelizers of films are considered inferior artists by many: working from a script is not seen as the same as inventing and writing a story from one's imagination. Walter Benjamin's judgment on translators echoes commonly held opinions about adapters: "The intention of the poet is spontaneous, primary, graphic; that of the translator is derivative, ultimate, ideational" (1992: 77).

It is no surprise that economic motivation affects all stages of the adaptation process. As comic artist Cameron Stewart has noted, "A lot of comic books are being made to appeal to Hollywood studios—they're being written and illustrated as a film pitch . . . They're writing comic books in anticipation of what can be done on a film budget . . . as a result you get superhero comics that aren't quite as superhero any more" (Lackner 2004: R5). The entertainment industry is just that: an industry. Comic books become live-action movies, televised cartoons, videogames, and even action toys: "The goal is to have the child watching a Batman video while wearing a Batman cape, eating a fast-food meal with a Batman promotional wrapper, and playing with a Batman toy. The goal is literally to engage all of the child's senses" (Bolter and Grusin 1999: 68). This, of course, may give new meaning to the level of engagement I have been calling participatory.

The Legal Constraints

In considering undertaking an adaptation, adapters may find that the financial attractions are more than balanced in some cases by worries about legality. If it is true that adapters are "raiders"—"they don't copy, they steal what they want and leave the rest" (Abbott 2002: 105)—adaptation may have legal consequences. The unlikely survival of F.W. Murnau's adaptation of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* novel is the result of an interesting combination of money and the law. Because he did not want

to pay royalties to the English, the German director Murnau made changes to the novel's plot, introducing a love story between the vampire and Mina, cutting the character of Van Helsing, and changing how Dracula dies. However, he was also working with limited means in the economically depressed Germany of 1921–22. Stoker's wife, however, still sued for copyright infringement, and copies of the film in England were ordered to be destroyed. Pirated copies made their way to England and the United States anyway, and German copies continued to circulate, but no "original" or copyrighted print of *Nosferatu* exists for this reason (see Hensley 2002; Roth 1979).

Adaptations are not only *spawned* by the capitalist desire for gain; they are also *controlled* by the same in law, for they constitute a threat to the ownership of cultural and intellectual property. This is why contracts attempt to absolve publishers or studios of any legal consequences of an adaptation. The issues of control and self-protection are foremost from the perspective of those with power; at the other end, there is little of either. As screenwriter Baker puts it:

The contract lets you know where you the writer stand in brutally frank legal language. You can be fired at any time. You are powerless and for the most part anonymous, unless you also happen to direct, produce, and/or act. Your credit can be taken away from you. Once your work is bought, it's like a house you've designed and sold. The new owners can do whatever they want to it, add mock-Tudor beams, Disneyland castle turrets, plastic fountains, pink flamingoes, garden gnomes, things that satisfy desires and contingencies that have nothing at all to do with you and your original intent for your material. (1997: 15)

There is clearly more than one reason why an adaptation is called, by law, a "derivative" work.

What does the law protect when it comes to adaptations? In U.S. law, literary copyright infringement standards really only cover the literal copying of words, as proved by the unsuccessful suits by the novelists upon whose novels were based such films as *Driving Miss Daisy* (1989) and *Groundhog Day* (1993). A group of dancers and martial artists lost their suit against the makers of the *Mortal Kombat* and *Mortal Kombat II* videogames, even though the company had videotaped their

performances and then digitized them for the games' arcade and home video versions. It seems that "substantial similarity" is harder to prove in court than one might think. In the case of a novel adapted to film, the courts study the plot, mood, characters and character development, pace, setting, and sequence of events, but because so much has to be cut from a novel and because so many adapting agents are involved in a collaboratively produced film, the adaptation is rarely ever close enough to warrant prosecution (see Y'Barbo 1998: 368–69). However, if a novelist can argue financial damage through unauthorized or unremunerated appropriation, there is some hope. But on the contrary, often a film version boosts sales of the novel, as publishers know. They even release new editions with photos from the film on the cover. This economic/legal complicity operates in other art forms as well. The 1990's techno adaptation of the "O Fortuna" chorus of Carl Orff's 1936 *Carmina Burana* by the Italian group FCB (called "Excalibur") raised the sales of the Orff recordings considerably (see Hutchings 1997: 391); no legal action was taken.

Parodies have legal access to an additional argument that adaptations cannot really invoke *as adaptations*: the right to comment critically on a prior work. This right was invoked by the publisher of Alice Randall's *The Wind Done Gone* (2000) when sued by the Margaret Mitchell estate for copyright infringement of *Gone with the Wind* (1936). The publisher argued that telling the story of Rhett and Scarlett from the point of view of a mixed-race slave constituted a critical commentary and not illegal copying.

From the perspective of the law, straightforward adaptation is closer to the work of postmodern appropriation artists like Hans Haacke and Sherrie Levine, who take the work of others and "re-function" it either by title changes or recontextualizing. But is this really any different from Claude Monet or Andy Warhol or Pablo Picasso appropriating images from other artists? The law today suggests it might be. In a famous case, Jeff Koons' "String of Puppies" adapted a black-and-white photograph entitled "Puppies" by Art Rogers from a heartwarming note card into the form of a three-dimensional wooden painted sculpture that was similar to, but thanks to considerable irony, different from Rogers' image. In the process Koons made these changes: the people

have a distinctly vacant look and have flowers in their hair, and the puppies are blue. And, of course, he showed this piece in the context of his *Banalities* series. Not having asked permission to do the adaptation, Koons was sued and used as his defense the parodic argument based on appropriation with "critical purpose" through the concept of "fair use." The court proceedings (see Inde 1998) kept the art as well as the legal world buzzing for years, as the decision favored first one side and then the other (see *Rogers v. Koons*, 960 F.2d 301, 307 [2d Cir.], *cert. denied*, 506 U.S. 934, 121 L. Ed. 2d 278, 113 S. Ct. 365 [1992]).

When it comes to theme parks or even digital media, the law is ever vigilant about ownership: do not try to adapt anything from the Disney domain without permission. On the other hand, there are some companies that allow players to expand their videogames on their own (the first was *Doom* in 1993) and share their new constructions with others through a common library (e.g., *Sims* [2001]). As Lev Manovich shows in "Who Is the Author?" the Open Source model allows infinite modification of a software code because everyone is licensed to change the original. This model clearly offers a new legal model as well, as does the recent development of "Copyleftmedia" and Larry Lessig's *Creative Commons* project in which artists can choose a license that allows them to share their works and others to draw upon a shared artistic community or "commons."

Cultural Capital

There are still other motives for adaptation, however. Given the perceived hierarchy of the arts and therefore media examined in Chapter 1, one way to gain respectability or increase cultural capital is for an adaptation to be upwardly mobile. Film historians argue that this motivation explains the many early cinematic adaptations of Dante and Shakespeare. Today's television adaptations of British eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels may also want to benefit from their adapted works' cultural cachet. Similarly, in a sort of reverse form of cultural accreditation, classical music performers sometimes aspire to become popular entertainers: Joshua Rifkin's *Baroque Beatles Book* rearranges the famous group's songs for baroque orchestra, including a cantata version of "Help" (see Gendron 2002: 172–73). Related to this desire

to shift cultural level is the pedagogical impulse behind much literary adaptation to both film and television. One of the largest markets for these works includes students of literature and their teachers, keen to appeal to the cinematic imaginations of those they teach. Check out the Web sites for just about any film or even stage adaptation that has educational “pretensions” today: there is now a secondary educational industry devoted to helping students and teachers “make the most” of the adaptations.

The existence of the Hollywood Production Code from the 1930s until the 1960s offers a different kind of argument regarding adaptations, cultural capital, and specifically mass audience reception. Even an adaptation of something as classic as *Anna Karenina* would have been suspect under the code’s regulations because of its sexual content: seduction, corruption, and illicit love. “A basic premise of the code was that Hollywood did not have the same kind of freedom accorded book authors and Broadway playwrights to produce artistic works. Reformers feared that screening the ‘modernism’ that pervaded contemporary literature [through adapting it] would be far more corruptive on the mass audience of moviegoers than it was on ‘readers’” (Black 1994: 84). Although adaptation remained common nonetheless, the choice of adapted works was more limited.

Personal and Political Motives

It is obvious that adapters must have their own personal reasons for deciding first to do an adaptation and then choosing which adapted work and what medium to do it in. They not only interpret that work but in so doing they also take a position on it. For instance, David Edgar’s stage adaptation of Charles Dickens’ *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838–39) for the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1980 has been called “a play about Dickens that critiqued his form of social morality, rather than a straight dramatization of the novel” (Innis 1993: 71). Some critics go so far as to insist that a “truly artistic” adaptation absolutely *must* “subvert its original, perform a double and paradoxical job of masking and unveiling its source” (Cohen 1977: 255). In contrast, Merchant/Ivory film adaptations of the novels of E.M. Forster, for example, are intended and received as almost reverential treatments. Sometimes homage is all

that is possible—or allowed. In 2005, RTE, Channel 4, Tyrone Productions, and the Irish Film Board sponsored 19 short film adaptations of the work of Samuel Beckett by directors either experienced with or influenced by the playwright. But in the name of fidelity, the Beckett estate would allow no changes to the texts whatsoever.

Some song covers are openly meant as tributes: Holly Cole’s *Temptation* is a homage to Tom Waits. Others are meant to critique, however: when a female singer like Tori Amos covers male misogynist songs, the new vocal angle subverts the adapted works’ sexist ideology: “97 Bonnie & Clyde” is a cover of Eminem’s song in which a man sings to his child that the two of them (no stepfather, no brothers) are going to the beach, where, we soon learn, he is about to dump the body of her murdered mother. These words are terrifying enough when sung by a male with the cooing of Eminem’s little girl’s voice sampled in, but when the very same words are sung by the mother, in a baby voice, to the daughter, they become a fiercely condemnatory quoting of the father. In a further adaptation, the daughter of this horror, as a young woman, then sings “Strange Little Girl” by the Stranglers (see Amos and Powers 2005: 288).

There are all kinds of reasons for wanting to adapt, in short. Adaptations of Shakespeare, in particular, may be intended as tributes or as a way to supplant canonical cultural authority. As Marjorie Garber has remarked, Shakespeare is for many adapters “a monument to be toppled” (1987: 7). As proof, witness the screenplay credits of director Franco Zeffirelli’s 1966 film version of *The Taming of the Shrew*: “Paul Dehn, Suso Cecchi D’Amico, and Franco Zeffirelli, with acknowledgements to William Shakespeare, without whom they would have been at a loss for words.” However, it was not only the Bard who was meant to be ironically displaced here, but also the earlier Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks film of the play. Hence the casting of the very marketable (at the time) pair, Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton. In a more subdued vein, Gus Van Sant’s 1991 *My Own Private Idaho* has the credit, “Additional dialogue by William Shakespeare.” Other adapters prove to have even bolder intentions, however. Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s cinematic adaptation of Jean Genet’s *Querelle de Brest* (1947) as *Querelle* (1982) was meant by its adapter to be “an

unequivocal and single-minded questioning of the piece of literature and its language" (Fassbinder 1992: 168).

An adaptation can obviously be used to engage in a larger social or cultural critique. It can even be used to avoid it, of course: the attempt to sidestep imperialist politics in the 2002 version of A.E.W. Mason's oft-filmed 1902 novel, *The Four Feathers*, by director Shekhar Kapur and scriptwriters Hossein Amini and Michael Schaffer, is, however, much less common these days than are more direct forms of political engagement. Sally Potter's ideological motivation for doing a film version of Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, as articulated in the introduction to the published screenplay, is different from Woolf's feminist aim, but equally political: Potter wanted to adapt—and therefore inevitably to alter—the text not only to tell a story she loved but also to permit “a more biting and satirical view of the English class system and the colonial attitudes arising from it” (Potter 1994: xi). Postcolonial dramatists and anti-war television producers have likewise used adaptations to articulate their political positions. This kind of political and historical intentionality is now of great interest in academic circles, despite a half-century of critical dismissal of the relevance of artistic intention to interpretation by formalists, New Critics, structuralists, and poststructuralists alike. What still remain suspect are other kinds of more personal and thus idiosyncratic motivations, despite the increased focus on individual agency in feminist, postcolonial, ethnic, and queer studies. Yet a handbook for screenwriters can confidently assert: “If the adapter is not significantly and measurably moved by the novel, for whatever reason, the play will suffer accordingly” (Brady 1994: 10).

Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein read, were moved by, and then adapted C.Y. Lee's 1957 novel, *The Flower Drum Song*, as a stage musical (1958) and then as a film (1961). The creators' stated progressive, liberal intentions did not prevent their representations of Chinese characters from looking patronizing and inauthentic to writer David Henry Hwang 40 years later. Hwang claimed that he was provoked into writing his own adaptation both by his own “guilty pleasure” (2002: 1) as a young man, enjoying the film because it presented a rarely seen love story between an Asian man and woman, and also by the changes he saw in the cultural issues facing Chinese Americans in the ensuing

decades (a shift from intergenerational conflict to assimilation). He kept the general story-line and most of the characters, jettisoned the text, respectfully retained the score, and claimed to return to and thus be “faithful” to the “spirit” of Lee's book. All this information seems to me to be of both interest and importance to our understanding of why and how an adaptation comes into being. Yet in literary studies, this dimension of response has been sidelined. However, adapters' deeply personal as well as culturally and historically conditioned reasons for selecting a certain work to adapt and the particular way to do so should be considered seriously by adaptation theory, even if this means rethinking the role of intentionality in our critical thinking about art in general.

The next section traces the changes in one particular narrative through a series of media and genres as one way to explore precisely all of these economic, legal, cultural, political, and personal complexities of motivation and intention in the process of adaptation. If I may myself adapt a theory from the work done on editing, adaptations are what have been called “fluid texts” that exist in more than one version; they are the “material evidence of *shifting* intentions” (Bryant 2002: 9; his italics). As such, they suggest the need to adopt a form of historical analysis that can accommodate “creative process and the forces that drive textual fluidity” (11).

Learning from Practice

I begin, therefore, with the “why?” question: Why would a whole series of very different twentieth-century European artists all choose to adapt one particular historical narrative: that of 16 Carmelite nuns from Compiègne, France, who faced the guillotine in 1794, just 10 days before the end of the Reign of Terror that followed the French Revolution? On the surface, this is hardly a modernist theme; it does not immediately appear to address anything very obvious in the twentieth-century *zeitgeist*—or at least not in the way that Oscar Wilde's *Salomé* captured the 1890's fearful fascination with the *femme fatale* or Richard Strauss' operatic adaptation of it a few years later translated the *femme fatale* into the terms of the new century, with its obsession with what Freud and Breuer had just labeled as hysteria. In contrast, this is a story

about 16 Catholic martyrs who went to the scaffold singing hymns, thereby silencing the mob's heckling by their music and their bravery. As a narrative, their story is certainly interesting, but not so obviously compelling or historically relevant as to have warranted being told and retold in the forms of the novella, film, stage play, and opera over a 30-year period of time.

In the historical account, the Carmelites of Compiègne were forced out of their convent in 1792, after the National Assembly confiscated all ecclesiastical goods and property and first urged and then forced all religious orders to give up what it called their superstition and return to the secular world. The nuns, who had continued to meet in secret to pray as a community, agreed to an act of consecration of their lives for their faith, as suggested by their Prioress, Madame Lidoine. This act, which they repeated daily, later became known as their vow of martyrdom. In June 1794, the nuns were arrested, appeared before the Tribunal, and were sentenced to death as "fanatics"—that is, as religious women, guilty of organizing "counter-revolutionary consultations and assemblies" (Gendre 1999: 277; see also Bush 1999: 201–13; S.M. Murray 1963: 62–65). Radiating joyous anticipation of martyrdom, they mounted the scaffold singing the "Veni Creator" hymn and renewed their vows. The youngest, Sister Constance, went first and Prioress Lidoine last. Constance began singing the "Laudate Dominum omnes gentes" psalm, and as the guillotine literally cut off her voice, the others took up the melody and continued it. The nuns' bodies were thrown into the common pit at Picpus Cemetery; 10 days later the Great Terror ended, as if, some said, in response to the martyrdom of the nuns who had explicitly offered their deaths for their country and their faith. We know all this from the testimony of one sister who survived, Marie de l'Incarnation, who was not with the others in Compiègne, but was in Paris when the arrests occurred. In fear, she then fled to eastern France and much later became the first of the story's many tellers (see Bruno de Jésus-Marie, and Bush's translation and edition of Marie de l'Incarnation).

The Carmelites' story was adapted in 1931 by a young German convert to Catholicism, the Baroness Gertrud von le Fort, who claimed to have discovered it first in a footnote to a religious text she was reading

(S.M. Murray 1963: 66). However, the story was well known in Catholic circles and indeed had come to form part of the mythology around the Revolution and especially the end of the Reign of Terror. This historical account became the frame for the Baroness' story of a fictional character named Blanche de la Force, a pathologically fearful young woman who joins the Carmelite order out of both a religious vocation and a generalized terror of both life and especially death. In the novella, called *Die Letzte am Schafott* (literally, *The Last on the Scaffold*), the writer later claimed that she had wanted to explore two matters: as her eponymous choice of surname for her character suggests, her own fears that her new-found faith would never be up to the kind of test demanded of the nuns and her terror about the rise of totalitarianism in her native country (see Gendre 1994: 283; S.M. Murray 1963: 61; Neuschaffer 1954–55: 35; O'Boyle 1964: 57). Yet history was not simply the backdrop for the story of the fearful young Blanche, as some have suggested (Bush 1999: xv). Instead, it offered the structural, intellectual, and spiritual skeleton on which le Fort could hang Blanche's existential terror. Through it she also could make the link to the (capital T) Terror and thus give historical resonance to an individual psychological response.

Die Letzte am Schafott, later translated into English as *The Song at the Scaffold*, is an epistolary novella, narrated in large part by M. de Villeroi, a French aristocrat who survived the Terror. Haunted by the excesses of the Revolution, he tries to find meaning in the horror of the past. He knows Blanche and her milieu well and so is particularly well positioned to recount her fate with sympathy. He tells of how, outside the convent, which Blanche has entered as a refuge, the forces of Revolution gather and gradually triumph, but inside she feels safe. However, as in the historical account, the nuns are soon cast out of their home, though not before they take a much more dramatic single (not daily repeated) vow of martyrdom; they are urged on this time not by their new Prioress, Madame Lidoine, who is instead absent from the convent at the time, but by Marie de l'Incarnation. In this version Marie is presented as a foil for the frightened Blanche: a natural daughter of a French aristocrat, she is noble in bearing as well as birth, brave, and

resolute—a woman much admired by the narrator, and, one senses, by the author herself.

In this novella, Blanche flees the convent after claiming that she too will take the vow. The sisters are arrested in Compiègne while Marie is in Paris, in part to look for Blanche. Despite being the instigator of the vow, Marie is ordered by her spiritual leader not to go back and thus sacrifice herself, but to live on. She witnesses the death of the martyrs, as does the narrator who hears the nuns begin the “*Salve Regina*”—a hymn sung when a nun is dying—and then the “*Veni Creator*”; as each woman dies, the sound of the singing becomes quieter. Suddenly, when only one voice is left (that of the oldest nun), Blanche appears and takes up the song. Pale but totally fearless, she sings the rest of the hymn before the mob of women kill her on the spot. The narrator continues the story past this climax though, ending it with the future of Marie, who would write up the nuns’ history.

Blanche, however, is the real focus of the story, and Baroness von le Fort later made clear that this character had both personal and political significance for her:

She never lived in the historical sense, but she took the breath of her trembling being exclusively from my own inner self and she will never be able to be freed from this, her origin. Born out of the deepest horror of a time that in Germany would be overshadowed by the anticipatory forebodings of the history to come, this figure stood before me as the “incarnation of the death anguish of an entire epoch going to its end” (Baroness Gertrud Von Le Fort 1956: 93, my translation).

In the mid-1940s, this version of the tale was adapted by Father Raymond Bruckberger, a “young, ardent, and attractive Dominican” priest who had fought in World War II, had been among the first to rally to the side of Charles de Gaulle, and had been principal chaplain to the Resistance (Speaight 1973: 261). Also seeing the nuns’ fate and especially their bravery as allegorical, but this time, of the French Resistance, he wrote a film scenario with the aid of Philippe Agostini. This version of the narrative suppresses much, including the narrator, and changes the emphasis, in part driven by the aesthetic exigencies of the new medium. Because it is intended for the cinema, the scenario

is more visual and dramatic; it is based on action, not religious discussion, and reveals a desire for direct camera presentation, rather than narration. For what appear to be complicated interpersonal reasons, there is no copy of this scenario in the public domain, so I rely here on citations and outlines in S.M. Murray (1963: 43–92) and Gendre (1994: 284–86).

Father Bruckberger later claimed to have been attracted to the elements of what he saw as a great classical tragedy in the novella; specifically, he was attracted to what he called the insurmountable conflict between two universes and two irreconcilable mysticisms, that of Carmel and that of the Revolution (1980: 421–22). Nevertheless, when he came to write the scenario, it was the possibilities of spectacular action—and not mysticism—that really attracted him as a potential filmmaker, especially in presenting the scenes of the French Revolution. He cut what he felt were extraneous characters and scenes and freely invented others. But he too kept the focus always on Blanche, who was almost constantly on camera, and thus on her fear of death.

To this end, he made much of a scene that had taken up about ten lines in the novella and actually never took place: the deathbed of the first Prioress, Madame de Croissy. In actual fact, this nun died on the scaffold with the others; in the novella, she is said to be ill when Blanche joins the order and is reputed to be afraid of dying. For this reason she feels a certain sympathy for the always frightened Blanche. Soon after Blanche’s arrival in the convent, the Prioress dies a painful death. Blanche, hearing her dying groans, is dismayed that God could let such a holy woman suffer so much. Understandably, the scenario writers could not resist the drama of this scene in their description: the doctor’s hurried steps are heard in the hall, the dying woman’s cries pierce the silence of the cloister, and Blanche stares at the closed infirmary door with great disquiet. Blanche is summoned to the Prioress’ deathbed, but does not understand the confession of her spiritual leader’s anguish that she hears. The other nuns are then called in; the Prioress kneels, says farewell and asks them to pray for her, as she humbly admits her fear of death and begs their pardon. This deathbed scene, as we shall see, is the one that changes most in subsequent adaptations.

Looking for someone to write the dialogues for this scenario, in 1947 Bruckberger and Agostini approached first the existentialist novelist, Albert Camus, who reminded them that he himself was not a believer, but suggested that they invite Georges Bernanos to be what in France is called the "dialoguiste" (see Vincendeau 2001: xi). This conservative Catholic writer had returned to France two years before, in 1945, after spending the war years in voluntary exile in Brazil (Béguin 1958: 127; Bush 1985: 2; Gendre 1994: 35). Bernanos was a most appropriate, indeed brilliant, suggestion. Not only was the theme of the story, as developed by both the novella and the scenario, totally consonant with that of his own novels, but Bruckberger had, in fact, himself given Bernanos a copy of the French translation of the novella in 1937 and the novelist had taken it with him to Brazil where he had reread it often (Kestner 1981: 14). But at the moment he was approached to write the film dialogues, the fiercely French, fiercely Royalist, and fiercely political Bernanos was fiercely depressed. Disappointed with the Fourth Republic and the technocratic and materialist society that he felt post-war France had become, he moved to North Africa in disgust. Even more significantly, however, at this moment in 1947, he knew that he was seriously ill—in fact, he was dying from cancer. For details on Bernanos' well-documented reaction to his illness, see Bush (1985: 2), Speaight (1973: 213–47), Béguin (1958: 93–94), S.M. Murray (1963: 17–19), Albouy (1980: 220–30), and Leclerc (1982: 109–71).

The dialogues that Bernanos agreed to write for the film scenario constitute in themselves an adaptation; that is, an appropriation of the story that results in a radically different work. Though of a deeply political and even polemical disposition, he personalizes the story, transforming the political allegory of the film scenario into an interior journey that is both spiritual and psychological, working out through the text his own fear of his coming death and his hopes for religious salvation (Bush 1988: 17).

Bernanos died just after finishing the dialogues; the film's producer decided that the script was unusable for the cinema because it was too long and did not have enough action (O'Boyle 1964: 58). The film, called (in the singular) *Dialogue des Carmélites* was finally made in 1960, but from a decidedly different script that used fewer than half

of Bernanos' lines. Albert Béguin, Bernanos' literary executor, found the original manuscript in a trunk after his death and edited it with an eye to publication as a stage play, which he in turn called *Dialogues des Carmélites* (in the plural). The play was published in 1949 and first performed in 1951. Clearly, yet another adapter had come forward, for editors can become adapters if they intervene in a major way, as occurred here; Béguin divided the work into acts, moved dialogue around, added historical decrees and hymns, and summarized mute scenes (Gendre 1999: 286–87; S.M. Murray 1963: 24–42, 125).

Bernanos' own changes to the death scenes in the scenario, however, are revealing in both personal and aesthetic terms. Less interested in external action than in the spiritual and psychological drama of the deathbed, he first makes the ailing Prioress his own age (59) and then calls attention to this added detail by having Blanche's young friend, the novice Constance, comment that, after all, at that age it is about time for one to die. Bernanos also gives to the Prioress a well-documented trait of his own spiritual and psychological makeup: he has her admit that she has meditated on death every hour of her life (Bernanos 1949: 43; see also S.M. Murray 1963: 129). Bernanos' letters and journals, not to mention his novels, are testimony to his life-long obsession with death and to his terror at its always seemingly imminent arrival. His obsession with death is clear from the memories of his friends (see Boly 1960: 15), but his own letters are also painfully explicit (see Béguin 1958: 31).

On her deathbed, Bernanos' Prioress, in great physical pain and equally great psychological and spiritual distress, scandalizes Marie de l'Incarnation by telling her that she feels abandoned by God. She then has a horrific vision of the persecution and destruction of her order. In this version of the story, only Blanche is then called to her side, and it is from her alone that the dying woman begs pardon for her fear. Her face disfigured with pain and despair, the Prioress dies a terrible death, one totally unsuited to her, as Constance later notes, asking whether God made an error in assigning this horrific death to this holy woman. Bernanos then puts in Constance's mouth the words that would mark his greatest thematic change in his adaptation of both the scenario and the novella: the words that express his personal extension of the Catholic

doctrine of the Communion of Saints. The logical conclusion of this doctrine, as Father Owen Lee has explained, is the idea that because the Prioress died such a hard death, someone else would have an easy one (1998: 177). In Constance's words: "On ne meurt pas chacun pour soi, mais les uns pour les autres, ou même à la place des autres, qui sait?" (57): "One doesn't die each for oneself, but each for the others, or even one in the place of another, who knows?" The meaning of these words is not clear until the final scene of the play. In that scene, Blanche steps out of the crowd, showing no fear, and goes serenely to her death on the scaffold. Blanche dies easily because she dies the death the Prioress deserved—and gave up for her.

That long and harrowing scene of the holy nun's death has been interpreted as Bernanos' means of coming to terms with his own death and with his fear of physical pain and spiritual desolation. Similarly, the representation of the death of Blanche, in full dignity and without fear for the first time, has been read as his wish-fulfilling projection of his own end. How can such a leap be justified from the textual traces? For one thing, this idea of a mystic exchange of deaths was purely Bernanos' addition. Bernanos scholars, in fact, are insistent that, despite the "debt" to the novella and the scenario, this is a purely Bernanosian text, shot through with all the themes of his entire oeuvre (Araas 1988–89: 16; Gendre 1994: 287–88; see also Hell 1978: 244). And they are not wrong, even if their insistence belies a post-Romantic need to assert precedence at all cost. No mere adapter, they suggest, Bernanos is a real creator. French writer Julien Green, called in at one point by the legal authorities to try to sort out the disputes about who "owned" this story, decreed that the invention and the creation of the principal characters belong to the Baroness, but that Bernanos interpreted the tale in his own manner. Because the task of making the characters come alive fell to him, in the arbiter's eyes, he remained the principal author. As Green put it, Bernanos took the scenario and made of it, very legitimately and as one might have expected, pure "Bernanos" (S.M. Murray 1963: 105–6). There is certainly little doubt that his version of the Carmelites' story was very different from what even Father Bruckberger had in mind.

It was Béguin's edition of Bernanos' stage play that the French composer Francis Poulenc saw in Paris, and it moved him deeply. But it was Guido Valcarengi, of the publishing house of Ricordi, who suggested in 1953 that Poulenc write an opera based on the play. The composer's initial hesitation was based on the fact that there was no love story, and this was to be an opera after all. Poulenc's reluctance was overcome by a feeling that the text was perfect for him as a composer: the rhythm of the language seemed to fit his musical imagination (Poulenc 1954: 213). To most of his friends and acquaintances, however, this religious story would not have seemed at all like ideal Poulenc material. A fashionable and worldly man-about-town, Poulenc had been a member of the irreverent group of young French composers known as "Les Six" and was better known for composing profane than sacred music (see Ivry 1996: 12–34, 110–11). Yet, in 1926, after experiencing a reawakening of his Catholic faith, he composed his *Litanies à la Vierge noire*, in honor of the famous black Virgin whose statue is kept at Rocamadour in France, where he had gone on a pilgrimage after the sudden death of a friend and rival, Pierre-Octave Ferroud (Gagnebin 1987: 33; Ivry 1996: 91–113). From then on, Poulenc would compose both sacred and secular music, often turning to religious themes to commemorate the deaths of friends and acquaintances (Ivry 1996: 162).

According to the ample evidence of his letters, Poulenc's composing of the opera of *Dialogues des Carmélites* was entirely tied up with his hypochondria and nervous collapse caused by his failing relationship with his lover, Lucien Roubert. He came to suspect that he actually needed this anguished emotional climate in order to compose the opera (see his letters to Henri Hell, 14 February 1954 [Poulenc 1991: 216] and to Rose Dercourt-Plaut, 25 December 1955 [237]). But even more important is the fact that just as Poulenc had begun his work on the adaptation with Roubert by his side in 1953, so he wrote the music of the nuns' demise as Roubert met his end, dying of lung disease, with Poulenc by his side in 1955. The mystical exchange of deaths that Bernanos invented was *lived* by Poulenc, or so he believed, writing to a friend that he was haunted by the idea that Roubert had died for him (1991: 232).

However, aesthetic concerns also played their part in this adaptation, along with these intensely personal ones. The shift in medium from play to opera involved making serious cuts to the Bernanos text and therefore to the nuns' story. Despite his rededication to Catholicism, Poulenc chose to cut the play's religious debates, as well as all the class issues raised by the French Revolution. The resulting adaptation process made this into a spare story of individual choice in the face of human mortality. But after all, it was written in existentialist Paris in the 1950s and by a composer caring for a dying lover (Gendre 1994: 73; Ivry 1996: 75–78).

Not surprisingly, then, in the operatic version of the story, the death of the Prioress is the climax of Act I. Poulenc adds powerful music to Bernanos' moving drama, but deliberately keeps the text in the foreground of his audience's attention by very thin scoring, so that every word could be heard and understood (Poulenc 1991: 206). Singer Régine Crespin, who premiered the role of the Prioress at the Metropolitan Opera in 1977, called this a naked death, one experienced in total fear of both the spiritual void and the physical reality of pain. It is a death, she said, that forced her to come to terms with her own mortality (n.d.: 107). It is at one and the same time a normal human death, an extraordinarily intense one, and, for this woman, an utterly inappropriate one. Deathbed scenes are not usually this realistic in opera: they are most often aestheticized and even sanitized (see Hutcheon and Hutcheon 1996: 43–47, 56–57). This death, on the contrary, is horrifically endured, and the Prioress is instructed to sing her part in a very rough manner; the composer even notates her death rattle in the score. The text's words, the bodily sounds of pain, and the stage action as she repeatedly falls back, exhausted, onto her pillow all come together to offer a scene of horror that is intensified by dissonances in the music; that is, by the audible evidence of suffering and, especially, terror. But Poulenc too saw the theme of fear balanced and countered by the theme of the transfer of grace in the exchange of deaths (1954: 213). Perhaps due to this potent (because it is contradictory) combination, the ending of the opera is considerably more moving, in my experience, than that of any of the other versions. Its horrible and haunting

power answers that of the Prioress' deathbed scene, just as Blanche's death itself is redeemed by that earlier one.

At the opera's end, beneath the strident funeral march heard as the nuns descend from the carts to approach the scaffold, the musical motif associated with the Prioress' death is heard again, but it is in turn gradually dominated by the nuns' singing of the "Salve Regina" hymn. One after another, the Carmelites march to the guillotine. The sharp and discomfiting sound of the guillotine blade slashes through the music, but each time it does, the defiant nuns sing even louder. Soon, however, the number of voices heard is reduced to a single one, that of Constance, and in the music, that death motif is now suppressed. The scene is now set, both musically and dramatically, for the mystical exchange of deaths: Blanche steps out of the crowd, and as the stage directions announce, her face is free from every vestige of fear. Constance beams and goes happily to her death, as the guillotine silences forever the Prioress' death motif. A "luminous theme" (Lee 1998: 177) associated with the workings of grace in the opera enters the music. Blanche does not finish the "Salve Regina" hymn that Constance had been singing, as might be expected, but in her new solitary strength, she approaches the scaffold singing slowly the last stanza of "Veni Creator"—a song of glory to God, affirming both her life after death and the significance of the nuns' sacrifice in the context of the Communion of Saints. Then the guillotine cuts off her voice as well; silence ensues. The music of the opera as a whole may have been deliberately scored thinly, but in the final moments, Poulenc uses large and lavish orchestral forces to bring home the emotional message of both Blanche's existential choice to die and her redemption in and through death—the death of the Prioress.

Intentionality in Adaptations

The story of these eighteenth-century Carmelite martyrs—an unlikely narrative for an opera of any period, much less the twentieth century—was actually equally unlikely as the adapted subject of a modern novella, film, or play. Or rather, plays in the plural, for there was another (not very successful) one in 1949 by the American Catholic playwright Emmet Lavery, who managed to get the copyright for all dramatized versions, thus almost scuttling both the Bernanos play

and the Poulenc opera. In the final wording of the legal agreement, the “authorship” of *Dialogues des Carmélites* is therefore articulated in this bizarrely presented way: “*Les Dialogues des Carmélites* / Opera in three acts and twelve scenes / Based on the text of the play by Georges BERNA- / NOS, inspired by the novella of Gertrud Von Le / Fort and a scenario by Philippe Agostini and of the R.V. [*sic*] Bruckberger, / transposed into an Opera with the authorization of Monsieur Emmet LAVERY” (qtd. in Gendre 1999: 304).

Though tortured, this listing amply demonstrates Millicent Marcus’ contention that the adaptive process is a total of the encounters among institutional cultures, signifying systems, and personal motivations (the adapter’s “professional agenda at the time of production” [1993: x]). This particular story obviously resonated in complex ways for its various adapters. The motives for choosing the story in each case were also intensely private. The reasons for interpreting it as either a political allegory or a tale of spiritual and psychological redemption were deeply embedded in the individual histories of the adapters, as well as in the political moments in which they were writing. The specific aesthetic form each adaptation took also depended upon the particular abilities and interests of the new creators.

Yet, in academic literary circles, we stopped talking about these dimensions of the creative process some time in the twentieth century. In fact, the very idea of dealing with the creative process began to sound dated in North America shortly after W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley’s 1946 condemnation of the “intentional fallacy.” A few decades later, Roland Barthes effectively entombed intentionality in his famous essay, “The Death of the Author,” and Michel Foucault danced on its grave when he shifted critical attention to the anonymity of discourse, making the position of the “author,” in his terms, “a particular, vacant space that may in fact be filled by different individuals” (1972: 96).

As H.L. Hix reminds us, in the wittily entitled *Morte d’Author*, Barthes’ statement was less an obituary than “the vehicle of a metaphor whose tenor is, roughly, that there is no transcendent figure at the origin of the text’s meaning” (1990: 3). What both the New Critics and the poststructuralists alike were protesting, in their very different ways, was having recourse to authorial intent as the *sole* arbiter and guarantee

of the meaning and value of a work of art. No one denies that creative artists have intentions; the disagreements have been over how those intentions should be deployed in the interpretation of meaning and the assignment of value. But it has been suggested that much of this debate has really been about critical fashion and academic or cultural politics: in 1990 Annabel Patterson argued that “much of the anti-intentionalism of the past four decades had its origins in local circumstances, in response to change in the cultural environment, and from the force of professional self-interest in the self-propagation of Modernism in the arts and of literary criticism as a professional discipline” (1990: 146). The New Critics broke with the Great Men theory of literature wherein literature’s value “lies chiefly in allowing us intimate access to their souls” (Eagleton 1996: 41). Intentions, even if recoverable, therefore, were deemed irrelevant to interpretation. Even the phenomenologically oriented critics of the Geneva school resolutely turned away from biography to trace the registering of human consciousness in the text itself. In focusing primarily on the textual dimension, of course, it is the *critic* who has authority, not the author or the adapter.

The examination of the different versions of the nuns’ tale, however, suggests that the political, aesthetic, and autobiographical intentions of the various adapters are potentially relevant to the audience’s interpretation. They are often recoverable, and their traces are visible in the text. The political dimension—in, for instance, feminist, queer, post-colonial, race, or ethnic studies—has been rescued. But the general injunction against the personal and aesthetic dimensions of intentionality still holds for the other aspects of the creative process, except in overt genres like confession, autobiography, or *testimonio*. In what some call our “posthumanist” times, with our suspicions of and challenges to notions of coherent subjectivity, what I am proposing may at first appear to be a step backward in theoretical-historical terms. But adaptation teaches that if we cannot talk about the creative process, we cannot fully understand the urge to adapt and therefore perhaps the very process of adaptation. We need to know “why.”

In the law, intention or motive determines such factors as the degree of a murder charge (first, second) or the very existence of a libel case. In the arts, by analogy, intention determines matters like why an artist

chooses to adapt a work and how it is to be done. Nevertheless, attention even to this kind of intent is in effect outlawed, for, it has been argued, considering the artist's life or intentions reduces literature to autobiography and reading to voyeurism. Yet it is arguably no easier to separate the creating agent from the creative act than it is to separate the ethical agent from the ethical act (Hix 1990: 81). *Auteurist* film critics, musicologists, and art historians usually see little problem with rooting the authority of meaning and value, not to mention motive, in artists' personal desires and creative needs, as well as in their conscious relations to the dominant artistic conventions of their age. Not so for literary critics, as R.W. Stallman's early articulation of the anathema against intentionalism makes clear: "Irrelevant to the objective status of the work of art are criteria which dissolve the work back into the historical or psychological or creative process from which it came" (qtd. in A. Patterson 1990: 140). In recent years, the historical along with the political has been rescued, with the help of New Historicist, feminist, Marxist, and postcolonial theory, and the Lacanians and trauma theorists have redeemed the psychological. However, the creative process itself in all its dimensions is still taboo or at least still out of critical fashion, considered too belletristic, journalistic, or simply Romantic.

Nevertheless, as we have seen with the adaptations of the Carmelites' story, adapters usually feel some "equivalence of sensibilities or form" (Schmidgall 1977: 6) or some "particular affinity with the artistic temperament or preoccupations" (Sinyard 2000: 147) of the creator of the work they decide to adapt; they then choose a particular medium in which to express that coincidence of concern. Of course, the result may not be as extreme as director David Cronenberg's description of his film adaptation of J.G. Ballard's *Crash* as "a lovely fusion of me and Ballard. We're so amazingly in synch" (Cronenberg 1996: vii). But some connection needs to exist. In the act of adapting, choices are made based on many factors, as we have seen, including genre or medium conventions, political engagement, and personal as well as public history. These decisions are made in a creative as well as an interpretive context that is ideological, social, historical, cultural, personal, and aesthetic. And that context is made accessible to us later in two ways. First, the text bears the marks of these choices, marks that betray the

assumptions of the creator—at the very least insofar as those assumptions can be inferred from the text. To return to my example, because the different versions of the Carmelites' story vary more than generic requirements or historical circumstances can explain, the variations function as indicators of the adapter's "voice," what James Phelan calls the "fusion of style, tone, and values" signaled not only by words but also by structural means (1996: 45). Second, and more obvious, is the fact that extratextual statements of intent and motive often do exist to round out our sense of the context of creation. Of course, these statements can and must be confronted with the actual textual results: as many have rightly insisted, intending to do something is not necessarily the same thing as actually achieving it (Nattiez 1990: 99; Wimsatt and Beardsley 1946: 480).

In a later revisiting of his position on intentionality, W.K. Wimsatt wrote:

An art work is something which emerges from the private, individual, dynamic, and intentionalist realm of its maker's mind and personality; it is in a sense ... made of intentions or intentionalistic material. But at the same time, in the moment it emerges, it enters a public and in a certain sense an objective realm; it claims and gets attention from an audience; it invites and receives discussion, about its meaning and value, in an idiom of inter-subjectivity and conceptualization. (1976: 11–12)

Although Wimsatt meant this to be an argument against taking authorial intent into consideration, I see it rather as exemplifying the need to rethink the function of adapter intention *for the audience* when it comes to understanding both the interpretive and creative dimensions of an adaptation. To use Wimsatt's own terms, in the public realm of "inter-subjectivity," knowledge about the "maker's mind and personality" can actually affect the audience members' interpretation: what they know about artists' desires and motivations, even about their life situations when they are creating, can influence the interpretation of any work's meaning, as well as the response to it. Like the adapter, the audience too interprets in a context. William Bush, a senior scholar of Bernanos' work, writes of being a 23-year-old graduate student

studying the play version of *Dialogues des Carmélites*, knowing that it was the writer's "last testament." He asks rhetorically: "How could I not be moved by the fact that he, in the last months before his death in 1948 at age 60, had written those dialogues for a film scenario about 16 nuns who, like him, were consciously preparing to appear before God?" (1999: xiii). Bush read the play as what Ross Chambers would call the testimony of someone "dying as an author" (1998: 23, 85); that is, the text bears witness to his death. It is a last dying gesture. Once known, this fact likely cannot be ignored by any reader.

Music semiotician Jean-Jacques Nattiez insists that an audience's knowledge about the creative process has a real impact upon interpretation, even if we could and should never reduce the explanation of a work to only that aspect (1990: ix). This level of analysis, which he names, borrowing from Etienne Gilson, the "poietic," is defined as "the determination of the conditions that make possible, and that underpin the creation of an artist's (or a producer's or an artisan's) work—thanks to which something now exists which would not have existed except for them" (13). The work of art is not just composed of formal structures, but of the "procedures that have engendered it" (ix) as well. For Nattiez, form results from a process of creation that can be described or reconstituted, at least in part, from textual traces (12). This process offers another context for understanding the motive to adapt. Claude Gendre argues that each new version of the story of the Carmelite martyrs appropriated "aspects of history to suit the author's particular spiritual beliefs" (1999: 274). Although this is demonstrably the case, we have seen that the spiritual is only one element of the context of creation of these works. Other elements play their part as well: the psychological, the political, the personal-historical (the place and time of composition), and the aesthetic (the choice of genre and medium). Armelle Guerne, Bernanos' secretary, claimed that the writer had articulated to her two very different reasons for wanting to write the dialogues for the film scenario: the subject of the Carmelites themselves, to whom he prayed each evening in order not to do something unworthy of them, and the desire to see if he could write for a performance medium (Gendre 1999: 284).

To bring such information into the interpretive and evaluative framework of an adaptation is to displace the adapter/author as "controller" in favor of what Phelan calls a rhetorical attention to "the recursive relationships among authorial agency, textual phenomena, and reader response" (1996: 19). When giving meaning and value to an adaptation *as an adaptation*, audiences operate in a context that includes their knowledge and their own interpretation of the adapted work. That context may also include information about the adapter, thanks to both journalistic curiosity and scholarly digging. In short, it may well matter—to an interpreting audience—whether the artist is working in Germany in 1931 or France in 1945 or Tunisia in 1947 or Paris in 1955, or whether the artist is creating a novella or a scenario or the dialogues for a film or an opera. But it may also matter that each one of the adapters of the Carmelites' historical story had deeply personal motives for being attracted to it. As readers, they interpreted the narrative in their own ways; as creators, they then made it their own.

By their very existence, adaptations remind us there is no such thing as an autonomous text or an original genius that can transcend history, either public or private. They also affirm, however, that this fact is not to be lamented. To use Benjamin's vivid image, "traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel" (1968: 91). So too do the traces of the adapting interpreter-creator cling to the adaptation. The process of adapting should make us reconsider our sense of literary critical embarrassment about intention and the more personal and aesthetic dimensions of the creative process. In theoretical-historical terms, our resistance is perfectly understandable, but it has inhibited us from understanding why such a critically denigrated form as adaptation has proved as much of an attraction for artists as for audiences. In *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, Edward Said argues that literature is "an order of repetition, not of originality—but an eccentric order of repetition, not one of sameness" (1985: 12). So too is adaptation. Despite being temporally second, it is both an interpretive and a creative act; it is storytelling as both rereading and rerepeating. Any answer to the question, "Why adapt?," needs to take into account the range of responses provided by adapters themselves.