DEFENSIVE ADAPTATION:
MANAGING SOCIAL ANXIETIES IN LITERATURE AND FILM

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DEDICATION

For my family
(Especially the first Doctor Neckles)

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INTRODUCTION

SCENES OF ADAPTATION

In the film *Tristram Shandy: A Cock and Bull Story* (Winterbottom 2005), the protagonist drops a hot chestnut down his pants. Our hero (comedian Steve Coogan, playing himself) flails in agony, feverishly attempting to remove the painful object. As he crouches in front of a mirror, we see reflected behind him a series of Steve Coogans, each also attempting to free himself from the searing-hot nut.[1] This *mise-en-abyme* moment can be read as the theoretical base of Winterbottom's film. The endless interplay of art and reality the film explores is here physically displayed for the film's audience. Coogan is attempting to rehearse a scene from the movie adaptation of *Tristram Shandy* that he is starring in, which is also the film we are watching him make. He uses a "real" hot chestnut to prepare his reactions for the moment of filming. Whether the "real" Steve Coogan also used a "real" hot chestnut to recreate the real effects of pain is pointedly left open; the endless reflections of Coogan that we can see through the mirror emphasize the impossibility of determining a final reality. And as Coogan's frenzy suggests, that threat of the impossible, and the distress it entails, is one from which we poor mortals may be unprepared to defend ourselves.

The movie is about a crew in the process of filming an adaptation of Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759). Sterne's novel is about a man who tries to write the story of his life in chronological order, a task at which he fails because life continually interrupts him. Winterbottom's film, scripted by Frank Cottrell Boyce, aims to dramatize that cycle of interrupted existence by filtering Sterne's non-linear novel through the

[1] *Tristram Shandy: A Cock and Bull Story*. Dir. Michael Winterbottom. Perf. Jeremy Northam, Steve Coogan, Keeley Hawes, and Shirley Henderson. 2005. DVD. Alliance, 2006.

conventions of mainstream popular films – which are nearly always bound by the conventions of classical narrative.[2] The result is a sort of backstage comedy in which several well-known actors play themselves playing characters in *Tristram Shandy* while other well-known actors merely play characters, who are playing characters or crew on the set of *Tristram Shandy*. It's not especially surprising to an attentive audience when, at the final cut screening, it is revealed that even this dual narrative has no "reality" component because all of the "filming *Tristram Shandy*" scenes were part of the film within the film. What *is* surprising, to anyone who walked into the theater expecting an appropriately tongue-in-cheek adaptation of Sterne's novel, is that the film has very little to do with *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*. This film seems to use adaptation as an excuse to explore the *mise-en-abyme* between art and reality. When the character Steve Coogan is interviewed about his role in the film, he responds simply to the interviewer's question, "Why choose a novel that many people say is unfilmable?" "I think," he answers, "that's the attraction."

To the characters in the film, the reason *Tristram Shandy* becomes a subject for adaptation is that the filmmakers wish to tackle the challenge of filming an unfilmable novel. Freed from the constraints of filming a faithful adaptation of a novel, both the diegetic and extradiegetic filmmakers can create nested films that expose "larger" truths about life and art. As clever as Winterbottom's film is, its subject is part of a long tradition in Western art. The play-within-a-play in revenge tragedies—of which the mousetrap scene in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1602) is the most famous—all suggest how the plots of drama are, to their audiences'

[2] In *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* (1985), David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson, and Janet Staiger discuss several key elements of classical Hollywood narrative: 1. *Hollywood films are invariably narrative films.* 2. *These narratives contain motivated, goal-oriented characters. Generally there are at least two lines of narrative action, one of which often involves heterosexual romance.* 3. *To achieve their goals, characters follow a chain of cause and effect (and all of their actions have consequences) to which time is subordinated.* 4. *Various obstacles thwart the characters' drives to their goals; these expand the space of the plot to acceptable "feature" lengths.* 5. *By the end of the film, the characters either achieve or definitively fail to achieve their goals in a way that registers change from the opening of the film.* 6. *Classical narratives always close off narrative lines.* David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristen Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Columbia UP, 1985).

dismay, more like real life than fiction. Novels like Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (1615) and Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1818) and Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1856) demonstrate the dangerous ease with which fiction may be confused with reality. Contemporary films like *A Double Life* (Cukor 1947) and *Synecdoche, NY* (Kauffman 2009) all explore the disturbingly insecure boundaries between artists and their art.

Within that larger category of narratives, however, there is a group of texts that specifically approach the problem by way of textual adaptation; these are especially plentiful in modernist and post-modernist influenced work since the twentieth-century. These texts range from musical comedies like Cole Porter's *Kiss Me Kate* (1949), which parallels the lives of actors to their counterparts in a musical adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* (1590-1594), to big budget art films like Michael Powell's and Emil Pressburger's *The Red Shoes* (1948), which both contains a ballet adaptation of and is itself an adaptation of Hans Christian Anderson's short story (1845). Harold Pinter's and Karl Reisz's skeptical romance *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1981), which both is and takes place on the set of a filmic adaptation of John Fowles's novel (1969), is a forerunner to Charlie Kauffman's aptly titled *Adaptation* (2001). *Adaptation* follows the efforts of a screenwriter to adapt a non-narrative, nonfiction book into a film that does not fall into Hollywood clichés. Within the context of their stories, the adaptations within this group of films serve as synedoches for the ways we use art to better understand our lives. They neatly showcase Oscar Wilde's maxim: "Paradox though it may seem—and paradoxes are always dangerous things—it is none the less true that Life imitates art far more than Art imitates life."[3]

Like more frightening versions of Wilde's dangerous paradox, these backstage tales of adaptation also suggest the ways art can tell us things about our lives that we don't want to know or demonstrate ways the shield of art might be used to keep the nastiness of life at bay. For instance, in his interview about the film within a film, Steve Coogan offhandedly remarks that

[3] Oscar Wilde, "The Decay of Lying," *Intentions* (London: James R. Osgood McIlvaine & Co 1891) 31.

Tristram Shandy (and *Tristram Shandy: A Cock and Bull Story*) is about how, "you can't pretend that you're not the fool." Uninsightful and offensive as Coogan is throughout most of the film, he nonetheless utters the only line that gets at the deep problem of this narrative: Everyone tries to present themselves well, as actors, as artists, as intellectuals, as business people, or as human beings, and everyone, to some degree, fails. They are all, in their own ways, both the heroes and the fools of their own stories. The film places the weight of arrogance and general ridiculousness on the shoulders of artists – not a single "non-film" person inhabits Winterbottom's world. Even the "regular" people – the paid extras who populate the big battle scene – participate in the art world. Yet if the film is part of an endless string of signification, then no one on either side of the screen is safe from the quandaries *Tristram Shandy* raises. Winterbottom's *mise-en-abyme* ensures that the audience is not safe from Coogan's lesson that we are all fools in life. The mask of nested narrative adaptations that compose this self-reflexive adaptation are particularly suited to make that truism easier to dissociate from one's own social experience. The *Tristram Shandy* adaptations make it easier, in other words, to defend against the problem even as they concede its inseparability from human experience.

Similarly, in *Kiss Me, Kate*, the emotional abuse that all of the characters suffer and inflict as they tame each other into appropriate romantic partners is filtered and distanced by song and dance. The abusive familial and marital relationships that are fodder for comedy in Shakespeare's seventeenth-century play become song cues in Porter's musical. When, on opening night, playboy actor Fred Graham, playing Petruchio, takes his Kate in marriage (she is played by his ex-wife, Lilli Vanessi) he defends his cruel behavior by declaring his matrimonial rights: "She is my goods, my chattels, my horse, my ox, my ass, mine anything. Touch her, whoever dares."[4] But Porter's adaptation takes a defensive stance against the idea of human property: As Petruchio's, and implicitly Alfred's, offenses to his wife's dignity mount to

[4] Cole Porter, Samuel Spewack, Bella Cohen Spewack, "Kiss Me, Kate." *Kiss Me, Kate: The Revival Cast* 25 Jan. 2000. Drg, 2000.

insufferable levels, Porter interjects a song break into the adapted Shakespearean dialogue. Reaching the end of his list of a wife's property equivalents, Petruchio croons, "*So kiss me, Kate,*" and so begins the musical's title number. Kate and Lilli are not won over in this scene, but Porter's music diffuses, for both his 1949 and future audiences, the effect of disconcerting relationship perspectives that have refused to be entirely outmoded.

Porter's lyrics throughout the musical are sardonic and self-aware – Petruchio's sentiments themselves are *meant* to be reprehensible. What we can see in *Kiss Me, Kate,* though, is the way that adaptation does something particular to these texts that separates them from other backstage tales. It is easy to forget that in *The Taming of the Shrew,* Kate and Petruchio's story is also just a play performed as part of a trick. A Lord, finding Christopher Sly passed out near an alehouse, decides to "practice on this drunken man" by dressing him in fine clothes to make "the beggar then forget himself."[5] When a troupe of strolling players arrives, they become part of the scheme. They perform, as the false lord and his false lady term it, "a kind of history" the watching of which will "let the world slip" (In. ii.144-146). Shakespeare critics disagree about how to understand the fact that the frame narrative of Shakespeare's play is one-sided (we end within Petruchio and Kate's story) and directors often cut the troubling opening scene entirely, beginning only within the "real" *Taming of the Shrew*.[6] But within Shakespeare's play, the art consumes real life entirely, and so becomes life itself. The world slips. Through that move, however, Petruchio's comic abuses and Kate's humiliation cease to be merely "play." In Porter's musical, the frame of the diegetic reality is never overtaken by the play. Petruchio/Fred Graham can diffuse the harshness of the sentiments that he sings *because* he is in an adaptation. The song *break* literally mediates Petruchio's spoken offenses and shifts the tone of the scene from

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[5] William Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew,* Ed. Barbara Mowat and Paul Werstine, The New Folger Library (New York: Washington Square Press, 1992) In.i.37

[6] See, for example, Leah Marcus, "The Shakespearean Editor as Shrew Tamer" *English Literary Renaissance* 22:2 (1992): 177-200; Graham Holderness, "Introduction," *The Taming of the Shrew* by William Shakespeare (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1991) 1-25.

disturbing litany to comic chorus. The heightened reality of the music and lyrics in both defends all of the characters from having their words, or even their actions, speak too loudly.

Defensive Adaptations

The very ubiquity of narrative adaptations from one medium to another, from one time and place to another, is so common that it is easy to accept their existence without further thought. Audiences love them, hate them, and theorize their value and effect. Yet perhaps because adaptation is not an independent medium or even a consistent genre, its function as a mode of expression has been undertheorized. As a mode of artistic expression, adaptations have been assigned two primary roles in Western culture: 1. Adaptations are a tool of pleasure and nostalgia (through the comfort of repetition with variation); or, 2. Adaptations are tools that "write back" in order to correct the social blunders of their source texts. However, by accepting these premises, theorists have uniformly failed to ask what these specific kinds of repetition with a difference might *do* for their audiences and creators.

In this dissertation, I look at a particular kind of adaptation—one I call the defensive adaptation. The defensive adaptation functions both more precisely than to give audiences the pleasure of repetition and more independently of artistic intention than the "writing back" motive allows. Critics argue that fidelity criticism – using faithfulness to an "original plot" as the standard of judging adaptations – underestimates the power of this art form. Most critical and popular receptions of adaptation, from this angle, are invalid for serious scholarship on the subject. These scholars, to illuminate its true sources of potential, point to the ideological subversions of many adaptations, to adaptation's ability to illuminate the potential relationships among media, and to the pleasure adaptations bring by providing repetition with a difference as content shifts to suit ever-changing audiences. Robert Stam and Alessandra Reigno argue that adaptations function as "barometers of the ideological trends circulating during the moments of

production."[7] Where my arguments differs from these and other critics who contend that the primary social function of adaptations is to "write back" to a text's outdated ideology or morality is that defensive adaptations cannot "write back" at a problem they cannot have an answer for or positive critique of; they can only isolate it and transform the way it is communicated. Moreover, suggesting that adaptations "write back" also suggests that their perspectives are presented *to* rather than *for* their audiences. As Porter's use of musical adaptation in *Kiss me, Kate* suggests, adaptation itself is just as likely to camouflage social problems by dressing the narratives that threaten to expose them in new medial clothing.

Defensive adaptation, I will argue, manages social problems that have no legal or otherwise formal means of redress. The problems that defensive adaptations reveal to be the most distressing are not legal or moral injustices that might be confronted through tangible social reforms. These adaptations, in other words, do not deal with problems on which people can take an easily defensible or logical position. Rather, they cluster around social problems that cannot be identified and corrected – problems that come with the very messy business of being human: the meaning of selfhood, the terms of social responsibility, the tragedy of unexpectedly interrupted lives, and the always obsessive nature of love. These are social anxieties, but they are particularly anxieties that are about participating in the social world. In both life and in fictional plots, problems that are more easily judged tend to marginalize these largely unanswerable problems.

Defensive adaptation allows audiences and artists to bracket unanswerable problems with technical processes: they broadcast the relationship between an "original" story and its representation in a significantly different form or medium. One can take a position on abomination of slavery, or the importance of women's liberation, or adultery, or whether a certain novel is unfilmable. Deciding on the meaning of personal identity may be a subject on which

[7] Robert Stam and Alessandra Reigno, *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice* (London: Blackwell, 2005) 45.

philosophy has much to say, but the problem of reconciling that personal identity with the social world is one that has no clear sides to stand on. The problems that defensive adaptations guard against, I argue, stem from precisely the types of social anxieties that existentialist philosophers such as Jean Paul Sartre never managed to parse out to the satisfaction of the masses. They are problems attendant to individual existence in a social world. These texts defend their audiences (and even their creators) against the unanswerable problems, the ones about which they can have *feelings* but which outstrip the capability of language, logic, or reason. Cole Porter's Petruchio can only make his unsettling attitude towards relationships palatable—and the fact that it is, even in 1949, still a comic position—by adapting the language of the play into song.

Defensive adaptations gather their power in that shifting among media. Rather than a response to these social problems, defensive adaptations are an effect of the *transformation* of a narrative from one medium to another. The problems I explore in this dissertation have been considered in many different registers of art, but adaptations intensify our access to unanswerable problems because of the unique way that adaptation is a product of mediation. In *Keywords*, Raymond Williams elaborates on the many "conflicting uses" of the word "mediation" throughout its history in English.[8] In political usage, the word has a positive cast: mediation is a process of conciliation (206). The Marxist tradition cast it in a more "unfavourable sense" where "certain social agencies are seen as deliberately interposed between reality and social consciousness, to prevent and understanding of reality" (206). Similarly, in psychoanalytic analysis, mediation is when unconscious content "undergoes mediation into the conscious mind" (206). Finally, there is the formalist sense of the word in which mediation is "an activity which directly expresses otherwise unexpressed relations" (206). Defensive adaptations, I argue, are the product when social anxieties become lodged in the gaps between media. Lodged in that gap,

[8] Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society,* Revised ed. (New York: Oxford UP, 1983) 206.

these problems start to throb. As a result, the three uses of the word that Williams outlines do not, in defensive adaptations, *conflict* but exist in a dialectical relationship. Defensive adaptations are the product of all three types of mediation. Defensive adaptations separate us from the reality of the social anxieties and also conciliate our relationships with them through their formal process of creation. Their movement among media, moreover, "expresses otherwise unexpressed relations" in the gaps that emerge between forms. For while the human audiences that encounter these texts need to mediate their relationships to the social problems they contain, the defensive adaptations *adapt* those problems by remediating them. An adaptations' defense, then, is most prominent at the moment when the art form asserts itself.

For instance: The artistic effect of Porter's song cue is that the audience registers its location in the narrative and the cleverness of the lyrics. In that split second, refocusing on the change in medium, Petruchio's misogyny slips to the background. When misogyny returns in the lyrics it is displaced by the rhyme of the words and the tune of the music. Thus this defensive adaptation does not just tell *The Taming of the Shrew* as an updated tale about life upon the wicked stage, with a pinch of music and dancing to liven it up for a postwar setting. *Kiss Me, Kate* adapts the taming into a kiss; it is a kiss that, out of context, sounds like the sweet musical romance theatergoers expect from a comedy. Within the context of its function as an adaptation about an adaptation, however, "Kiss me, Kate," is a command that grows out of all the most potentially unsavory aspects of Shakespeare's play and of the lives of the players in the musical adaptation of that play. As in *Tristram Shandy: A Cock and Bull Story,* the highly mediated layers of narrative make the stakes of the play difficult to grasp, but that distancing is also what makes these adaptations appealing: these texts play out their existential problems, the ones neither the plot nor time can resolve, in the spaces among media. They can erect these defenses despite the fact that, as we will see, several of these texts look nothing like the film/literature adaptations with which adaptation scholars have been primarily occupied. Therefore, texts I identify as

defensive adaptations throughout this dissertation all conform to the three terms of adaptation that my examples from *Tristram Shandy: A Cock and Bull Story* and *Kiss Me, Kate* set out:

1. An adaptation occurs when a text is adapted from one medium to another *or* when a shift in the form of its medium is drastic enough to warrant renaming.

The idea of adaptation is potentially very broad; texts can be adapted to fit new environments without being adapted from one medium to another. Yet textual adaptations, especially those adaptations that are defensive, depend on medium as well as narrative adaptation. The term adaptation, when used in a biological or Darwinian sense only means that an organism or species undergoes "modification" to function in a changing environment.[9] It is technically true that Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) adapts Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* (1841) for a political climate ready to debate the questions of colonialism and gender relations that the later novel raises. And yet this "retelling" of Bronte's novel is still a novel – the narrative is adapted while its medium remains fundamentally stable. Critics and readers have often looked to retellings or strongly intertextual works for the most insightful or creative interventions in the hierarchy of earlier texts. As I will argue in Chapter I, that preference stems from the fact that such texts are not threatening to a source text's character system because they eschew plot and setting fidelity.[10] Retellings of texts develop a new contract with their audiences in the way that the new social order of the text prompts revaluation of both the new text and the tale it retells. Unlike defensive adaptations, retellings claim to lay bare the core problems of the earlier text to work through them. However, such retellings generally appear when the problems they pinpoint in or draw from their sources are already socially safe subjects – "safe" in the sense that such subjects are actively discussed rather than those on which everyone agrees. That is, they only

[9] "adaptation," *The Oxford English Dictionary* <www.oed.com>.
[10] I borrow the term "character system" from Alex Woloch. Alex Woloch, *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2003).

tend to address problems that have a clearly political valence as well as a human component: slavery, colonialism, gender inequality, and so on.

Defensive adaptations primarily manage existential problems that, by their nature, are resistant to such working through. In defensive adaptations the adaptation of a narrative is tied to an adaptation of a medium; the dual processes that means that even if the anxiety-causing problem does not change, the mediation can fulfill a *desire* for change. A novel or a play adapted from a newspaper article will be an adaptation as well as a fictionalization. It may remain within the medium of print but its modes of production and consumption are drastically different than those of its source; the experience of the text is significantly mediated. David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly* (1989), for example, tells the story of man who carried on a decades-long affair with a man he believed to be a woman. Hwang's play lends emotional depth and sympathy to the emotionless paragraph-long report of the case from which he drew his subject. Hwang has said that when he read the newspaper article, he felt "the impossibility of the situation and the inevitability of it, both at the same time."[11] And in that change from detached newspaper writing to drama, Hwang's play defends against a form of communication that refuses to appreciate that the significance of a story often has very little to do with mere facts. His mediation of the text both draws out and defends against the painful significance of "the situation" and the form in which it circulates.

George Bluestone, one of the earliest critics to write a formal adaptation study, defined adaptations as texts that "metamorphose" their sources.[12] Bluestone's simple definition is useful and reflects popular usage, but like his use of the term adaptation, what the *metamorphosis* of a text into a different medium might mean for its narrative goes uninterrogated. Bluestone' word

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[11] David Henry Hwang, Interview with John Louis DiGaetani, *Theater and Drama Review* 33.3 (Autumn, 1989): 141-153. 143. Hwang and DiGaetani also discuss the effect the newspaper article had in their social circles. David Cronenburg eventually filmed Hwang's adaptation of the play in 1993. Hwang's play is also, of course, a retelling of *Madama Butterfly*.

[12] James Naremore, "Introduction: Film and the Reign of Adaptation," *Film Adaptation* Ed. James Naremore (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2000) 1-15. qtd. 6.

choice has both biological – where metamorphosis is a form of maturation – and supernatural implications. The etymological connections to Ovid's tales, in which metamorphosis is generally a mode of protection or punishment, suggests that the metamorphosis of a text is just as likely to be a method of maintaining order in the social sphere as it is an evolutionary move.[13] When André Bazin wrote about adaptation in 1948, he argued that a "work" should sit at the top of a pyramid of literature, drama, and film; the more media in which a narrative was adapted, the closer the work was to completion as art.[14] Bazin's major contribution was to identify cinema as an art form, but in adaptation studies Bazin's perspective suggests that only a narrative represented in different media art forms can even begin to "mean" something to a culture. Bazin's underappreciated essay begins to account for the cultural significance of textual metamorphoses among media. The existence of a text in multiple media makes it more stable – part of a pyramid.

What kind of instability, then, can adaptation deflect? Under what circumstances does a text require the protection or punishment of metamorphosis? How does defensive adaptation's dialectical mode of mediation manage broad social anxieties? Part of the hindrance to more deeply understanding how textual adaptation has functioned in Western culture is that, like Bluestone, the bulk of scholars who theorize adaptation focus on literature to film adaptations.[15] What it means to be an adaptation is taken for granted while the stakes are placed on the status of and relationship between literature and film. John M. Desmond and Peter Hawkes, in their useful guide for teaching filmic adaptation to students simply state that film adaptation is "the

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[13] "metamorphosis." *The Oxford English Dictionary* <www.oed.com>.

[14] André Bazin, "The Cinema as Digest," in *Adaptation* Ed. James Naremore (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2000) 19-27. 26

[15] From one angle, this level of attention to novel/film adaptation is connected to transitions in the popularity of various mass media. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, theater was the populist medium. Charles Dickens's frustration with the numerous playwrights who would rush his unfinished novels to the stage (because his novels were published in monthly parts and inconsistent copyright laws made such pirating easy) was so intense that he would satirize such adapters in the later installments of *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-1839). Film took theater's public place in the early twentieth century and so it makes sense that formal adaptation studies has gathered around the novel/film relationship. The threat of the dramatist to the novelist was replaced with irritation at the upstart filmmaker.

transfer of a printed text in a literary genre to film" before they move on to the particulars of studying such adaptations.[16] Adaptation, from these definitions, is the stable point. The trouble starts when adaptations are executed by artists and received by their audiences. Yet, opera and ballet adaptations of literature generate far less debate *about adaptation*. While a significant number of ballets and operas are adaptations of well-known novels and plays, the use of their narratives and titles is seen as an excuse to explore a very different kind of art form – one in which narrative is far less important than music or dance. These adaptations can be more easily be seen as "readings" of a source text, as Robert Stam and Brian McFarlane would have it, rather than as a (possibly butchered) "translation" or "transfer."[17]

But if we can borrow the term "adaptation" wholesale from the life sciences, then we should consider what purposes that process might serve in the arts.[18] Though opera and ballet may present different *kinds* of adaptations, they can still help us see what conditions of life defensive adaptations may emerge out of. Linda Hutcheon, in *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006), concludes that adaptation is appealing because it is part of the human drive for repetition with variation; adaptations are "memes" that have evolved, "by cultural selection, traveling stories adapt to local cultures, just as populations of organisms adapt to local environments."[19] From this perspective, adaptation becomes simply another aspect of storytelling, an intermedial fluke of artistic history. It also suggests that if a text has not been adapted, it has somehow been deemed less culturally "fit" than other stories; it was unworthy of adaptation. While there may be numerous adaptations of, say, Arthurian legends, what about more localized adaptations – texts that may only have been adapted once or twice? Are they less part of the evolution of art? What

[16] John M. Desmond and Peter Hawkes, *Adaptation: Studying Film and Literature* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005) 1.
[17] Brian McFarlane, "Introduction," *Novel to Film* (London: Clarendon Press, 1996) 9-13; Robert Stam, "Introduction: The Theory and Practice of Adaptation," *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Adaptation* (London: Blackwell, 2005) 1-52. 3.
[18] Not until after the publication of Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859) does the OED have a record of "adaptation" being used to comment on adapting art from one medium to another (1878).
[19] Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (New York: Routledge, 2006) 177.

is consistent about defensive adaptations, however, is that they actively take on simultaneous metamorphoses of form and content and all their attendant cultural baggage. The existence of a defensive adaptation means that rather than refining its narrative's place in the world, an adaptation actually becomes less tailored to any one environment and more of an opening to discover what different environments have in common. That same clear textual metamorphosis, however, is layered over murkier human problems.

2. A text is an adaptation when a narrative claims a relationship to a source text.

Developing a shared *dependent* reference point (even if that shared history is purely conceptual) is integral to the way adaptations circulate. Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) may have features in common with William Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* (1601), but without a claim on the earlier text, its effect is as contingent intertext. The most concise definition of textual adaptation by these terms also comes from Linda Hutcheon. Hutcheon argues that adaptation is "an extended, deliberate, announced revisitation of a particular work of art" (170). Like James Naremore, Thomas Leitch, and Robert Stam, Hutcheon is influenced by Bakhtinian conceptions of intertextuality and dialogics; from this angle, adaptations are an effect of the inescapable fact that all texts are intersections of other texts.[20] Robert Stam, in particular, has elucidated how adaptations are the product of the multiplicity of languages and modes of communication that inform every text.[21] These perspectives have refined critical studies of adaptation while simultaneously creating more questions about where analysis should "draw the line between relevant and irrelevant sources?"[22] The important distinction for all of these critics, however, is that adaptations do not just contain other texts but also speak the terms of their relationship with those texts. In this project, the way texts speak their relationships to a source is

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[20] Thomas Leitch, *Film Adaptation and its Discontents: From Gone with the Wind to The Passion of the Christ* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007).
[21] Robert Stam, "Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation," In *Film Adaptation*. James Naremore, ed (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2000) 54-77.
[22] Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein, "Figures in the Corpus: Figures in Influence and Intertextuality," *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991) 3-36. 22.

crucial to identifying an adaptation. Christine Geraghty's view of adaptations in terms of "layering and transparencies" that produce the effect of ghosts and hauntings among texts is especially useful when examining defensive adaptations, which work continuously to displace the terms of the relationships they claim.[23] "The layering process," Geraghty tantalizingly suggests, "involves an accretion of deposits over time, a recognition of ghostly presences, and a shadowing or doubling of what is on the surface by what is glimpsed behind" (195). As a result of this deliberate layering by which unexpected ghosts may materialize, the life and art *mise-en-abyme* of *Tristram Shandy* cannot extend to the classification of adaptations. Although textual adaptation exists on a spectrum of referentiality, the sticking point between an adaptation and its claimed source (whether it tells the whole story or not) is what keeps a narrative's unanswerable problems from spinning out of control.

This concept of a defensive *type* of adaptation is in the tradition of several current adaptation theorists who have made efforts to construct a taxonomic adaptation studies. In the wake of the dialogical and intertextual turn in adaptation studies, critics defined the field by creating categories of adaptation that describe what adaptation *does* rather than what it *doesn't* do.[24] The sense that something is lost in an adaptation, and that one's sense of what is lost or gained is directly related to one's taste or intelligence, has become a commonplace in reactions to adaptations in a range of media. Within that commonplace is a belief in medium specificity—film as film, novel as novel, drama as drama—the conviction that every medium has salient qualities and that narratives are best suited to some one or other of those media. Gerard Genette in *Palimpsests* (1997) defines what most would call adaptations as hypotexts. Genette's definition is part of Stam's extended definition that adaptations also "amplif[y] source texts through these multiple intertexts" (7). Both Dudley Andrew in his essay, "Adaptation" (1984)

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[23] Christine Geraghty, *Now a Major Motion Picture: Film Adaptations of Literature and Drama* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2008) 11.

[24] A distinction formalized by Seymour Chatman as "What Novels Do that Films Can't (And Vice Versa)." Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1978).

and Thomas Leitch define *types* of adaptations as a way of separating valuable criticism of adaptations from mere qualitative reader-reactions. That is, defining types and goals of adaptation serves to undermine the criteria of "fidelity" that critics argue distracts us from what adaptations are really trying to do. The remedy, they argue, is to assign categories to adaptations and to evaluate them on their success within that category as well by as their independent merit as works of art.

Kamilla Elliot's 2003 *Rethinking the Novel/Film Debate*, though focusing again on novels and film, elucidates six concepts that together explain most of the strategies that artists use when adapting a work from novel to film. Elliot elegantly tackles the anthropomorphic language that has been used in assessments of the relationship between form and content (that emotionally charged language of fidelity, desecration, and betrayal) by using MGM's *Wuthering Heights* (1939) to outline the many categories of adaptation that circulate in Western culture. Elliot's categories – psychic (the spirit of the text), ventriloquist (emptying the source text), genetic (narrative kernels that transfer between texts), De(Re)composing (deconstructing the source), incarnational (word made flesh), and trumping (which medium "represents" better) – are useful in that they provide positive vocabulary for meeting an adaptation on its own terms.[25] Among these categories, defensive adaptations as I discuss them most often fit into the genetic category – where kernels of narrative affinity are maintained despite a metamorphosis. Categories, however, are primarily useful for delineating critical analyses; they define a text's intended or experienced relationship to the text it claims as a source. They undervalue the mass experience of audiences, without whom those texts would cease to function *as adaptations.*

3. **A text is an adaptation when comparison to a source and between media becomes important for a narrative's circulation among its audience.**

[25] Elliot's argument exposes the "interdisciplinary rivalries" that hold back adaptation studies and she manages to "provide templates for the various ways in which films seek to connect with novels in adaptation in terms of form and content" – adaptations may be more or less successful in their quests but it is these templates that seem best to define their aims (136). Kamilla Elliot, *Rethinking the Novel/Film Debate* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2003).

Circulation among an audience completes defensive adaptations. Adaptations are almost unique as an art form in that they cannot exist *as adaptations* without garnering reaction from an audience; adaptation is an exclusively social art. A painting will still be a painting, a poem still a poem, a film still a film, whether anyone sees them or not. Adaptations are more akin to a Brechtian theatrical performance, which requires the audience to do their part in completing the art. Current critical explanations for the cultural role of adaptation (some of which I describe above), however, leave audiences as passive receivers of texts. The usual arguments run as follows:

1. Adaptations of texts are common because they work in the popular culture market as pre-sold products (*the economic argument*)
2. Adaptations of "classics" serve to teach the public about (literary) history (*the heritage argument*)
3. Adaptations of contemporary texts firmly place those texts and their authors in the evolving literary canon (*the literary survival argument)*
4. Adaptations of certain texts at certain moments in history chart or critique the socio-cultural climate and/or that of its source text (*the "writing back" argument*)
5. Adaptations let us see, in the flesh, characters and situations we have heretofore only imagined (*the concretization argument*)

Adaptation, however, requires audience participation and evaluation; adaptations never present their contents quietly – and a text that circulates as an adaptation does so because of the vocal responses it prompts. In *Tristram Shandy*, the link to adaptation is consistently used as a marker of cultural literacy, or lack thereof, just as adaptations of canonical texts have served as middlebrow markers of quality since the dawn of Hollywood. "There's so much in that novel. Why would you choose *that*," scolds a sexy, intellectual production assistant; iterations of her sentiment echo throughout the film.

Yet this social feature of adaptations has not received much attention partly because of academic reservations about reader-response criticism, which has the potential to become an unbounded critical black hole. But even discussing fidelity criticism, as adaptation theorists uniformly do, implicitly takes a reader-response perspective. The idea of fidelity in relation to adaptation rests in the idea that an adaptations of any text strives, as its central goal, to be faithful to either the plot or the spirit of its acknowledged sources. The cliché that "the book is always better than the movie" often stems from this belief. Whatever the logic or argument behind the production of a particular adaptation, audience reactions always turn to qualitative comparison between the known text and the adaptation. Defensive adaptations are not only barometers for ideological trends but also a way to *mediate* problems that time will not materially change; comparison is a facet of that mediation.

As contemporary critics attempt to turn away from fidelity assessments in their work, they have also begun to ignore what may be at stake in audiences for making those fidelity comparisons. Championing adaptations based on whether or not they can stand as independent artworks, while valuable for evaluating artistic quality, cannot itself be taken as the way to understand the role of adaptation in Western media culture. Dudley Andrew stated early in the distancing from formal fidelity criticism that "adaptation is a fact of human practice" – a point that Linda Hutcheon and Thomas Leitch recently reasserted (Hutcheon 177, Leitch 21).[26] While complaining that other critics resort to fidelity arguments to uphold literary prestige over more popular forms like theater or film, their academic perspective fails to account for popular audiences who may have no investment in the literary prestige that professional critics cite as responsible for fidelity criticism.

Since only in the movement among media does the medium specificity come into play, I argue that the collision between narrative and form, where texts meet their audiences, is where

[26] Dudley Andrew, "Adaptation," *Film Theory and Criticism* Eds. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford UP, 1999) 452-260. 456.

the defensive quality of adaptation erupts. While the sensitivity that defensive adaptations have to social anxieties emerges from the gaps between media, it is primarily in they way an audience experiences these texts that the adaptation becomes defensive. The fidelity and medium specificity debates are not accidents of the linear experience of texts but the effects of defensive adaptation. These easily articulated debates help displace the distressing social anxieties for which the "sides" are less clear.

Scenes of Adaptation

Defensive adaptations, by definition, work very hard to make the problems they tackle difficult to see. However, adaptations within texts, like *Tristram Shandy: A Cock and Bull Story* and *Kiss Me, Kate* still carry the cultural implications of other adaptations. Therefore, throughout this project, I examine such *scenes of adaptation* as a way of grasping otherwise elusive facets of defensive adaptation. A scene of adaptation is at its basic level a scene or scenes in a single text where a narrative is adapted. But the phrase *scene of adaptation* also has broader implications for adaptation studies. My phrase, "scene of adaptation" comes from a history of criticism about reading, writing, and interpretation portrayed within texts. Many critics, most notably Paul de Man in *Allegories of Reading*, have examined representations of reading and writing in literature. De Man, in the service of deconstruction, argues that the "reading scene" is a metaphorical representation of the "*inside* [of] a text that was first something alien to us and which we now make our own by an act of understanding. But this understanding becomes at once the representation of an extra-textual meaning."[27] Interpreting the fictionalized representation of reading, in other words, allows us to better apply the results of such scenes to our understanding of how reading works in the world outside that text. In Nancy Cervetti's use of the term, the "scene of reading" allows for socially safe representations of radical social critiques because

[27] Paul De Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, and Proust* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979) 12-13.

cultural commentary is encoded in the process they stage.[28] The projects of De Man's and Cervetti's work diverge from my own (and from each other). But, together, these critics suggest that the "scene" of reading may simultaneously expose and hide a text's relationship to cultural meaning.

Adaptation studies especially of novel to film adaptations, have also examined the "scene of reading," or the use of written texts in film, as a way that filmmakers "encounter their own" relationship of their medium to the supposed "originals" from which they are derived. Kamilla Elliot analyzes the way that adaptations of Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* defy the written word; they contain many scenes in which written texts are ignored or destroyed. Unlike De Man's and Cervetti's work, however, these arguments remain tied to questions of medial allegiance. But there are also scenes in which reading, interpretation, or assertions of medial superiority are secondary to the adaptation process depicted. Like the scene of reading, the scene of adaptation serves as a metaphorical expression of a function adaptation serves in its cultural context: here we can analyze the social problems adaptation may expose and also what problems it may help hide. Garrett Stewart has argued in a similar context: "it is only in this way that in reading about another's reading you can think to encounter your own."[29]

A clear scene of adaptation appears in Charles Dickens's *Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-1839). Young gentleman, Nicholas Nickleby, has recently escaped from an abusive schoolmaster and joined up with a rag-tag traveling theatre troupe. Almost immediately, the manager asks him to develop a play for the troupe to perform. But he does not expect anything like "invention."[30] Handing Nicholas a French play he explains: "just turn that into English and put your name on the title-page" (Dickens 280). Without protest, "Nicholas smiled,

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[28] Nancy Cervetti, *Scenes of Reading: Transforming Romance in Bronte, Eliot, and Woolf* (New York: Peter Lang, 1998).
[29] Garrett Stewart, *Dear Reader: The Conscripted Audience in Nineteenth-century British Fiction* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1996) 32.
[30] Charles Dickens, *Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby* (London: MacMillan & Co. Ltd., 1954) 280.

and pocketed the play" (280). Nicholas seems to accept that to "turn" the play into English and put his name on the title page will do no harm. It will not transform anything important about the play. And, after all, the translation will be his work. But a later scene indicates that Nicholas' translation theft weighs on his mind. Some time later, Nicholas is introduced to a "literary gentleman." "Did you ever hear a definition of fame, Sir?" asks the literary gentleman (599). The definition offered by this pointedly anonymous adapter of two hundred and forty seven novels is succinct: "When I dramatise a book, Sir, […] *that's* fame—for its author" (599). Nicholas violently disagrees. He argues that while Shakespeare artfully derived "plots from old tales and legends in general circulation," contemporary adapters "press, cut, hack and carve" the sweat and genius of other writers into second-rate theatre (600). In this scene, Dickens satirizes the fraught copyright issues of his day, during a period when dramatists could bring adaptations of novels to the stage before either had even been finished (601). Nicholas' characteristic agitation and defensiveness underscores the fact that he has just agreed to the same kind of artistic infringement he condemns. Dickens's narrator even refers to him as the "young dramatist" (285).

Readers of Dickens novel might not remember Nicholas' artistic theft at this moment, but what this scene brings to light is a sense of guilt in our hero that he may not even have realized himself. The clear gap between media in the literary gentleman's work makes that guilt stick. However, because it is swallowed and redirected at the adaptations and adaptors themselves, these adaptations defend Nicholas against the accusations he makes so virulently. Because such scenes of adaptation take place within a single text, they remove the layer of mediation that in general practice displaces the underlying social anxieties that adaptation so often tackles. The "scene of adaptation" serves as an opening through which we can encounter defensive adaptations in culture.

Setting the Scenes

Thomas Middleton's revenge tragedy, *Women Beware Women* (1657), ends with that hallmark of the genre: a play within a play.[31] After encouraging the murder of her husband, the Duke of Florence marries his mistress, Bianca. Livia, a noblewoman who was in love with Bianca's now-dead husband, arranges a masque, ostensibly to celebrate the Duke's marriage. She casts in the production all those who have wronged her and who she, in turn, has betrayed. As playgoers might expect, nearly everyone on stage ends up dead. What's striking about the play, and particularly this final bloody scene, is that it contains comic overtones that are in tension with the play's vicious representations of human behavior. The Duke who, despite his adulterous ways, has been fairly harmless throughout the play, cannot grasp the meaning of the scene developing in front of him.

At the start of the scene, the Duke and his new wife receive a written narrative: "a model/ of what's presented" in the play (v.ii.30-31). The Duke is unaware of what's to come and the Duchess is aware only of her plot to murder the Duke's meddling brother, a sanctimonious cardinal. Calmly, the newlyweds settle down to watch the "pretty, pleasing argument" that they're sure will follow the plot given to them (45). As the play unfolds, however, the Duke watches in exaggerated confusion as the scene devolves into a retributive bloodbath. When the first victim falls the Duke notes: "This swerves a little from the argument, though" (121). Concerned, at first, only that the "argument" of the model seems to be misrepresented, the Duke soon becomes frustrated at the play's failure to follow the plot he knows: "Why sure, this plot's drawn false; here's no such thing" (127). As the deaths mount and the players slip out of their roles and their lives they exposit the true treachery at work. But, the Duke fails to see the real tragedy playing out in front of him. He insists on reading the scene in terms of its relationship to the original "model" given to him. Finally, exasperated, he concedes: "I have lost myself in this quite" (140). And, indeed he has "lost" himself: the poison that Bianca meant for the Cardinal is in the Duke's cup, and the hapless lawmaker dies moments later. This tragicomic scene from a

[31] Thomas Middleton, *Women Beware Women* Ed. Roma Gill (Hill and Wang: New York, 1968).

seventeenth-century play might seem quite distant from what we think about when we think about adaptation – even if the first writer who comes to mind when thinking about adaptations happens to be William Shakespeare. But within this scene of revenge, there also lies what I read as a prime example of a defensive adaptation.

As I suggested above, defensive adaptations manage distressing social problems and effect this management through the mediation that defends audiences against the narrative distress these texts contain. In this example from Middleton, Livia, wrathful over her brother's murder of her lover, Leantio, resurrects an old plot originally meant to celebrate the Duke's first marriage but which "would fit these times so well" (iv.ii.205). That is, the Duke's new legal bond aims to overwrite his and Bianca's former marriages, but it cannot make them disappear. Livia reasons that the cover of the old plot will make her revenge seem merely an accidental effect of performing the text: the deaths "will be thought/ Things merely accidental, all's by chance, / Not got of their own natures" (iv.ii.161-163). The Duke, watching his fellow Florentines fall, instead of processing the scene or attempting to intervene in the mayhem, turns to the "model." He proclaims that the problems are merely of fidelity to the "argument" of the summary plot versus the performed play. Insisting that something is "drawn false" the Duke fails to see the very real envy and wrath "of their own natures" affecting his citizens.

The revenge tragedy of the play lies partly in the way the new commercial structure of Middleton's England had led to dehumanization. As Roma Gill puts it: "All sense of the human and the individual is lost" (xvii). Yet there is also a sense in the play that the objects and status these characters aim for is just an excuse to let the real "malice" of human natures show (v.ii.205). When Bianca, seemingly penitent in the moments before her death, opines the "pride, greatness, beauty, youth, ambition" of the dead around her, she offers no solutions: "there's no help for't" (v.ii.216-17). The Duke's comic interjections demonstrate how defensive adaptation displaces the real social problem at hand so that audiences do not sense the pain of the problem. In this case, The Duke is watching his people literally tear each other apart – he is seeing his

kingdom crumble to pieces because avenging one's identity and reputation has become more important than any kind of human collectivity. In *Women Beware Women* the scene of adaptation reveals that in this dehumanized materialistic society, and perhaps in any society where vindictive wrath is the response to every problem, there's no help for it. The Duke's unfortunate end, however, showcases how adaptation finally cannot protect them from the problem's real effects. His willful blindness allows him to remain calm in the face of the mayhem. But as the supposed arbiter of justice in his community – the representative of the law – his inability to act on the problems in front of him is a symptom of the law's inability to address the *human* problems that directly affect its citizens.

In *Women Beware Women,* Livia's masque is not some translation of, for instance, a well-known poem into a dramatic performance (though the scene is very much adapted to current real-life circumstances). Nevertheless, since the "model" of the play becomes the "argument" against which the performance is finally held accountable, it becomes an adaptation in effect. The way texts are discussed in terms of adaptation are just as important as actual moments of adaptation in identifying a scene of adaptation. Middleton uses the play-within-a-play convention of his day for his "unashamedly theatrical conclusion."[32] Since the Duke cannot legally or rationally solve the malice and discontent of the populace, his comically irrelevant fidelity assessment—that turns the play into a defensive adaptation—protects his mind from the distressing rants of the dying players.

The defensive power of adaptations against the social problems I focus on in the chapters that follow is inextricably linked to the formal anarchy that emerges when a narrative appears in a new or radically different media form. The problems exposed *in* a scene of adaptation allow us to begin looking for defensive adaptations *of* texts. These scenes can reveal the *kinds* of adaptations that certain unanswerable social problems repeatedly inspire. Each of these chapters also

[32] Roma Gill, "Introduction," *Women Beware Women* by Thomas Middleton (Hill and Wang: New York, 1968) xiii-xxvi. xxv.

explores the types of adaptations that have become part of the problems defensive adaptations manage. As a flashpoint for these instances of messiness that scenes of adaptation excavate, I will first turn to the easily categorized adaptations of a text whose well-ordered structure has made the social anxieties it deals with on its very surface uniquely difficult to read: Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice***.**

The dehumanizing desecration of individual identity in *Women Beware Women*, the cold disregard for human life that the artist wrestles with under capitalism, is a model for the defensive adaptation I explore in Chapter II. In texts like *Theatre of Blood* (Hickox, 1973) and its theatrical adaptation (2005), and in Patricia Highsmith's *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (1955) and Anthony Minghella's 1999 film, such problems of identity generate defensive adaptations about art that breaks into life and ends in murder. These murderers never formally pay for their crimes, but the thorny problem of how to administer justice fairly is also managed through adaptations. In Chapter III, I interrogate the problem of moral and legal guilt. The scene of adaptation in Anthony Trollope's *The Warden* (1855) reveals the social resonance of George Colman's *The Iron Chest* (1796). Colman's much-maligned dramatization of William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794) suggests how defensive adaptations about the imprecise terms of social responsibility become adaptations whose relationship to the source of guilt is, literally, swallowed. The rarity with which guilt is fairly designated, however, still produces adaptations that manage social anxiety about that perpetual injustice.

When the problem is one of incompletion—in my example, lives that are unnaturally interrupted—the adaptations are always destined to failure, but only because the adaptations' own failures (of completion or popularity) are a condition of its effectiveness in managing the pain of loss such texts contain; emerging from the gaps in a failed life trajectory, they too must finally fail in order to keep the tragedy in check. In Chapter IV, I look at the scene of adaptation in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1855), where a mother's attempt to manage her distress over her son's interrupted life results in a failed adaptation whose consequences echo throughout

her family's life. Seeing this failed adaptation prepares us to consider the defensive adaptations of Ellen Wood's once wildly popular but now almost forgotten novel, *East Lynne* (1861). The disappearance of this text and its adaptations from popular culture, I suggest, may be less a result of changing taste than an effect of the texts' management of the interrupted lives they contain.

My last chapter looks at one of the most popular topics in art and adaptation—the love story. I look at three films containing love stories that become dangerously dark and obsessive: *The Red Shoes* (Powell 1948), *In a Lonely Place* (Ray 1950), and *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (Reisz 1981). Each of these texts, though, are all also about the production of an adaptation. These embedded adaptations result in texts that are pointedly and inescapably fragmented. The problem of writing a successful love story that also accounts for self-destructive bent that the search for "true" love entails.

Finally: it is important to keep in mind that although I discuss emotional and psychological processes of different characters, I am not interested in psychologizing the characters *per se* (though I am suggesting that a textual audience's sympathetic reaction is generated by the sense that these characters are actual humans). Rather than an analysis of individual character psychology, I see each character's affect as a *figure* for the textual processes of adaptation and the way those effects function and circulate in Western culture. I aim to show how these moments of character psychology can be used as a heuristic for understanding how adaptation can (and already does) serve as a mode of social defense. Scenes of adaptation contain empathetic traits but, at the same time, those emotional connections between character and audience are narrative effects of those characters' relationships to the texts they adapt (or attempt to adapt). These adaptations elicit affective reactions to their narrative through their formal qualities; those reactions displace deeper problems alluded to by an earlier text. Human emotions help these adaptations become defensive.

CHAPTER I

SPATIAL ANXIETY: ADAPTING THE SOCIAL SPACE OF *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE*

Secrets and Social Codes

There has been a history of intense critical and public reaction to adaptations of Jane Austen's light, bright, and sparkling novel, *Pride and Prejudice* (1813). *Pride and Prejudice* follows Elizabeth Bennet, the second of five sisters, as she contends with her poorly informed mother, her ineffectual father, her silly younger siblings, her family's downward social mobility, impending spinsterhood, the snobbery of her friends and neighbors, and her own prejudices. In the end, after an unconventional courtship built on caustic wit, she overcomes all of her obstacles to marry the wealthy gentleman, Mr. Darcy. After the rush of Jane Austen adaptations in the late 1990s, most notably the universally popular 1995 British Broadcasting Corporation's *Pride and Prejudice* mini-series, a sense of general stewardship over "proper" representation of Austen's work in film and other media again pervaded the popular and academic presses.[1] The most polarized reactions to *Pride and Prejudice* adaptations, however, have been directed at the two feature-length versions of the novel. The 2005 Joe Wright-directed *Pride & Prejudice* and the 1940 MGM Greer Garson/Laurence Olivier vehicle hold notoriously unstable places in the Austen film canon. I suggest that the fervent cries of "foul" against fidelity that have been uttered by generations of Janeites have more to do with the way feature-length adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice* radically restructure the character space of the novel than with whether or not these films are "good" adaptations of Austen's novel. That is, adaptations of a novel, especially one

[1] For extended discussions of the relationship between Austen and the Janeites (as devoted Austen fans are called) see: Deirdre Lynch, "Introduction: Sharing with our Neighbors," *Janeites: Austen's Disciples and Devotees* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000) 3-24. 3.

that is about the way people of character achieve their space in the world, formally challenge the story's notion of "good" character by the restructuring (in a new medium) minor characters' space against the protagonist's character space.

In this chapter, I look at Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* in light of three television serials (1967, 1979, and 1995 BBC) and the two feature-length film versions of the novel. I suggest that the sympathetic representation of social anxiety and impropriety common to both of the feature-length adaptations is the locus for highly charged reactions to those films. Alex Woloch argues in his influential theory of the realist novel, *The One Vs. The Many* (2003) that minor characters in novels are always potentially full people who are wrathfully kept at the margins of the space of the novel in favor of developing the protagonists.[2] For Woloch, *Pride and Prejudice* is a narrative *about* how the emerging "singular depth" of Elizabeth Bennet pushes the other less socially and intellectually adequate characters to the margins. As Elizabeth Bennet becomes the protagonist of Austen's novel (and a model for what a protagonist should be) the other characters shift and fade into the background. The "entire being" of Elizabeth's middle sister, Mary, for example, is "often reduced to a single sentence" (Woloch 71). Mary Bennet, caught in the middle of five sisters, is always placed, "in a comparative context, as though she would be of no interest by herself" (71). In the novel as a whole, much of the satire is mercilessly directed at characters who are socially anxious or less successful in their social performances than Elizabeth. As Woloch's argument makes plain, that mercilessness is approved of in the space of the novel. In other words, the novel encourages a sense of personal superiority on the part of the reader, who is invested in Elizabeth as the protagonist. The novel is thus interested in developing a "proper" reader of Elizabeth's "propriety" (and regulated impropriety) over and against the vulgar reader or the vulgarity of its minor characters. But if, as Woloch argues, the construction of novel space imbues character space with emotional valences, then I suggest that the adaptation of a narrative

[2] Alex Woloch, *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003).

(especially this narrative) from one medium to another means that the sympathies of the novel will, inescapably, be restructured as well.

While serial television adaptations of the novel manage to maintain Elizabeth's character space, and thus her narrative and social superiority, I take the implications of Woloch's literary argument to suggest that the compressed running times of the feature-length films afford socially inept minor characters more time and space in the narrative relative to Elizabeth's. In effect, by nurturing a sense of "faithfulness" to Austen's narrative, the minor characters wrestle more space in the filmic narrative than they can in the space of the novel. This reorganization of narrative space in the *Pride and Prejudice* films threatens Elizabeth's balance as protagonist. Creating more relative character space for minor characters, as we will see, leads to increasingly sympathetic portrayals of those characters while simultaneously decreasing Elizabeth's hold on the narrative. In the 1940 MGM adaptation, for instance, Elizabeth may be in most scenes, but she is never glimpsed on her own and many of the characters literally struggle to maintain their space in any given shot.[3]

Understanding these films as empathetic reorganizations of character space may force us to consider that reading Austen's novel as it teaches us to may have unsavory implications for how people allow the social order to function. Critics and readers of Austen have long agreed that dear Miss Jane's novels are biting social commentaries, but what have been the consequences of accepting that certain people are not worth reevaluating *as people* because they are not pleasant, amusing, or attractive *to you*? These adaptations allow audiences to maintain Austen's narrative-approved superciliousness while simultaneously exposing blinded social interaction as an impediment to overcoming pride and prejudice.

Social Space, Character Space, and Medium Space in ___shire

[3] *Pride and Prejudice.* Dir. Robert Z. Leonard. Writ. Aldous Huxley and Jane Murtin. Perf. Laurence Olivier, Greer Garson, Edna Mae Oliver, Mary Boland, Maureen O'Sullivan, and Edmund Gwynn. 1940. VHS. MGM,1997.

Shifting medium in this particular *kind* of narrative means that carefully defined character space is subverted. That medium destabilization is what makes each version of *Pride and Prejudice* an adaptation, but the destabilization is also what brings the social anxiety closer to the surface, making it more available for questioning. Alex Woloch's argument draws together the ongoing critical conversation about the social performances in *Pride and Prejudice* with formal criticism about the novel's structure. Narrative critics have broadly argued that the ways of reading, of texts and of life, that Austen explores literally shape the space of her novel. "Much of the structure of the narrative," Felicia Bonaparte summarizes, "including its characters and action, is as consciously calculated to explore the means of knowing as to offer the realistic social and psychological portraits we have mostly thought it aimed for."[4] The arguments hinge on the famed chapter when Elizabeth reads Mr. Darcy's explanatory letter. "Effectively," Darryl Jones concludes, Austen hands "control of her narrative over to Darcy."[5] This scene flips Elizabeth's (often incomplete) ways of knowing – the same ways of knowing that readers have been trained to trust from the start of the novel. Elizabeth declares: "I have courted prepossession and ignorance, and driven reason away […]. Till this moment, I never knew myself."[6] Rather than leaving Elizabeth's earlier judgment in question, then, Austen allows Elizabeth herself to question specific aspects of that judgment. Austen thus gently guides the course of her readers' ways of knowing to their proper final destination. By these arguments, we can see how form and character are uniquely intertwined in Austen's work. However, from these narrative perspectives, the characters are just examples of *character types* functioning within Austen's epistemological project.

Woloch's argument has made an impression on theories of the Novel partly because of his premise that all of the characters in novels are individuals; they are potential human beings

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[4] Felicia Bonaparte, "Conjecturing Possibilities: Reading and Misreading Texts in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*," *Studies in the Novel* 37.2 (Summer 2005): 141-162. 144.
[5] Darryl Jones, *Critical Issues: Jane Austen* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) 112.
[6] Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2003) 202.

who are *put though* the process of rounding or flattening. The identity of a protagonist, Woloch argues, depends on the marginalization of the people around them, both in terms of the novel's space and in terms of characterization. Some critics have argued with Emily Auerbach that "Jane Austen uses minor characters as exaggerated versions of her protagonists' flaws, as if allowing them to view themselves in a distorted amusement park mirror."[7] I, along with Woloch, would argue that while this perspective is valid, it devalues the coherent individualism of all the potential people that compose the character system in a novel's space. That is, the novel does not construct flat characters as allegories for Elizabeth; Elizabeth and Austen's narrator *flatten* them.

Rather perpetuate that violent flattening we might say: in the space of Austen's novels, the protagonist can recognize aspects of herself in the people around her who she finds most frustrating, and it is through that awareness that she gains prominence among the characters. To identify the minor characters as versions of Elizabeth is to accept the marginalization imposed on those characters in a reading of *Pride and Prejudice*. To dismiss people who exhibit "follies and nonsense, whims and inconsistencies" is to reinscribe critically the marginalization that they experience in the space of the novel (Austen 57). The danger in that scenario is that readers may reproduce, both in our ways of reading and in our real life interpersonal relationships, the prejudice that Darcy early identifies in Elizabeth; by accepting the novel's social judgments we accept that lack of social grace or complete self-possession makes a person *deserving* of marginalization. It may be easy to avoid Darcy's "propensity to hate everybody" (57). Elizabeth's tendency "willfully to misunderstand them" is trickier to negotiate (57). "We're not electing the homecoming queen here," impatiently lectures Prudie, at one of her most insufferable and most vulnerable moments in *The Jane Austen Book Club* (Swicord 2007).[8] Defending the oft-maligned Fanny Price from the dislike of her fellow book club members, she opines: "Yes.

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[7] Emily Auerbach, *Searching for Jane Austen,* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004) 137.

[8] *The Jane Austen Book Club.* Dir. Robin Swicord. Adap. Robin Swicord from the novel by Karen Joy Fowler. Perf. Emily Blunt, Maria Bello, Hugh Dancy, and Kathy Baker. 2006. DVD. Mockingbird Pictures, 2007.

We all know, if this were high school, yes, Elizabeth Bennet would be most popular and Fanny would be least." Many critics have noted the sympathetic potential in Austen's less popular characters, especially Charlotte and Mrs. Bennett, but have not necessarily considered it in terms of space and room for sympathy.

Pride and Prejudice, far from being entirely light, is steeped in the social judgments of both its creator and its heroine. Rachael M. Brownstein has argued that Jane Austen was guilty of "drawing snobs and encouraging them in snobbishness."[9] Johanna M. Smith finds the new Darcy family that emerges in the novel's happy ending to be "smug and smothering."[10] Critics such as Ivor Morris have further elucidated how "there is evident in Elizabeth, as in Jane Austen herself, a vehemence of liking and dislike as to both persons and opinions."[11] For Morris, Elizabeth's verbal sparring with the silly secondary characters, especially Mr. Collins and Lady Catherine de Bourgh, allow her to become "more herself" (3). What Morris's argument makes clear is that for Elizabeth to become the character she does, she *needs* interaction with the range of human characters that she encounters in her community and in the character system of *Pride and Prejudice*. By extension, Morris' argument allows recognition that characters, and people, who maneuver through their social spaces without the eloquence or graces that distinguish their more *likable* counterparts are nonetheless integral members of human existence.

The way that characters are socially condemned (by the narrator at least) for what they do not, cannot, or care not to know functions in much the same way that feature-length adaptations are criticized for failing to perform Austen correctly. Defensive adaptation, as we will see in the following analysis of *Pride and Prejudice,* is an often subconscious but nonetheless strategic

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[9] Rachael M. Brownstein, "Irony and Authority," in *New Casebooks: "Sense and Sensibility" and "Pride and Prejudice,"* Ed. by Robert Clark (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994): 180-192. 182.
[10] Johanna M. Smith, "The Oppositional Reader and *Pride and Prejudice*," in *A Companion to Jane Austen Studies,* Eds. Laura Coon Lambdin and Robert Thomas Lambdin (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000) 27-40. 38
[11] Ivor Morris, *Jane Austen and the Interplay of Character,* Reprint Ed. (New Brunswick, NJ: The Athlone Press, 1999) 7.

mode of self-preservation. What makes adaptations threatening, especially those of canonical texts where the terms of majorness or minorness seem well-established, may be that they "secretly" undermine the accepted terms of character space. Adaptations that renegotiate character spaces may always be threatening because they emphasize the way that identity is mutable, that establishing a social presence does not make that identity fundamentally stable. No matter how well one "knows" *Pride and Prejudice* there is always the chance that a new version will emerge to challenge that constructed textual identity. The potential wrath of the protagonist that Woloch identifies, rather than squeezing into a narrative that is already bursting with characters and plot, emerges in audience and critical reactions to the texts that use fidelity to Austen's novel as justification for that wrath. As Dierdre Lynch has observed: "Indeed, a customary method of establishing one's credentials as a reader of Austen had been to regret that others simply will insist on liking her in inappropriate ways" (7). Intense support for or rejection of these films may have less to do with faithfulness to Austen's plot or their independent status as works of art, than with her audiences' own fear, anxiety, and pride about their places in the social world.

At the same time, the way adaptations play with character space may also be what makes them attractive – they present possibilities for controlling a seemingly uncontrollable iterative space. In *Pride and Prejudice*, for instance, while readers may recognize the lingering prejudice in Elizabeth and see how her perception matures, they must be in sympathy with her throughout the narrative. Readers cannot be allowed to empathize with the fools around her or they risk failing to reach what Peter Brooks would call the "right" ending of the novel.[12] Elizabeth's ultimate social and personal triumph gives readers a warrant to continue in certain patterns of willful misunderstanding. The feature film adaptations, however, sympathetically

[12] Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative,* Reprint ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1992).

reorganize the space of the novel so that Lizzy's ultimate triumph does not necessarily come at the expense of those whose endings are less triumphant.

As a model for reading the world, *Pride and Prejudice* both sanctions and encourages a lack of sympathy for people who do not "deserve" it – who are silly, shallow, pedantic, or naïve. Being Elizabeth simply means not having to say you're sorry.[13] Critics are unusually interested in the terms of truth set out in *Pride and Prejudice*. The twinned nouns of the title do not entirely count for this continued focus on this issue – especially since critics, no matter how they get there, come to the conclusion that truth always resides as a point between two extremes of belief, temper, or circumstance.[14] But the reader can only come to these points of truth, critics seem to agree, by sympathizing with Elizabeth in her journey. So what becomes of those people who were pushed to the margins of the narrative? Or of those who cannot make the distinctions between likable and unlikable rejections of propriety that distinguish our heroine? What of the Mrs. Bennets who thankfully die before their husbands' estates are passed to silly cousins (Austen 159)? Or of the sickly, silent, "insignificant," Anne de Bourghs who are crushed under the weight of their mothers' "dignified impertinence" (162)?

The consequences of the "secret" code of propriety are perhaps best encapsulated in the scene where Bingley and Darcy return to Longbourn after a long absence. Mrs. Bennet is pleased to see Mr. Bingley, whom she still hopes to see married to Jane, but resents Mr. Darcy's past superciliousness: "[Mr. Bingley] was received by Mrs. Bennet with a degree of civility, which made her two daughters ashamed, especially when contrasted with the cold and ceremonious politeness of her curtsey and address to his friend" (Austen 317). In the 1995 BBC version, Mrs.

[13] She does apologize to Darcy and her beloved sister, Jane for her short-sightedness, but only insofar as admitting her errors applies to her own future happiness. Her reconsideration of Darcy and the adventurer George Wickham does not spark a reevaluation of others around her.
[14] See Emily Auerbach and Felicia Bonaparte

Bennet's clipped tones when she utters the cold greeting, "And Mr. Darcy. You are welcome too," capture the lack of courtesy that distresses her daughters.[15]

But what's important about this scene is that a significant portion of Lizzy's discomfort arises from circumstances of which Mrs. Bennet knows nothing. Alone in knowing that Mr. Darcy has been responsible for securing and funding Lydia's marriage, "Elizabeth particularly […] was hurt and distressed to a most painful degree by a distinction so ill applied" (317). Mrs. Bennet is not spared because of her lack of knowledge or her inappropriately applied pride. Indeed, her behavior is only seen to confirm the poor opinion the reader already had of her. But Lizzy and Jane's silence only perpetuates Mrs. Bennet's socially inept behavior. They condemn her for what she had no way of knowing and for what she clearly cannot gather on her own. Whatever the impropriety of correcting one's mother in public, Lizzy and Jane expose her to ridicule just as surely as their father's failure in his husbandly duty does the same. The fact that Mrs. Bennet possesses a "weak understanding and an illiberal mind," is taken as an excuse for the reader to join in that ridicule (228). We too know the secrets of social interaction—secrets that Mrs. Bennet has been unable to grasp because no one will let her in. In this scene, the secret is a literal one, but it stands in for unspoken secrets of social propriety and success that put Lizzy, Jane, Bingley, and eventually Darcy at the top of the social ladder.

"If you didn't lollop about there'd be room for us all!"[16]

We might start by looking at the spaces of the *Pride and Prejudice* adaptations with an empirical eye. The running time of the unabridged audiobook of the novel suggests that if we were to read the novel aloud, as certainly would have been done during its first edition run, it

[15] *Pride and Prejudice*. Dir. Simon Langton. Writ. Andrew Davies. Perf. Colin Firth, Jennifer Ehle, Allison Steadman, Susannah Harker, and Crispin Bonham-Carter. 1995. VHS. BBC/A&E, 1996.
[16] So cries Lydia in the 1995 BBC adaptation.

would take approximately 11 hours and 29 minutes.[17] The actual number signifies little unless we consider it as the approximate experiential time of *Pride and Prejudice.* By comparison, the longest of the filmed adaptations, the 1995 BBC television serial, is 5 hours long and its 1979 sister is just over 4 ½ hours long.[18] Proportionally, then, the spaces of these adaptations fit in at just under 1/2 and just over 1/3 of the experiential time of the novel, whereas the feature-length 1940 and 2005 versions, as well as the theatrical adaptations, are designed for audiences to experience in approximately 1/6 of the time and in far less space than in the often interrupted practice of reading or the meticulously spaced-out viewing of a television serial across several evenings. It is commonly noted that the circumstances of a plot must be "compressed" in the space of any dramatization. But let us keep in mind that minor characters like Mary Bennet function in the novel in terms of how they are actively pushed to the sides of the narrative space. Alternatively, when she is filmed, Mary is often seen to pop up or push in to her sisters' conversations. When we consider that in a two-hour version of *Pride and Prejudice*, such minor characters must actually *push in* to the narrative space, this reorganization of space becomes a social affront to Elizabeth, whom the narrator so carefully moves to the center in the space of the novel.

Maintaining Elizabeth as the center of the narrative, however, is the structural project of the BBC television adaptations. There are many factors that may contribute to that project, not the least of which is the BBC commitment to creating a certain kind of literary education through faithful plot adaptation, which was as dependent on justifying the canonical standing of the novel

[17] *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen. Narrated by Flo Gibson. Audio Book Contractors Inc., 1986 <www.audible.com.>

[18] There have been more filmed adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice* than of any other Austen novel. The ones that I discuss are the only ones that are available for viewing either to the public or to researchers; according to archivists at the British Film Institute, other versions that were broadcast live on television were either not recorded or were destroyed in the great BBC archive purge of the 80s. For more information as well as production stills from the earlier television adaptations see Sue Parrill's book on the subject.

as it was on interpreting the novel on screen.[19] The 1995 BBC production has generally been embraced as "the definitive cinematic treatment of *Pride and Prejudice*"[20] and the opening scene of the film does nothing so well as establishing Elizabeth as the standard of judgment in its world. The first images and lines of dialog belong to Bingley and Darcy as the two men ride in a field to judge the prospect of letting Netherfield Park. The scene is one of many expanded scenes that include Darcy and is part of screenwriter Andrew Davies's efforts to make Darcy an object of desire.[21] The shot begins on the pounding horses hooves, and when we see the two gentlemen they are primarily filmed from behind, against the expansive park and in profile, emphasizing their position as strong horsemen. Yet these side and partial views of the men become striking only when a low-angle close-up of Elizabeth follows them. The intimate shot of Elizabeth establishes her as someone open and accessible where our earlier acquaintances were difficult to catch. She looks down on the two men from a hill, surveying them as they have surveyed the house. Her expression is calm, confident, and knowing – she controls the image. We only have that one glimpse of the men's characters, and the camera instead follows Elizabeth. In effect, she wrests control of the narrative from the men. She takes the camera with her to Longbourn and never quite lets go.

This tactic of granting more narrative control to Elizabeth's image is most noticeable in the 1995 adaptation; the 1979 version visually constructs Elizabeth's protagonist status by emphasizing the distance between her and the other characters. The most remarkable series of shots in the earlier series marks the way Elizabeth's hold over the narrative space is constantly

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[19] According to the BBC's mission statement as currently posted on its website, the goal of the corporation is: "To enrich people's lives with programmes and services that inform, educate and entertain" (www.bbc.co.uk). Robert Giddings and Keith Selby make this point about the cultural role of BBC adaptations: "Being processed by this genre is one of the stages by means of which novels become classic novels." In "Introduction," *The Classic Serial on Television and Radio* (London: Palgrave, 2001) viii-xi. x.

[20] Sue Parrill, "*Pride and Prejudice* on A & E: Visions and revisions," *Literature/Film Quarterly* (Salisbury: 1999): 27.2, 142-49. 149.

[21] See Lisa Hopkins, "Mr. Darcy's Body: Privileging the Female Gaze," *Jane Austen and Hollywood* Ed. Linda Troost and Sayre Greenfield (Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1998) 111-21. Cheryl L. Nixon, "Balancing the Courtship Hero: Masculine Emotional Display in Film Adaptations of Austen's Novels," *Jane Austen and Hollywood*, Eds. Linda Troost and Sayre Greenfield (Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1998) 22-43.

reasserted. Meeting Elizabeth in the woods around Rosings, Darcy hands her the letter that will cause Elizabeth to question her previous understanding of his character. The camera tracks back to an aerial shot as Lizzy sits down to read her letter as Darcy walks further away from her. Their two tiny figures threaten to become indistinguishable from the landscape itself. This moment in the narrative is the turning point when Lizzy realizes (here in the voiceover that this adaptation favors): "Til this moment, I never knew myself." The increasing visual field that precedes her interior exclamation implies Lizzy's growing awareness of the world and her place in it, just before the scene cuts back to a low-angle medium close-up of Lizzy reading. At the same time as this marks a narrative turning point the plot, the shot reassuringly entrenches Lizzy at the center of the narrative space. Elizabeth is part of the widening world and of the sympathy shift to Mr. Darcy, but not subject to them. The image of Mr. Darcy walking away from her, moreover, serves as a model for the other characters, who may touch Elizabeth's story of growth, but always step away.[22]

The narrative pressure of the shorter running time and thus narrative space of this 1979 version emerges in the multiple tracks the film takes to maintain Elizabeth's character space. But if the 4 ½ hour space afforded to this adaptation necessitates the multi-track expressions of Elizabeth's spatial control, then a 2 ½ hour adaptation might need more violent means of separating out Elizabeth's space. The 1967 television adaptation—the closest in total time to the feature length films—is particularly interesting in how it allows Elizabeth to maintain her protagonist strength.[23] Originally broadcast in six half-hour episodes, the series is far more compartmentalized than its longer television sisters. That extreme compartmentalization expands

[22] But even if the characters in the space of the series do no always entirely respect Elizabeth's physical space, Elizabeth takes control verbally. At the final family dinner, when Elizabeth gathers the courage to ask Mr. Darcy about Georgiana, her voice literally silences the voices of the rest of the party, who deferentially fall to whispers as Darcy and Elizabeth have their short exchange. The way Elizabeth's voice overthrows the dinner conversation has been building throughout the series in Elizabeth's voiceovers. In this, Elizabeth is free to narrate her own perspective to her audience as no other character can. This Lizzy holds power in both the visual and aural diegesis and in the soundtrack.

[23] *Pride and Prejudice*. Dir. Joan Craft. Adapt. Nemone Lethbridge. Perf. Celia Bannerman and Michael Gough. BBC. 1967. British Film Institute Archives. VHS.

the experiential time of the text even as it diminishes the narrative space. Rather than emphasizing Elizabeth's hold on the narrative space, this 1967 version leaves her in primary control of that space by encoding the process of marginalization through isolating the minor characters in their respective introductions. Mrs. Bennet, Lady Lucas, Charlotte, The Bingleys, and Mr. Collins/Lady Catherine are all introduced outside of scenes in Elizabeth's perspective. When these other characters are introduced, it is in scenes that are either invented for the series or that we hear from the narrator in the novel (or third-hand from other characters).[24] These introduction vignettes give the characters spaces all their own, meaning that if their *own* pride and prejudices are not remedied at least they pose little threat to *Elizabeth's* development. Even Wickham, who is first introduced *to* Elizabeth gets an extended glamour shot that is more common to Hollywood film and otherwise almost entirely absent from this program. The glamour shot identifies its subject as an object of desire. Since Wickham is Elizabeth's first romantic interest, that aspect of the shot is important. But the lingering shot also ensures that Wickham is kept visibly separate from Elizabeth's space.

Similarly, the first episode, in which all of the minor characters have their introduction vignettes, is titled "Neighbors." That Mrs. Bennet gets an introduction that isolates her space in the same way as the people who are the Bennets' neighbors, suggests that the "Neighbors" of the title are not neighbors to Longbourn, but neighbors to *Elizabeth*. These others, who may or may not live with Elizabeth, are still just neighbors to the real owner of *Pride and Prejudice.* Lizzy further maintains her hold on the narrative by being the one character whose tale is allowed to thread through all of the episodes; the other characters' subplots are largely confined to one or two episodes, a move which emphasizes their narrative confinement. And in the final episode, "Destiny," Elizabeth and Darcy together stand on the grounds of Pemberley, a married couple ready to take on the centrality that was always already theirs: "We are arrived," Darcy intones,

[24] If one happens to be watching these scenes from a "knowing" audience perspective, they even seem to increase the novelistic space rather than to encroach on Lizzy's territory.

"Welcome home, Mrs. Darcy." While there was much furor over the final lines of the American release of the 2005 adaptation, which ends with nearly the same sentiment (we see Darcy kissing Elizabeth on the steps of Pemberley and murmuring, "Mrs. Darcy" to express his pleasure) this ending does not function by emphasizing the interpersonal relationship between the newlyweds. The final scene exists solely to acknowledge Elizabeth's power. Mr. Darcy says "We" are arrived and extends a welcome, but it is Elizabeth who is finally addressed with the title that makes official the social superiority we knew was hers all along.

The five to six parts of these television series, regardless of individual length, are an effect of their mini-series presentation. They are broken down for the convenience of television viewing, but that requirement should not diminish the fact that television mini-series exist in a more expanded space than feature-length films. Their mode of presentation, which recalls the chapters and three-volume structure of novels, disciplines the narrative both spatially and experientially. From a viewer perspective, consequently, characters have more space in which to maneuver. Even though their actors' bodies take up space that they might not have in the novel – or at least space that they might have taken up differently in readerly imagination – they are not collectively pressed too close together. In contrast, the experience of feature film viewing is expected to be continuous. Although the 1967 television version is not substantially longer than the 2005 film, the latter sees a spatial clash between scenes that might otherwise separate, define, and allow judgment of the differences between the major and minor characters. In the same way, the 1940 version, based on the 1935 play by Helen Jerome, collapses certain spatial expectations; there is not even an interval for one to collect proper value judgments.[25] Consequently, all of the characters are granted significant space in the narrative and Lizzy and Darcy's romance plot becomes the generic organizer to everyone else's space. As a result of the spatial collapse, anarchy develops in the physical and social space of the feature films.

[25] Helen Jerome, *Pride and Prejudice* (Samuel French, London: 1936).

The minor characters in the feature films are notably discontented with the space that the narrative wants to grant them. Robert Z. Leonard's film – scripted by Aldous Huxley and Jane Murtin – remains in the realm of frothy comedy; Susan Parrill identifies it as a screwball comedy (mismatched lovers, fast talking and clever dialogue) common to that era in Hollywood.[26] Generically, the turn from satire to light comedy accounts for the film's softened character portrayals of all of Austen's biggest fools. And yet the characters' grasp on space and sympathy is not as passive as such a genre-based observation suggests. As Christine Geraghty puts it: "the film overflows with women."[27] A visual sense of characters' bodies *pushing in* develops in Leonards's *mise-en-scene*, or everything that viewers can see in a frame. As is frequently observed, the costumes in this film would place the narrative in Victorian England rather than the earlier Regency period during which Austen wrote; the large hats, puffed sleeves, and hoop skirts on the women were meant to recall the Antebellum costumes from *Gone with the Wind*, a smash success of the previous year.[28] While the re-dating of the costumes is tied to production concerns, the visual effect is that the characters – both female *and* male – often seem to be pushing themselves into frames. In the opening scene, which takes place in a fabric shop, the Bennet women, Charlotte and Lady Lucas, and Mrs. Philips all must pile into the frame to be seen, with the fabric of their dresses rustling for space. The mass of their dresses is in contest with the available space of the frame. The shop, as well as the shot, seems barely adequate to contain them – a fact of which they all seem uncomfortably aware.

Even Mr. Darcy suffers from the lack of space. At the first assembly ball, he repeatedly bows to excuse himself from nearly bumping into those around him – he just barely avoids

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[26] Sue Parrill, *Jane Austen on Film and Television: A Critical Study of the Adaptations* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2002) 49. The screwball comedy, perhaps best represented by films like *His Girl Friday* (Hawks 1940) wherein the verbal (and sometimes physical) battles between the potential lovers are all foreplay to their eventual union.

[27] Christine Geraghty, *Now a Major Motion Picture: Film Adaptations of Literature and Drama* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2008) 35.

[28] Linda Brosh, *Screening Novel Women: From British Domestic Fiction to Film* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) 22. Brosh argues that the extravagant female costumes emphasize the women's role as consumers of both products and men.

collisions with Sir William Lucas, with Elizabeth and Charlotte, and with Jane and Bingley. He actually crashes into Elizabeth and Wickham while waltzing with Miss Bingley. Darcy's difficulty navigating the ball suggests that his personal sense of space is at odds with the literal space in which he finds himself. Elegant and reserved Jane of the 2005 adaptation is similarly jolted out of her personal space; becoming flustered after learning that Mr. Bingley will soon return to the neighborhood, she collides with a nameless gentleman on the streets of Meryton.[29] A narrative addition in the MGM version has the Bennets planning a house move to escape the shame of Lydia's elopement. This story point increases the characters' difficulties in negotiating personal space by placing more physical obstacles in their way. In the final section of the film, the Bennet house is cluttered with items the family will carry with them to the new home. Simultaneously, Longbourn is invaded by nearly all of the minor characters in the film: Mr. Darcy, Mr. Bingley, Mr. Collins, Wickham, and Lady Catherine all descend on the Bennet home to get in their last words. The objects that make up the Bennets' lives lay strewn about the parlor to provide comic obstacles for Mr. Collins and Lady Catherine to contend with. And yet, as these two comic characters trip over and sit on the Bennets' most prized possessions, we can feel how the Bennets (Elizabeth included) are all being pushed out of their physical and social space as the narrative draws all too quickly to a close.

While all of the longer versions, including the novel, end with Lizzy and Darcy's marriage and contemplations of their future life, this feature-length version undermines the couple's centrality. The final scene of the MGM film finds Mary performing one of her songs with a gentleman caller. The scene cuts into a medium shot of Mary alone; for the first time she hits the high note of the song. She smiles, having gained this point, and looks out of the frame towards her suitor. The moment gives Mary control of both her performance and the visual field, leaving her and her sister Kitty (who is keeping company with an officer) with the centrality that

[29] *Pride & Prejudice*. Dir. Joe Wright. Perf. Keira Knightley, Matthew Macfadyen, Brenda Blethyn, Donald Sutherland, Simon Woods, Rosamond Pike, and Judi Dench. 2005. DVD. Focus Features, 2006.

Elizabeth, who is not seen or heard from again, at the margins of what we have been taught to understand is her narrative. That disruption of expectations, which functions at both the level of filmic construction and of star discourse (we expect to be left with our stars, Greer Garson and Laurence Olivier), resists marginalizing these two sisters as they have been marginalized throughout the narrative. The ending leaves the narrative space open (Will they marry their two gentlemen?) rather than closing it off with the union of Elizabeth and Darcy. Darcy and Elizabeth may have had the center of *this part* of the narrative, but Mary and Kitty will carve out space for their own futures.[30]

"Don't you judge me, Lizzy! Don't you dare judge me!"[31]

There is, throughout the feature-length versions, a sense of the minor characters colluding against Lizzy's social superiority. Character awareness that Lizzy is unforgiving in her judgments does not simply verbalize what is implied in the novel and the longer films. Rather, the verbalizations are marked as the speaker's own resentment for his/her constricted social space. While all of the adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice* display *some* added sympathy for *some* characters, it is telling that both of the feature length versions are sympathetic to *all* of the characters except those whose foolishness (the threat of being laughed out of existence) is balanced by their social status (Lady Catherine in the 2005 version) or whose actions are vicious (Miss Bingley, George Wickham). Lydia, whose actions most threaten Elizabeth's future, fittingly becomes the voice of this discontent. When 1940 Lydia comes home to Longbourn, she laughingly draws Mr. Collins into their circle. As the family troops into the kitchen to let the servants see Lydia's ring, Lydia runs back to Mr. Collins (who has not moved), grabs his hand, and declares: "You too, Mr. Collins; we old married people must stick together!" The youngest Bennet is still heedless of the social borders she transgressed by eloping with Wickham (she can't

[30] Similarly, the UK version of the 2005 film ends when Elizabeth gains permission from her father to marry Darcy. Therefore, when the film ends, Darcy and Elizabeth are caught in separate rooms.

imagine why her father is out of humor). But her attitude speaks to a desire for incorporation into a wider community of "old married people." Lydia's growing space as a voice of conscious disruption to a social order dictated by Elizabeth becomes clear in the 2005 adaptation. Speaking of Mr. Darcy's participation in her wedding, Lydia witheringly tells her older sister, "Mr. Darcy is not half so high and mighty as you sometimes." And even the 1967 television series Lydia pushes into Elizabeth's "Destiny": "I cannot imagine why," she laughs, "you always speak so ill of him." While Lydia may not understand Darcy or even herself, she understands her sister very well.

The dominant character space that Elizabeth maintains in the novel is predicated not only on Austen's organization of her character system, but also on the very clear indications that *Pride and Prejudice* is "a book filled with fools" (Auerbach 142). So although the community of people that surrounds Elizabeth is crucial to her development, it has been viewed as crucial only insofar as Lizzy's rejection of certain conventions and good regulation of others can reveal the "conformity and blindness of communities" (130). For William Deresiewicz, Elizabeth outgrows her community of Meryton and develops an imagined community with Darcy, Georgiana, and the Gardiners at its center.[32] Elizabeth grows out her own past foolishness into a model human being. And yet Lizzy and her behavior, impertinent as they both may be, are always left in the good graces of the reader. Estimated by her author to be "as delightful a creature as ever appeared in print," Elizabeth is the one character whom readers are prepossessed to like.[33] The narrator expresses her in the best possible terms; "there was a mixture of sweetness and archness in her manner which made it difficult for her to affront anybody" (Austen 51). Established as a paragon, not of virtue nor beauty nor even intelligence (though she possesses all of these qualities) but of sociability, Elizabeth is simply just *more likable* than anyone else in the

[32] William Deresiewicz, "Community and Cognition in *Pride and Prejudice*," *ELH* (64:2) (1997): 503-35. 530.
[33] *Jane Austen's Letters*, 3rd edition, collected and edited by Deirdre Le Faye (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 1995) 201.

narrative. Unlike Jane, she is not a perfect sweetheart, and her very imperfections make her endearing. In this novelistic world, to be likable is fully dependent on being able to express oneself well – it is the "sweetness and archness *in her manner*" that sets Lizzy apart. Discussing narrative authority in Austen, Tara Goshal Wallace argues that silence has the most power in *Pride and Prejudice* while talk is often misleading noise:[34] "Talk in this text belongs, after all, to Mrs. Bennet, Lydia, Collins and Lady Catherine de Bourgh" (Wallace 51). I would suggest that these characters try to make space for themselves – but their fevered attempts to wrangle space are overshadowed by Austen's narrator, who obviously "talks" more than any of the fools.

The problem of weak expression subjugates characters in the space of the novel. Mrs. Bennet occasionally makes valid points but rarely makes them eloquently or even coherently. When Lydia runs off with Wickham, the narrator indicates that Mrs. Bennet spends her time "Blaming every body but the person to whose ill judging indulgence the errors of her daughter must be principally owing" (273). As "the person" in question, Mrs. Bennet may not blame herself, but she is clearly aware on some level that Lydia could not be trusted on her own. Lydia, she laments, "had nobody to take care of her" (273). She was "not the kind of girl to do such a thing," but solely, "if she had been well looked after" (273). Although Mrs. Bennet's moment of self-awareness is buried in complaints about not getting to Brighton herself, the creeping self-awareness that Mrs. Bennet occasionally demonstrates might be all the more poignant for no one in the family being able to respond to her productively. The narrator's control of *Pride and Prejudice* makes this point formal as well; the narrator's fine capability for expression raises her to the top of the social ladder precisely because the weak linguistic skills of her fools is what keeps them foolish. Elizabeth is elevated not only in her wit and eloquence but also through her free indirect connection with the narrator. In other words, she has the narrator's sympathy in a way that no other character does. And, indeed, only when Elizabeth sees accounts of others in

[34] Tara Ghoshal Wallace, *Jane Austen and Narrative Authority* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995).

print (Darcy's letter) can she begin to reevaluate their social graces. Other characters are not that lucky.

Mary, for instance, makes repeated overtures for sympathy but is overlooked. Alex Woloch argues that Mary's isolation from the family can be seen in the "unsparing" narrator's tendency to confine her to her own single-sentence paragraphs (72). Yet one of Mary's most inappropriately sanctimonious moments contains a glimmer of sympathy from the narrator. After Lydia's elopement with Wickham, the sisters and their relatives converge on Longbourn to commiserate. Sitting at dinner with the family, Mary remarks: "This is a most unfortunate affair; and will probably be much talked of. But we must stem the tide of malice, and pour into the wounded bosoms of each other, the balm of sisterly consolation" (274). Elizabeth, having "no inclination of replying," doesn't (274). As Woloch also notes, "Mary never has a conversation with anyone" (73). In this moment, we see the way the whole Bennet clan *pushes* Mary into the platitudes they so hate. Only in "perceiving" Elizabeth's indifference does Mary launch into conduct-book quotes (for as seemingly cold as the first statement seemed to be, the import of it was that Mary is afraid of malice and was looking for consolation).[35] Mary's clear perception of her sisters' feelings leads her to drone:

> Unhappy as the event must be for Lydia, we may draw from it this useful lesson; that loss of virtue in a female is irretrievable—that one false step involves her in endless ruin—that her reputation is no less brittle than it is beautiful,—and that she cannot be too much guarded in her behaviour towards the undeserving of the other sex. (275)

Perceiving her own increasing minorness in their lives, Mary's fear and anxiety over her seemingly insurmountable position flattens her statements from personal pain to generalities. The

[35] Conduct-books were popular educational tools, especially for young women during the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries and Nancy Armstrong argues that their modes of sense-making became important in the development in the domestic novel in Britain. James Fordyce's *Sermons to Young Women* (1766) is an important example of the genre. Mary often speaks "conduct-book clichés in all their tiresome perfection" (Armstrong 108). See Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction* (New York: Oxford UP, 1987); Jaques Carré, ed. *The Crisis of Courtesy: Studies in the Conduct-Book in Britain, 1600-1900* (Boston: Brill, 1994) and Laura Vorachek, "Intertextuality and Ideology: Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and James Fordyce's *Sermons to Young Women*," In *New Windows on a Woman's World: Essays for Jocelyn Harris, Volume Two,* Eds. Colin Gibson and Lisa Marr (Dunedin, New Zealand: University of Ontago Press, 2005).

way Mary flattens *herself* as a response to her social clumsiness is dramatized and reinforced in the 1979 BBC adaptation. Although Mary is the first character we meet in that adaptation, Elizabeth quickly eclipses her. Later, when Mary utters this same platitude, her mother cries, "Nonsense!" and leans forward towards Lizzy. The words effectively dismiss Mary, and the action darkens the middle daughter's face (alone) in shadows. While this moment may functionally reflect the conditions of production (BBC television productions at the time could afford few retakes to fix minor lighting problems), Mary's dual linguistic and imagistic marginalization in favor of Elizabeth counters the other sympathetic gestures she receives from the new narrative structure. Elizabeth and the rest of the Bennets can only see the generalities and not why Mary may have turned in that direction. Mary is forced to "console herself" (275).

I'm not disputing that some people have a "real superiority of mind" for which "pride will always be in good regulation" (BBC, 1995). What I do see in *Pride and Prejudice* is a world in which people see themselves being pushed aside, and they are tragic *because* they do not have the tools to elevate themselves.[36] The foolish characters seem so incapable of profiting from practice that clinical psychologist Phyllis Ferguson Bottomer argues that eight of the "inferior characters" in Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* exhibit symptoms of autism and Asperger's syndrome.[37] While Bottomer acknowledges that Austen could not have the clinical or conceptual knowledge to purposely represent behaviors of the autistic spectrum, she suggests that since Austen did describe what she saw in her world that she described these syndromes without recognizing what they were. Bottomer's approach is beyond the accepted literary analysis boundaries. But readers must be more mindful of a novel that could function as such a scientific

[36] Woloch identifies Austen's work with emerging capitalism (Mary Poovey too, in *Genres of the Credit Economy: Mediating Value in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Britain* (2008), makes connections with the banking system) but the terms of gaining capital do not necessarily depend on identifying the foolishness of those you triumph over. I would say, rather, that the emerging capitalist markets instead reflect long-standing terms of social success in which social anxieties become foolishness because they are chalked up to "mean understanding" or people who simply "would not take the trouble of practising" (171).
[37] Phyllis Ferguson Bottomer, *So Odd a Mixture: Along the Autistic Spectrum in* Pride and Prejudice (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2007). Darcy is among her sufferers, but she argues that his particular condition is one that could be improved by environment and choice of partner.

case study. What's at stake in her argument for readers of Austen's novel is her ability to diagnose what most readers would take to be a literary technique – a comic effect and clever social commentary – as a fundamental problem of social ignorance. Bottomer's analysis makes clear that Austen's construction of a protagonist status for Elizabeth depends on the denigration of other characters without generosity of feeling from either Elizabeth or Austen herself – feelings of which they, like the characters they disdain, are not capable. In the novel, being likable is dependent on being able to express one's self well and the minor characters are kept from that eloquence by their social anxieties. While the treatment of Lady Catherine in the MGM adaptation is unique – in this version she *allows* herself to be seen as a tyrant to help Darcy gauge Elizabeth's feelings for him – Darcy summarizes the matter behind this rewriting of character: "My aunt means quite kindly, Miss Elizabeth. Her manner is a little unfortunate."[38] What we see in the sympathetic reorganizations of character space in certain adaptations is not that the fools are *more* eloquent themselves, but that the construction of the film better expresses their existence; these texts are more eloquent *for* them.

Perhaps the best structural example of this collusion against Elizabeth's singularity is that most adaptations on both stage and screen cut certain major minor characters. Linda Brosh notes: "most theatrical adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice* eliminated Mary and Kitty" (30). But this cutting is part of what gives the other minor characters more space. The excision of Mr. and Mrs. Hurst, most of the Lucases, or even Kitty Bennet really means that they have no space to gain or lose. Cutting saves them from becoming minor. One can't be marginalized or mocked if one

[38] Many critics have identified the rewriting of Lady Catherine's character as part of the films bid to win sympathy for British efforts in the Second World War. For more on that perspective see Linda Brosh. See also: Ellen Belton, "Reimagining Jane Austen: The 1940 and 1995 Film Versions of *Pride and Prejudice*," *Jane Austen on Screen*. Ed. Gina Macdonald and Andrew F. Macdonald. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003) 175-96; Elisabeth H. Ellington, "'A Correct Taste in Landscape': Pemberley as Fetish and Commodity," *Jane Austen in Hollywood,* Eds. Linda Troost and Sayre Greenfield. (Lexington: U P of Kentucky, 1998) 90-110; Robert Lawson Peebles, "European Conflict and Hollywood's Reconstruction of English Fiction," *Yearbook of English Studies* 26 (1996): 1-13.

doesn't exist at all. This may be a silent sympathy, but Joe Wright's *Pride & Prejudice* attempts to dissipate such boundaries of social spaces.

The space of Austen's novel, defined as it is by class and propriety, is like shifting compartments that sit next to each other but never overlap. Wright's camera roves through its scenes, floating through doors and windows with abandon, as if to challenge the well-defined spaces of the novel and the television serials. Indeed, critics of the film note the way this version transposes interior and exterior scenes from the novel.[39] The ease of movement that directs our vision of the scene in the film is matched by the sound design, where doors and windows are no barrier to hearing the voices behind them. While the camera is still outside the house with Elizabeth, we hear Mrs. Bennet declare that Netherfield Hall is let at last, all while watching her through a closed window (Lizzy seems to hear her too). The Bennet girls may not have the supernatural ability to hear through barriers unaided, but their tendency to listen at cracks in the doors and windows suggests that they, collectively, are interested in breaking through prescribed boundaries. In contrast, we might consider the way minor characters in the 1967 BBC version, particularly minor characters who exhibit the most social ineptitude, are introduced in isolation from Elizabeth and the main action of the narrative. By introducing these characters in an isolated "safe" space, the text formally assures us that they have somewhere to return to – not just in their individual character lives, but also in the space of the filmic text. In Austen's novel, we (for the most part) do not visit spaces without Elizabeth, thus meaning that that they do not functionally exist in the narrative until Elizabeth visits them. These filmic spaces, however exist independently as physical holding spaces for Mr. Collins or Mrs. Bennet. These spaces promise that the minor characters will not need Elizabeth's space in order to maintain their own existence.

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[39] Mary M. Chan, "Location, Location, Location: The Spaces of *Pride & Prejudice,*" *Persuasions On-line* 27.2 (Summer 2007); Laurie Kaplan, "Inside Out/Outside In: *Pride & Prejudice* on Film 2005," *Persuasions On-Line* 27.2 (Summer 2007). No pagination.

They therefore pose a less tangible threat to Elizabeth's hold over the bulk of the narrative space. But the 2005 film's case is not so easy.

The socially awkward and unsuccessful characters in Wright's film may be more aware of their position than their literary mini-series counterparts, but the space of the film means that although they have more relative space in the narrative they are far more completely trapped in their roles and in the bodies of the actors who play them. Laurie Kaplan sees the opposite effect happening in the film locations: "by exchanging outside settings for indoor settings Wright cancels the impact of such themes as claustrophobia, repression, and lack of choice."[40] However, while the transposition of indoors and outdoors, and the camera's roving eye, may suggest a greater freedom of space, the camera tends to move *against* characters like Mr. Collins. Tom Hollander's Mr. Collins is by far the most sympathetic straight Collins yet. His pained, halting line delivery, his small stature, and his character's penchant for playing with sad looking little flowers demonstrate how detached Mr. Collins is from the social forms he works so hard to follow. Despite this sympathy, the camera always moves around him and leaves him behind. At the Netherfield Ball, as the camera swirls through the scene creating a sense of the discord and impropriety that disturbs Lizzy and the supercilious Miss Bingley equally, Mr. Collins stands still among the revelers. Unacquainted with most people around him, and having already ill-advisedly introduced himself to Mr. Darcy, Collins stands alone in the crowd. The camera circles him as he sniffs at one of the poor blooms he favors (unlike Mr. Bennet, who cultivates orchids, Mr. Collins has a tendency to pluck the petals off of wildflowers). He glances at the room around him full of people talking to each other and not to him, and as he looks up at the heavens rather piteously, the camera whirls away.

In contrast, Lizzy controls the camera movement. When she spins on a swing to mark the passing months, the camera takes her point of view as *she* whirls. Only Elizabeth, we understand,

[40] Laurie Kaplan, "Inside Out/Outside In: *Pride & Prejudice* on Film 2005," *Persuasions On-line* 27.2 (Summer 2007) No pagination.

will ever move beyond social boundaries. As Mary M. Chan also points out, the fluid camera movement is as likely to create a sense of claustrophobia as it is to create a sense of freedom.[41] Elizabeth's power over social and behavioral judgment is something the minor characters take their newfound relative space to point out. When Charlotte, twenty-seven and never having been pretty, engages herself to Mr. Collins, she tells Elizabeth but cuts off her friend's reaction: "Don't you judge me Lizzy! Don't you dare judge me!" Charlotte's desperation for the ability to act without being judged by someone else's inflexible standards is palpable, as are the consequences of having a protagonist who is almost singularly appealing.

The consequence of increased sympathy for all the characters in this comedy of manners means that the characters who always won sympathy may shift into parodies of themselves. The strong, fundamentally happy Bennet family portrayed in both feature film versions led to associations with Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* rather than with Austen's portrait of a deeply flawed clan.[42] But if the compressed space means that the whole family can be seen sympathetically, then the already sympathetic Fitzwilliam Darcy and Elizabeth Bennet, as well as Jane and Mr. Bingley, are in some danger. In the feature film versions, the secondary couple takes on clear comic overtones that their good character saved them from in the space of the novel. Jane, in the novel, is a domestic goddess whose "strength of feeling, a composure of temper and a uniform cheerfulness of manner" mostly keep her safe from the "impertinent" (Austen 22). In the 1940 film, her pliability means that she can take bad advice too far. When

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[41] Mary M. Chan, "Location, Location, Location: The Spaces of *Pride & Prejudice," Persuasions On-line* 27.2 (Summer 2007). No Pagination.

[42] The trailer for the 1940 film proclaimed: Not since *Little Women*…such delight on screen." Sally B. Palmer argues of the 2005 film that it takes on the "coming-of-age guise" to be intelligible to young people. Barbara K. Seeber argues that the 2005 film, Chadha Gurinder's 2004 Bollywood-esque retelling, and the 1940 film, portray a kindly Mr. Bennet and a loving relationship between Mr. and Mrs. Bennet and so "undo Austen's feminist critique of the patriarchal family." Sally B. Palmer, "*Little Women* at Longbourn: The Re-Wrighting of *Pride and Prejudice,*" *Persuasions On-line* 27.2 (Summer 2007). Barbara K. Seeber, "A Bennet Utopia: Adapting the Father in *Pride and Prejudice*." *Persuasions On-line* 27.2 (Summer 2007). No Pagination.

Jane falls ill at Netherfield, she almost fails to be examined properly. Advised by Mrs. Bennet that her right side is her "best," she will not turn her head to the physician. Awkwardly, she cranes her neck towards him so that Bingley (who is looking on) will never see anything but her best side. In this version, the good intentions of Mrs. Bennet override Jane's sense, even when she is beyond the space that her mother controls.

Bingley, meanwhile, possessed of "so much ease, so much good breeding" in the novel, is almost unable to handle unexpected social situations in the 2005 film (Austen 16). When Bingley returns to Netherfield with the intention of finally proposing to Jane, the suitor is completely thrown off balance by Mrs. Bennet's volubility and excuses himself and Mr. Darcy almost immediately after arriving. Bingley and Darcy retreat to the outdoors so that Bingley can rehearse, in a variety of forms, the way he will approach the Bennets on the next try. We watch the men in a golden-hued long shot as Bingley stutters and paces and rehearses the possible scenarios that will accompany his next entrance to the home. In these shots, all of Bingley's ease is seen to stem from his expectation of control in social situations, rather than from an innate social ease. He must gain control in an alternative space (an open space beyond the social realm) before he can boldly reenter the Bennet household and claim the privilege to propose to Jane. But Jane and Bingley were already relatively minor in the space of the novel – so seriously charming in their innocent relationship that they were primed for comic effects. Elizabeth and Darcy, who were only comic through their own wit in the space of the novel, become more open for imposed comic effects in the space of the films.

Laurence Olivier, who was at one time Greer Garson's mentor, commented that "Darling Greer seemed to me all wrong as Elizabeth … [playing her] as the most silly and affected of all of the Bennet sisters"; the critic for *Variety* meanwhile complained that Olivier seemed "very

unhappy" in the role of Darcy.[43] In Olivier's case, we might see his Darcy as part of the developing trend of awkward feature-length Darcys. These Darcys, so clearly uncomfortable in social situations, can avow their "inability to catch the tone of a conversation" without earning Elizabeth's censure that his anxiety is no excuse for not taking "the trouble to practice," (BBC, 1995). Like David Rintoul's deeply reserved, almost stiff, Darcy in the 1979 version, Olivier's exaggerated, affected mannerisms (his tendency to bump into people at balls) and breathy delivery speaks not so much to his discomfort in the role but to Darcy's discomfort with the highly public place that his role in society and his space in this narrative force him to take. Matthew McFadyen's 2005 Darcy with his whispering, stuttering, delivery leaves us in little doubt of his general social discomfort. When McFadyen's Darcy says that he is shy, it's easy to believe him.

All this growing discomfort in the new social space climaxes in the second proposal scene in Wright's adaptation: Lizzy walks on the "moors" at dawn bathed in the blue light of morning with the mist surrounding her. She pauses and the camera zooms in as she turns to her right. There, in the rising light, she sees Darcy walking towards her in his dressing gown, its tails flowing behind him and his shirt undone. They face each other. The Brontëan allusion of this moment is almost parodic; from my perspective, the extremes of the protagonists' emotions are too much for this narrative that has given so much sympathetic space to so many.[44] As the lovers lean towards each other and almost kiss, the sun rises in the background and the light dazzles their faces. Its light diminishes the sharp lines between the characters and their background, which had been so clear in the blue dawn. They seem to be on the verge of losing all control of

[43] Michael Troyan, *A Rose for Mrs. Miniver: The Life of Greer Garson* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998) qtd. 107; Anonymous Rev. of *Pride and Prejudice*, dir. Robert Z. Leonard. *Variety.* 10 July 1940. *Variety Film Reviews* (New York: Garland, 1983) 216.

[44] Many critics of the film were dismayed by the Romanticism of the film, which they saw as more suited to *Wuthering Heights* than to *Pride and Prejudice.* See, for example, Catherine Stewart-Beer, "Style over Substance? *Pride & Prejudice* (2005) Proves Itself a Film for Our Time," *Persuasions On-Line* 27.2 (Summer 2007): No pagination.

their relationship to their space; they threaten to fade into the background of a narrative that people take great pride in believing is "rightly" theirs.

These "traditional" adaptations are challenging to Janeites because they claim the identity of an earlier narrative only to deconstruct its integrity. If Elizabeth's centrality, or the centrality of an original work, can be so disrupted, then perhaps there is no security for any kind of character system. Perhaps the greatest threat that *Pride and Prejudice* adaptations pose to the social realm – the greatest social anxiety they contain – is the sense that most of us have been neither Elizabeths nor Darcys, but rather Mary's and Mr. Collins's, who "wished to say something very sensible, but knew not how," and so spent time arranging empty words "as may be adapted to ordinary occasions" (Austen 9; 67). While most adaptations readjust for social and political differences, when it comes to texts that explore manners or pleasantness it can be difficult to accept sympathy for such unlikable characters. That lack of kinship these adaptations can expose is perhaps more insidious and more difficult to fix because we, as humans, don't want to let go of authoritatively sanctioned superiority.

The adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice* that I have discussed have been sites of contest in both the public and narrative spheres. But all versions of *Pride and Prejudice*, even those that I would not classify as adaptations, contain the social anxiety of identity that Austen's novel so meticulously constructs. Recent cinematic and novelistic reimaginings of *Pride and Prejudice* in contemporary settings take up the social anxieties that shadow the surface narrative. The radical adaptations, *Pride and Prejudice: A Latter Day Comedy* (Black 2003) and *Bride and Prejudice* (Gurinder 2004) set Elizabeth's story in two contemporary communities – the American LDS and a town in India – where the whole notion of 'community' presses against the individualistic formation of the protagonist against the fools that surround her. These radical adaptations[45] of the novel are less about the way their Elizabeths distinguish themselves from their communities than

[45] I borrow the term from Jean I. Marsden. Jean I. Marsden, *Shakespeare, Adaptation & Eighteenth-Century Literary Theory* (Louisville: The University Press of Kentucky, 1995).

about how the Elizabeths struggle to remain within their communities; the social anxiety they tackle is partly about the consequences of failing to take responsibility for your community. That social problem is rendered formally in the way these two films negotiate genre expectations. Christine Geraghty also sees "gaps" between genres as crucial to understanding how these adaptations work: "the gap between an adaptation and other examples of its genre also draws attention to the processes of transformation and performance" (9). The focus of Geraghty's work is on the kind of gaps that actively draw attention to the differences between source and adaptation (particularly in such radical adaptations) rather than on the gaps between media. But by looking at how these films confound genre expectations, we can also see how these films formally defend their audiences against becoming like the less likable characters in the narrative by creating new ways of linking them with Elizabethan superiority: The films defend audiences by including them in new combinations of generic codes.

The first pits American romantic comedy expectations against the moral imperatives of the Latter Day Saints (LDS); the latter showcases (especially in performance styles) the clash between Bollywood and Hollywood styles of storytelling.[46] By retelling the *Pride and Prejudice* narrative in a contemporary setting (and in new national settings), however, the films largely block the kind of fidelity rhetoric that follows heritage adaptations. By the same token, that blocking move lets the anarchy of the character space (that we see at work in the other feature-length adaptations) flourish unheeded. *Bride and Prejudice*, in particular, shows unprecedented sympathy for the Mr. Collins character, who becomes less and less awkward after he marries and develops his own household and space in the United States. The combination of retelling and adaptation appears to be more open to the kind of writing back that would seem to make us more aware of social problems posed by both texts. But, more often than not, these radical adaptations

[46] *Pride and Prejudice: A Latter Day Comedy*. Dir. Andrew Black. Writ. Anne K. Black. Perf. Kam Heskin, Orlando Seale, Ben Gourley, and Lucila Sola. 2003. DVD. Excel Entertainment Group, Inc. 2004; *Bride & Prejudice*. Dir. Gurinder Chadha. Perf. Aishwarya Rai, Martin Henderson, Daniel Gillies, Indira Varma, and Naveen Andrews. 2004. DVD. Buena Vista Home Entertainment, 2005.

scuttle social questioning by claiming to do the work for us. *Pride and Prejudice: A Latter-Day Comedy* makes all the necessary winking, clever comparisons between the family values of close-knit LDS communities and country families in Regency England, putting much of the burden of comparison on its audience, who is asked to compare the LDS community to wider American practices. Chadha Gurinder's film, meanwhile, proclaims itself as a comic post-colonial critique wherein the Cosmopolitan American Darcy's infiltration and poor understanding of Lalita's (Elizabeth's) Indian family and beliefs is paralleled to the West's devaluation of its Eastern neighbors (a critique that savors as much of *A Passage to India* as it does *Pride and Prejudice*). In the end, Darcy's love for Lalita is also seen as his ability to assimilate himself to Indian traditions, rather than in Lalita's removal from her community (as we see Elizabeth "achieve" in the novel). That critique is refracted back onto the films intended Western audience, whose viewing practices the film aims to disrupt with the integration of Bollywood-eque musical sequences. Over the course of the film, however, its audiences are taught how to participate in those expectations.

Both *Pride and Prejudice: A Latter-Day Comedy* and *Bride and Prejudice* proclaim loudly: "Look how the romantic and class problems from the novel can be transported to today and look at the solutions and revisions we can offer!" That loud self-reflexivity silences the social anxieties that Austen's novel stifles from its first sentence; tackling problems of nation and belief, the human problems still bubble beneath the surfaces of these adaptations. The failure of *people* to attempt to understand *people* is still at the core of these narratives, but by allowing them to remain *national* problems (or factions within nations) and generic problems, they diffuse the burden of individual responsibility in interpersonal relations; they carry on the meanest spirit of the novel they claim as their source. But, the anarchy of character space can appear unthreatening to the hierarchy of the novel because the societies they portray are actively distinct from their predecessor's. "I am not English!" *Bride's* Darcy (Martin Henderson) repeatedly cries with exasperation. The national distinction, he is reprimanded, is beside the point if his actions are not

fundamentally different than his predecessors'. As these two radical adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice* suggest, while such adaptations may seem to be the least intrusive on a novel's space because they are so temporally distant, arguably they formally maintain the problems and prejudices of their sources *more* successfully because they remain deeply buried in the narrative and thematic structure.

Through the Looking Glass

As I argued in my introduction, retellings remain distinct from adaptations because they do not go through a metamorphosis from one medium to another; they "lay bare" problems they see in the source text from a new perspective or context. The highest profile retelling of *Pride and Prejudice,* Helen Fieldings's *Bridget Jones's Diary* (1996), critiques the patriarchal system of Regency England silently upheld by the genderless omniscient narrator of Austen's novel, however much the earlier narrative also questions that order.[47] Fielding truly places her Elizabeth (Bridget Jones) at the center of her novel by letting the London Singleton's diary speak for itself. The independent voice of Bridget's diary showcases how the status of women in contemporary England has developed – so that they can speak for themselves rather than through an ungendered narrator.[48] If the marriage plot and embarrassing family and friends will always be a problem, then Fielding's caustic, clumsy, neurotic, and endearing heroine suggests that at least women can be more imperfect and human than even Austen's lively minded, impertinent Elizabeth. That we cannot imagine a solution to these deep-seated problems of social anxiety that *make her family embarrassing*, is not itself considered as a problem in this text. It's that sigh of inevitably that surrounds the embarrassing family and friends, however, that we have seen the

[47] Fielding and the novel won the 1998 Galaxy Books Awards British Book of the Year.
[48] For the most influential studies of the politics in Austen's novel, see: Claudia L. Johnson *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* (Chicago, Chicago UP, 1988) and Marilyn Butler *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975). Johnson argues that the novel is sympathetic to Enlightenment versions of feminism while Butler argues that Austen's novel essentially upholds conservative patriarchal values.

Pride and Prejudice adaptations undermine by granting sympathy to the most embarrassing family and friends that the heroine can boast; these texts reveal social anxiety to be a problem so blinding that even a novel about overcoming prejudices that cause anxiety cannot overcome most of them itself. And yet, not even the adaptations that closely match the prejudiced character space of the novel can help being more sympathetic, even if that sympathy looks like mere sentimentality.

Retellings (or remakes, in the case of films), as much as they may aim to tackle the social anxieties of their predecessors, lack the formal protection of the gaps an intermedial adaptation produces. The loud association with a precursor text in another medium allows the unanswerable social problems that underlay a narrative to push up to the formal surface of the text (if still hovering at the edges of the plot). The *mediation* that the media change provides will always palliate the problems even as it produces distancing gaps between the texts. The links between texts that series of adaptations create reveal how neither time nor national association nor political party can safely name the problem of certain existential social anxieties, let alone suggest a solution. But the less of a shift there is from the original medium to the new one, the less defensive the text can be against the problems of its narrative. In a retelling of a novel as a novel, the problem can become so loud as to nearly silence the voice of the earlier narrative. Such retellings, which may circulate with nary a hint of influence or intertextuality, nevertheless function as inversions of defensive adaptation; the minor character of an unanswerable problem takes over the narrative with the wrathful indifference of a protagonist.

As a story, Jefferey Eugenides's *The Virgin Suicides* (1993), a darkly comic tale about the suicides of the five beautiful Lisbon sisters in Vietnam-era America told retrospectively by a chorus of boys who grew up on their block (and harbored voyeuristic crushes on all of them), seems far from the distant and well-ordered world of *Pride and Prejudice.*[49] Having watched the girls obsessively throughout the whole of their short lives, the men compile a haunting casebook

[49] Jeffrey Eugenides, *The Virgin Suicides,* Reissue edition. (New York: Warner Books, 1999).

of photos and physical evidence that they use to understand the mysterious girls whose deaths represent the disintegration of their snobbish and tenuously connected community. Initial reviews of the novel remarked on the text's roots in classical Greek tragedy, citing the foreboding voice of the choral narrator as a major innovation for contemporary novel narration.[50] Literary criticism latched onto the evolutionary and environmental aspects of the novel (which links the fading life of the girls to the fading physical environment in their American suburb) and elucidated the influence and intertextual significance of literary modernism and magical realism styles of the twentieth century.[51] But taking away the style and the detail of this novel leaves us with a familiar narrative frame: Five beautiful sisters, daughters to mismatched parents (a domineering and eccentric mother and a sympathetic but ineffectual father), from an upper-middle class small town, seek various means to escape the confines of their stifling home and the eyes and whispers of their neighbors. The sisters, who the boys are shocked to learn are "distinct beings" and not "five replicas," have a "shining pinnacle" in Lux Lisbon (26; 79). Lux emerges from the mass of girls to be the sexiest, the most vibrant, and the most self-destructive; in the end, she uses her effortless interaction with the opposite sex to distract the choral narrators from the real problem in her life "so that she and her sisters could die in peace" (216).

Lux has more social ease than her sisters, especially her middle-sister, Mary. In the one dance the teenage sisters are allowed to attend, Mary danced with "studied movements" (128): "She seems to have a picture in her mind of what pattern their feet should make on the floor, of how they should look together, and she concentrated fiercely to realize it" (128). Like Austen's Mary, Eugenides's Mary practices her art with precision, but with "neither genius nor taste; and

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[50] Michael Wright, "Cosmic Tragedy of Small-Town Nymphs," Rev. of *The Virgin Suicides* by Jeffrey Eugenides. *The Times,* 10 Jun 1993.

[51] Kenneth Womack and Amy Mallory-Kani, "'Why Don't You Just Leave It Up to Nature?': An Adaptionist Reading of the Novels of Jeffrey Eugenides" *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 40:3 (2007): 157-73; Francisco Collado-Rodríguez, "Back to Myth and Ethical Compromise: García Márquez's Traces on Jeffrey Eugenides's *The Virgin Suicides," Atlantis: Revista de la Asociación Española de Estudios Anglo-Norteamericanos* 27: 2 (2005): 27-40; Benjamin Widiss, "Jeffrey Eugenides's Backyard," Modernist Studies Association Annual Conference. Loews Vanderbilt Hotel, Nashville. 14 November 2008.

though vanity has given her application, it had given her likewise a pedantic air and conceited manner" (Austen 25). The narrators remember that, "When a fast song came on, Mary danced less well. 'Like old people at weddings trying it out'" (Eugenides 128). But while the means of escape in *Pride and Prejudice* is marriage, the means of escape in *The Virgin Suicides* is encapsulated in Eugenides' title.

We might say *The Virgin Suicides* is a nightmare version of *Pride and Prejudice*. In this world, the sexually excessive Lydia replaces Elizabeth at the center of the sisters, marriage is replaced by death, the community of neighbors is not merely foolish but threateningly voyeuristic, and the plot cannot close with a happy ending but only with the tellers of the tale caught in a horrifying narrative loop of going "over the evidence once again […] with the feeling that we were retracing a path that led nowhere" (238). But what if, instead, *The Virgin Suicides* reveals the potential nightmare in *Pride and Prejudice* so completely that it cannot even speak the truth of their association? *The Virgin Suicides* is on its harsh surface about the social anxieties that *Pride and Prejudice* dismisses as minor follies and inconsistency rather than symptoms of a deeper discord between individuals and the social world they create, a world with arbitrary rules of manners and manner of expression that have little to do with the human emotions and concerns beneath them.

In *The Virgin Suicides,* the problems of a neighbor's death and her parents' pain is transmuted into the proper way to write a condolence card: "Most people opted for generic cards that said 'With Sympathy' or 'Our Condolences,' but some of the Waspier types, accustomed to writing notes for all occasions, labored over personal responses" (48). The narrators wonder at the affected shallowness parents: "We realized that the version of the world they rendered for us was not the world they really believed in, and that for all their caretaking and bitching about crabgrass they didn't give a damn about lawns" (55). But, the narrators continue, and deepen, that shallowness by wondering about the drives, desires, and motivations of the Lisbon girls, watching and judging them for years, without ever appealing to them directly. The narrators

finally blame *them* for the social disruption, the "selfishness" of their suicides, angry that "they hadn't heard us calling, still do not hear us" (247-248). The narrators' failures of social interaction, their fears about failing to discover the girls' true identities, the implications of the obsessive love they harbor, the guilt of their responsibility in the suicides, the pain of seeing young lives like their own so tragically interrupted, these are all the central themes of *The Virgin Suicides.*

But if these are the central themes of *The Virgin Suicides* they are also the potential threats that lie beneath the comic social missteps in *Pride and Prejudice,* threats that the form of the novel so careful and strategically buries beneath the hierarchal sympathies of its character system. Both novels can critique the conventions of manners that keep their characters from connecting with those around them, but neither can even imagine how to surmount them. Adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice* stir up their social implications as they disrupt the character system, but the barrier of formal transformation keeps the social problem safely distant, spoken culturally only in terms of what it means to make a "good" adaptation of a well-beloved (we might call it popular) text.

I have opened my project with *Pride and Prejudice* for the obvious reason that it is the most popular text by an author whose novels have been particularly important in adaptation studies. But I have also started with *Pride and Prejudice* because, as its *Virgin Suicides* inversion indicates, social anxiety – the fear of minorness or misapplied majorness – is the existential anxiety underlying all of the unanswerable social problems that we will see defensive adaptations processing in the pages that follow. The disturbing subject of *The Virgin Suicides* has been divisive among readers and critics, with both ultimately focusing on the innovative style of the novel to avoid the narrative's refusal to provide a solution to the suicides at its center.[52] The car-

[52] Prominent *New York Times* critic, Michiko Kakutani complained:

> The reader repeatedly wonders why the girls don't rebel. Why don't they reach out to friends, or run away from home? Why don't the authorities insist that they go to school? What has driven their mother to impose such a strict regime in the first place?

crash effect of *The Virgin Suicides* – leading readers to consider how the tragedy looks rather than what was behind it – suggests why Western culture, at least, has been so likely to rely on defensive adaptation as a mode of narrative experience. Defensive adaptation allows us to approach problems without touching them, to talk about them without talking about them, to find safety in the change of form that keeps the frightening motives of the repetition at bay. Yet for all the distancing and displacement, adaptation is still a productive social activity. Adaptations demand that their audiences are incorporated into a specific social conversation, a conversation that they can participate in without consciously knowing all of the arguments involved. Indeed, only by reaching audiences that have varied degrees of "knowing" about a specific textual history can a real conversation occur. The conversation may operate in terms of medium, but the passionate exploration of individual existence in the social world that is always embedded in adaptation receptions, both popular and academic, is why the conversation still matters.

> Such obvious questions are never addressed by Mr. Eugenides, and his willful ignoring of these issues can grate on the reader's nerves, momentarily breaking the spell of his tale. (par. 11-12)

But ultimately, the disturbed reader closed her review in matters of form: "By turns lyrical and portentous, ferocious and elegiac, "The Virgin Suicides" insinuates itself into our minds as a small but powerful opera in the unexpected form of a novel" (par. 13).
Michiko Kakutani, "Of Death in Adolescence and Innocence Lost," Rev. of *The Virgin Suicides. The New York Times Review of Books* 19 Mar. 1993. www.nytimes.com.

CHAPTER II

ADAPTATION AND IDENTITY IN *THEATER OF BLOOD* AND *THE TALENTED MR. RIPLEY*

Don Quixote de Le Mancha may well be the fictional character most famous for trying to bring a little bit a fiction into his reality. Don Quixote's efforts to make his world more like chivalric romances pits a generic vision of what the world could or should be against the world that is and *Don Quixote* charts the effects of that clash.[1] Cervantes' text, partly because of its sustained popularity over the last four hundred years, has generated numerous imitations and adaptations. As we have already seen by looking at adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice*, the disruption of character systems that adaptation requires manages deep-rooted anxieties about participation in the social world: What can a minor character mean when there are such charismatic minor characters to be had? What and who may be sacrificed when pleasantness, ease, and propriety become the standards of human worth? But what those texts assume is that there is the *potential* for a full individual self to emerge as a social identity in any person – a potential that the conditions of social interaction continually repress. *Don Quixote* is an example of what happens when texts are used as a template to manage a perceived anarchy in social interaction. Don Quixote uses literature as a warrant to give new meaning to his social identity. That move, however, tacitly acknowledges that, even in a world as stable and ordered by tradition as the chivalric ones that Quixote tries to emulate, identity is not fixed. But, there are many examples, in fiction and film, of less chivalrous men who use fiction as the inspiration, the source text, for their actions.

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[1] Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *Don Quixote: The Ingenious Hidalgo De La Mancha,* trans. John Rutherford (New York: Penguin, 2001).

Part of the argument of this project is that the anxiety that surrounds adaptation is an effect of the formal disruption that happens in the space of the text. As we have seen in the analysis of *Pride and Prejudice* in Chapter I, the formal disruptions intrinsic to adaptations among media threaten to release the social anxieties embedded in all versions of a text. At the same time, the formal disruptions mediate the effect of the source text's storytelling. The *Pride and Prejudice* adaptations grant more space and sympathy to Austen's social blunderers, but despite the other characters' movement, Elizabeth still triumphs over all of them. The supremacy of her character is more challenged in the feature-length versions, but therefore all the more triumphant in her narrative. These adaptations, in other words, defend against the larger social anxiety they contain by giving the same answer that Austen gave: they ultimately allow the wrathful protagonist to flatten the socially unsuccessful characters. They perpetuate the anxiety that successful social interaction is always beyond the reach of the human majority.

In a lecture given recently at Vanderbilt University, Regenia Gagnier posed a question that gets at the root of the social anxieties that defensive adaptations manage: What does it mean to humans to consider themselves human?[2] The very meaning of being human in the Western world, she summarizes, has been contained in our absolute freedom and contingency. That inescapable contingency is the basis of our being in the world. As we in this post-postmodern age lazily affirm daily but rarely think about, individual selfhood, for better or for worse, is negotiable. This absolute freedom, however, left philosophers like Jean-Paul Sarte feeling nauseous.

In *Being and Nothingness* (1943), Sartre proposes: "Being *is that* and outside of that, *nothing.*"[3] That nothingness that we both fear and yet require to define existence lies behind all human efforts at self-identification. "This is why," Sartre suggests, "the past can, if need be, be

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[2] Regenia Gagnier, "A Literary Anthropology of Freedom and Choice: The Novel as Philisophical Anthropology," Public Lecture. Vanderbilt University. 26 March 2009

[3] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956) 5.

the object aimed at by a for-itself which wants to *realize* value and flee the anguish which comes to it from the perpetual absence of the self" (*Being* 120).[4] Some notion of the past as object, in Sarte's formulation, is what allows a person to "flee the anguish" of the unbearable nothingness beyond being. In terms of textual adaptation, this existential reliance on the past as object – as the right and stable source for the existence of a text – is what fidelity critics rely on. In order to *mean*, to "*realize* value," a text, like a person, must have a past. Jaques Lacan, in contrast, saw this view of human experience as excessively negative.[5] For Lacan, the progress of the human subject (and more important, the human perception of existence) is linked more to "anticipation," to that moment when the "I" is eventually linked to "socially elaborated situations," and the question of *what I will have been* (7). Humans begin by understanding ourselves as a "fragmented body" and the mirror stage, when the individual learns to identify his body as a "totality," leads "to the finally donned armor of an alienating identity" (6). While these two analyses approach the essential problem from different directions (past vs. future anterior) where they meet is in their agreement that desire, and thus action, "arise[s] from a felt 'lack' in the self, and specifically a lack of wholeness and self-coincidence."[6] In response to this lack, this nothingness, humans construct identities in order to deal with the world; the danger lies in trying to "believe in a self that I have myself created."[7] Fixity of identity, or identity as an expression of some essential self, is something that both these perspectives reject and which self-identification efforts help the individual continuously escape.

In this chapter I look at two fictional men—Tom Ripley of *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (Highsmith 1955 and Minghella 1999) and Edward Lionheart of *Theatre of Blood* (Hickox 1973

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[4] The term "for-itself" refers to the distinction Sartre makes between being-in-itself and being-for-itself. Being-in-self, because it exists in the hole of nothingness where self should be, must be constituted by being-for-itself. The for-itself is "borrowed existence" (55).

[5] Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 1999) 8.

[6] Bruce Baugh, "The Hegelian Legacy," in *The Columbia Companion to Twentieth-Century Philosophies* (New York: Columbia UP, 2007) 375-388. 381.

[7] Christina Howells, "Conclusion: Sartre and the deconstruction of the subject," in *The Cambridge Companion to Sartre*, ed. Christina Howells (New York: Cambridge UP, 1992) 353-372. 328.

and Simpson/McDermott 2005). Through these men, we can see how defensive adaptations that manage anxieties about the contingency of the self manifest as texts that violently question the boundaries amongst fiction, reality, and the media that represent them. The lack of plentitude in "self," and the anguish and fear that knowledge inspires (consciously or in the unconscious), is precisely what the murderer-adapter defends himself against in his bloody work. The source texts these murderers work from seem to have identities that represent their essential selves. But the murderer-adapters reality adaptations show them to be the unfixed alienating armor they are. The murderer-adaptors re-fragment the textual and human bodies around them to force identity reconstructions; he uses adaptations to defend himself from his lack of self. The boundary crossing that destroys bodies and texts alike defends his audience against contemplating that same nothingness.

Murderer-Adapters: From page to scream

In *Adaptation* (Jonze 2002), Susan Orlean, the fictionalized writer of a book being adapted by a fictionalized version of Charlie Kaufman, the real screenwriter of *Adaptation* (which is also an adaptation of the real Susan Orlean's real book *The Orchid Thief*), declares with anger and frustration: "We have to kill him before he murders my book."[8] While *Adaptation* is a sustained meditation on the nature of Darwinian and textual adaptation, the murderer-adapter that Susan Orlean so fears is literal in other contexts. In a variety of novels, films, and television shows, printed narratives are used as inspirations – or excuses – for murder. In Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet* (1885), the scene of the crime, the murderer claims, is drawn from newspaper articles. In *Quills* (Kaufman 2000), an insane asylum inmate adapts the Marquis de Sade's early torture porn to the body of a female servant. On a season two episode of the television show, *Bones*, "Bodies in the Book," Temperance Brennan, a forensic anthropologist

[8] Charlie Kaufman, writ., *Adaptation,* dir. Spike Jonze. perf. Meryl Streep, Nicholas Cage, and Chris Cooper. Sony, 2002, DVD, Columbia Tri-Star, 2003.

who moonlights as a novelist, is forced to investigate crimes that translate the murders from her novels into real life.[9] The murderer, in other words, adapts Dr. Brennan's fictions into reality. The pilot episode of *Castle*, however, adds an important twist to this trend. In "Flowers for Your Grave" a murderer *pretends* to be a copycat killer adapting author Robert Castle's murder-mysteries to reality.[10] His method of self-defense, as it were, is only discovered because he fails to properly adapt all the details from the books. The catch is that the killer is simply using his serial murders as a way to cover-up both the true murder target and to hide his identity from the world.

This string of murderer-adapters seems to indict many effects of the written word: the ease with which audiences can be manipulated by a text, the uncontrollability of a text once it enters the public sphere and the mourning of the artist for that loss, the drastic ways that texts can be misinterpreted, and even that old notion that fiction can be a dangerous influence on weak minds. But what the fictional presence of these murderer-adapters also suggests is a challenge to the social structures of which both they, and the texts they adapt, are a part. Objects that are readily accepted into mass culture, novels of mystery, sex, and crime – even non-fiction meditations on flowers – become fodder for breakdowns in the social order. For the murderer-adapter, contents of bodies and texts become interchangeable. Bodies and texts by necessity become interchangeable for those who pursue him in the name of the legal, moral, and artistic order. The murderer-adapter employs the permeable boundaries between fiction and reality, and the disturbing fragility of the human body, to defend against the fearful contingency of identity and uncertain nature of the self.

Boundary crossings, whether between God and man, life and death, good and evil, or normalcy and Other always provoke fear. By this definition, the expression of fear in literature

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[9] "Bodies in the Book," *Bones,* perf. Emily Deschanel, David Boreanaz, Michaela Conlon, Eric Millegan, and T.J. Thyne, writ. Karine Rosenthal, dir. Craig Ross Jr., 20th Century Fox, 14 Mar. 2007.

[10] "Flowers For Your Grave," *Castle*, perf. Nathan Fillion and Stana Katic, writ. Andrew W. Marlowe, dir. Rob Bowman, ABC Studios, 9 Mar. 2009.

and film, whatever genre it appears in, seems to control fear by clearly defining boundaries. Beyond trapping the fear in fiction, provoking or expressing fear in a novel, a play, or a film ostensibly contains that fear within its borders. As Martin Tropp would have it, such "stories are not nightmares transcribed, but fears recast into safe and communicable forms."[11] The murderer-adapter constructs a scene of adaptation in which terror is predicated on the existence of a prior text through which the killer can justify his actions. At the same time, his victims and pursuers can use that text to follow and judge his actions. What both parties are allowed to minimize in this process is the fact that the casualties become by-products of interpretation, rather than people possessing any being in themselves. This fact – that the bodies and identities we use define ourselves as humans only mask a emptiness – is what the murderer-adapter figure both relies upon and defends against by emerging as a murderous subjectivity who seems to always be an exceptional Other.

Edward Lionheart and the *Theatre of Blood* texts perform the process of adaptation as it copes with fears about the perpetual lack of the individual self. By enacting Shakespeare's art as a real event (a living theatre) Lionheart treats "reality" as another medium into which texts can be adapted. Killing the critics who ravaged his performances, Lionheart undercuts the safety that critical distance – whether that criticism is of a text or the text itself – seems to offer from the messiness of being an individual self in a social world of constructed identities. Tom Ripley, however, is an embodiment of existential fears about the insubstantiality of personal identity – fears that became urgent in the post-war rush of consumer culture. Katherine Golsan has recently argued that *The Talented Mr. Ripley* and its two major film adaptations, *Plein Soleil* (Clément 1960) and *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (Minghella 1999) suggest a model for analyses of adaptation: that of adaptation as forgery.[12] Golsan's perspective is that Tom "is not only a character, but

[11] Martin Tropp, *Images of Fear: How Horror Stories Helped Shape Modern Culture (1818-1918)* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company Inc., 1990) 4.
[12] Katherine Golsan, "Adaptation as forgery: the case of The Talented Mr. Ripley," *Post Script* 23.3 (Summer 2004): 19-36.

becomes a figure of adaptation itself. Copy and forgery as creative imitation are as good or even better than the original" (17). Golsan's focus is each filmmaker's stance on faithful adaptation (Clément supports a coexistence of texts while Minghella feels the guilt of the forger in his adaptation efforts) in relation to original texts. Golson's argument dovetails with my own but I suggest that seeing Highsmith's Tom as himself a figure of adaptation suggests alternate possibilities for analysis. Tom Ripley, I argue, becomes an agent only through adaptation. His work represses the lack that socially constructed identities imperfectly fill, because he forces his audiences (both inside and outside the text) to ask who Tom "really" is. Knowing and fearing that there is no "really," both Tom Ripley and Edward Lionheart, these murderer-adapters, sacrifice bodies to establish identities. The texts they perform in, and the adaptations they produce, defend against the implications of such freely-willed identities.

"One does tend to look at life through narrative structure"[13]

It's often remarked that film adaptations of novels, in particular, give physical presence to people and places that readers could only heretofore imagine. That embodiment is referenced as both a positive expression of the wish-fulfillment qualities of adaptation and as a negative undercutting of readers' imaginative faculties. Even in defending the important role of adaptation in culture, Linda Hutcheon laments: "Now that I know what an enemy orc or a game of Quidditch (can) look like (from the movies), I suspect I will never be able to recapture my first imagined versions again. Palimpsests make permanent change."[14] In *Rethinking the Novel Film Debate*, Kamilla Elliot, calling this the "incarnational concept of adaptation," argues that the idea is "predicated on the Christian theology of the word made flesh, wherein the word is only a partial

[13] Lee Simpson and Phelim McDermott, *Theatre of Blood* (London: Oberon Modern Plays 2005) 29.
[14] I contest Hutcheon's position – I have a rotten imagination and my repeated viewing of the various adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice* has never impinged on the image of Lizzy Bennet that I created during my first encounter with the novel. Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (New York: Routledge, 2006) 29.

expression of a more total representation that requires incarnation for its fulfillment."[15] Elliot points to Charles Lamb's nineteenth-century review of Shakespeare restagings, which "displaces concerns regarding the violence done to language in the incarnational model onto concerns over the dramatization of textual violence" (168). But consequently, Elliot suggests, adaptation can also seem like sacrilege against the word – that it can be threatening because its very "reality" seems to reveal the "unreality" of language.[16]

The 1973 Vincent Price-starring film, *Theatre of Blood*, throws a wrench into these works. The comic excess of the murders in this film, each of them based on a famous death in Shakespeare's plays and enacted on the body of a theater critic, makes the initial "scandal" of interpretation/ incarnation not simply that Shakespeare's words will be acted out in reality but that they will be acted out *badly*. The film is camp-horror. It delights in its self-reflexivity and the play declares itself as a tributary "orgy of beautiful over-acting" (9). The matter is this: Edward Lionheart, presumed dead Shakespearean actor, revenges himself on the critics who reviled him throughout his career. Specifically, he murders the circle of critics who denied him the Shakespeare Critics Circle Award. His murder methods are very much like something out of Shakespeare; Lionheart and his band of tramps kill the critics in live adaptations of scenes from the plays that composed his final repertory season. Only Devlin (Peregrine in the film and Jack in the play) manages to escape.

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[15] Kamilla Elliot, *Rethinking the Novel/Film Debate* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2003) 161.

[16] Jacques Derrida suggests as much in his concept of the dangerous supplement. For Derrida, writing is the dangerous supplement that threatens speech but it is also the only way for speech to achieve presence; "it adds only to replace" and allows us to make ourselves absent (145). The supplement substitutes for, and thus creates, what never really existed. It "will always be the moving of the tongue or acting through the hands. In it everything is brought together: […] the scandal is that the sign, the image, or the representer, become forces and make "the world move" (147). Such recognition might account for the pleasure critics seem to take in excoriating bad adaptations in any media, but it also accounts for the vehemence with which adaptation scholars collectively dismiss fidelity criticism as inevitable rather than considering *why* such comparison is inevitable. The mere impulse to justify the relationship between the "original" and its various expressions in different media manages that fearful lack of substance. Jacques Derrida, "…That Dangerous Supplement…" *Of Grammatology,* trans. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1997) 141-164.

Generically, the film falls into the category of body-horror typically associated with post-1970s films: "the distinctive boundary-breaching characteristics [which] are intimately related to aspects of 'postmodern' social experience" (Tudor 51):[17]

> In effect, the characteristic ambiguity and fluidity of bodily boundaries in modern horror is seen to be substantially different to the typical boundary-breaching of earlier periods, because it gives expression to postmodern 'experience[s] of social fragmentation and to the constantly threatening confrontation between embattled "selves" and the risky and unreliable world that they inhabit' (Tudor, 1995: 40). (51)

By this postmodern account we have a near teleology for horror: its boundary crossing has always been working toward revealing the instability of everyday life. But whether or not we accept the postmodern perspective, we can identify a certain tendency to discuss physical boundary crossing in a way that resonates with textual boundary crossing. Textual productions always create their own aesthetic boundaries to manage the contingency of their identities. But bound up within that security of creation is the knowledge that such boundaries are themselves artificial.

While Lionheart's imprisonment in the film, *Theatre of Blood*, may seem to control the threat he poses to the safety of art and criticism as a repository for fears of human contingency, the film's mocking self-reflexivity dissipates the boundary between Lionheart's vengeance and our own reality. Anthony Greville-Bell's script is at once clever and groan-inducing; John Hickox's direction uses a bevy of extreme high/low angle shots that are both disconcerting and excessive. But among all this excess there is a striking economy of performance, as Phelim McDermott – adapter of the film to the play – points out: "although a camp film, [Vincent Price's] performance never is. There is at the heart of the film something quite touching which

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[17] *Theatre of Blood* appeared during the rise of horror in the 1970s when, as Morris Dickstein argues, the "surge" of the genre "suggested currents of disquiet that were not always visible on the surface of our national life." Coming out of the counterculture revolutions of the 1960s, the 1970s saw a turn towards paranoia and fear of governmental conspiracy that inverted postwar Communist paranoia of the 1950s. The most potent horror films of the decade [like *The Exorcist* (1973) and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974)], in Kendall R. Phillips' words, were "increasingly pessimistic and now openly apocalyptic." Morris Dickstein, "The Aesthetics of Fright," *Planks of Reason: Essays on the Horror Film*, eds. Barry Keith Grant and Christopher Sharrett (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2004) 51; Kendall R. Phillips, *Projected Fears: Horror Films and American Culture* (Westport, CT: Praegar 2005) 122.

we hope to capture in our own version."[18] The play itself inspires raucous laughter from the audience – from its revelry in punning to its stage-blood bath.[19] But that touch of something true at the "heart of the film" makes *Theatre of Blood*'s scene of adaptation striking. The very unreality of language that the dangerous supplement of writing threatens to expose moves further away as Shakespeare's words are not merely dramatized but brought out of language and into life. Rather than *either* dramatizing textual violence *or* doing violence to Shakespeare's language, Edward Lionheart manages to do both. Lionheart, by cannibalizing Shakespeare's plays and destroying the bodies of the critics who encounter his performances, disrupts modes of displacement that Elliot sees at work in incarnational adaptations and the criticism about them.

Further, by turning this film about Theatre into a play about Theatre, Simpson and McDermott's *Theatre of Blood* removes the mediating safety of the film screen. The blood from the murders that, in the original 2005 production, Lionheart (Jim Broadbent) gleefully spatters towards his captive spectators threatens to get blood on the audience's hands as well as on his own. The added subplot about the development of the British National Theatre, in which *Theatre of Blood* was produced, also shatters the fourth wall of the production so that the location of the fear and the audience are literally in the same space. Similarly, the front of horror so unfrightening that it courts the audience's laughter sends the purpose of horror films, the assurance that "fear will be aroused, then controlled," round again.[20] The emotional distance that the critics believe their reviews effect becomes the conduit through which Lionheart converts his shame and rage about the critics' rejection of his identity into their personal fear for the safety of their bodies. Lionheart is so serious that the effects of his murders threaten to seep out of the theatre critic world and even out of the fiction itself. If the boundaries contain nothing, perhaps the *nothing* beyond their being is also what these repositories of bodies and texts protect *us* from.

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[18] Phelim McDermott, "Author's Notes," *Theatre of Blood* (London: Oberon Books, 2005) 3-5. 4.
[19] Souvenirs sold at the British National Theatre, where the play premiered, included individual bottles of stage blood that audience members could take home and enjoy.
[20] Dennis Giles, "Conditions of Pleasure in the Horror Cinema." *Planks of Reason: Essays on the Horror Film,* eds. Barry Keith Grant and Christopher Sharrett (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2004) 37.

"Critical Miscalculation"

For the most part, the references to Shakespeare in *Theatre of Blood* and its theatrical adaptation function as allusions. The references are not all identified for the extra-diegetic audience and as Thomas Pendleton asserts in his overview of the film "it is truly remarkable that although obviously a commercial film, it repays repeated viewings with new delights and the more, I think, the more one knows about Shakespeare."[21] Diegetically, however, Lionheart's murders function as adaptations rather than simple allusions. The critics he kills are dragged into the performance (more or less literally); the scenes he performs are both enacted in a different medium (life rather than Theatre), and are narratively suited to Lionheart's revenge.

The opening credits of Hickox's film warn that we are watching a text that will not operate within prescribed textual boundaries: Title cards for *Theatre of Blood* are intercut with scenes from silent film adaptations of Shakespeare. Whether or not the sources are entirely clear to the viewer, popular Shakespearean cues (Elizabethan clothing, sword fights) are all there. On one hand, these silent film moments refer to the style of Edward Lionheart's performances. The critics who hated Lionheart always accused him of "madly overacting" and the histrionics of early silent film implicitly compare to Lionheart's own.[22] On the other hand, the film clips correspond to the medium of *Theatre of Blood* rather than to Lionheart's theatrical performances. Like his performances, the clips allow an earlier mode of production to resurface. Jack Devlin, *Times* critic of Simpson and McDermott's stage adaptation, complains that Lionheart played Shakespeare as if "nothing had changed in the last twenty or thirty years."[23] The criticism is that Lionheart's large style of acting is at odds with contemporary theatrical sensibilities. He

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[21] Thomas Pendleton, "What [?] Price [?] Shakespeare [?]," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 29.2 (2001): 135-46. 144.

[22] *Theatre of Blood.* Dir. Douglas Hickox. Perf. Vincent Price, Diana Rigg, and Ian Hendry. MGM: 1973. For more on silent film performance conventions see Roberta E. Pearson, *Eloquent Gestures: the transformation of performance style in the Griffith Biograph films* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

[23] Lee Simpson and Phelim McDermott, *Theatre of Blood* (London: Oberon Books, 2005) 41.

represents both a lack of progress and an unreciprocal relationship between art and criticism: "Whatever we said, he didn't seem to hear it" (41). Horror scholar Morris Dickstein argues that, "going to horror films is a way of neutralizing anxiety by putting an aesthetic bracket around it" (Dickstein 54). The silently gesticulating actors in the clips remind us that we, too, cannot necessarily hear what they have to say; their words are bracketed off from our experience of the text. The opening credits of *Theatre of Blood*, by integrating clips from films so different than the one we are about to watch that they seem like another medium entirely, indicates how artificial "aesthetic brackets" really are. That medium instability suggests that fiction and art do not always work the way audiences, especially critics, think they should.

Aesthetic messiness is something *Theatre of Blood* plays with from its very first murder. The Theatre Critic from *The Financial Times* is called to evict some tramps from one of his properties. Although the critic's wife warns him that his horoscope predicted that March would be "a difficult month" ("Ah, Ides of March?" he muses) he goes anyway. When he arrives, the tramps rise against him, corner him against a plastic sheet, and stab him – Caesar-style – to death. Setting the camera on the opposite side of the plastic sheet, Hickox creates a screen (not unlike a cinema screen) that the knives of the tramps tear through as often as they do the critic's body. Finally, a bloody mess, he tears through the screen entirely. A police officer, standing idly by, steps in front of the critics removes his costume to reveal: Vincent Price as Edward Lionheart. Price's star persona (his very public identity) does double duty here – the extra-diegetic audience both knows he will be the star and suspects what kind of sinister character he will be. The anonymous officer immediately gains a presence that gives the critic's final words real meaning. As the critic falls to the floor the shot cuts to an extreme low-angle shot from below the floorboards. We look up at his face: "You; it's you. But you're dead." Solemnly, Price replies "No, another critical miscalculation on your part [...]. It is you who are dead. I am well."

The moment of Lionheart's appearance reveals the wide "critical miscalculation" that will make the rest of the narrative events possible. If the final border between life and the

undiscovered country has been destabilized then no boundaries are guaranteed.[24] The critic turns towards the floorboard, his gaze implicating the unassigned point-of-view camera (and thus the real film audience) in his death. To clue in any remaining unknowing viewers to the *Julius Caesar* performance that has been in progress, Lionheart (Price) launches into a monologue: "Friends, Romans, countrymen…". As he does so, a single drop of blood runs over the floorboard towards the camera lens. For this shot, we have no second mediating screen to protect us and as the second drop drips towards us, glinting in the sun, the camera cuts away.

While neither the film nor the play seems to pose any threat of world apocalypse, they play out an artistic apocalypse, where the boundaries among film, theatre, writer, audience, performer, history, reality, and fiction are repeatedly crossed. Yet by fashioning this reality as simply another medium in which he can perform, Lionheart's most disconcerting act is to reveal that one does not have to be an artist to be vulnerable to the threats his living adaptations pose. At the same time, while this boundary crossing is frightening, the only saving grace also seems to be that the boundaries can be continuously adapted. Threatening the viewer with the breakdown of boundaries between art and reality, and the subject and object of fear, Edward Lionheart, relieves his own fears about his absence of self by the way he uses bodies as placeholders. External identities, his actions imply, are only constructed through engagement with different media. The *Financial Times* critic literally rips through the first mediating screen that failed to protect him. As the blood of Lionheart's first victim drips towards the viewer, our own comfort in aesthetic brackets threatens to dissolve.

The only line of defense against Lionheart's sinister adaptations seems to be the critical distance we, the film's audience, can take from them; this isn't serious horror of the apocalypse. This film is silly, referential, allusive; instead of feeling the fear it provokes, we can laugh at it. That is the same stance taken by all of the critics in the film, but their critical distance fails to

[24] Lionheart did, as we later learn, use Hamlet's "To be or not to be" speech as an epigraph to his apparent suicide.

protect them. Ironically, the *Financial Times* critic had been called to the scene under the pretense that the police "needed someone with real authority." The critics' false authority fails to manage either the threat posed by Lionheart to their bodies or the fear Lionheart's own pronounced lack of a personal self resurrects. The critics, however, are not meant to be sympathetic victims. They are, Frank Ardolino eloquently affirms, "inflated idiots masquerading as arbiters of taste."[25] Nevertheless, displacing the victim as the expected object of empathy is another way that the two versions of *Theatre of Blood* play with existential fear. If the critics are not people we fear *for* and Lionheart is not really a creature we can foster fear *of* we are left with an unpleasant freedom. The choices left to us have been made unsavory: we are mad as Lionheart, fatuous as the critics, clueless as the police, or as pliable as Lionheart's own phantom audiences.

Lionheart's revenge tragedy may physically kill the critics as they killed his professional identity in reviews, but it is not a performance for them alone; Lionheart wants to implicate everyone in his actions. Flush from a performance as Shylock (who, heedless of his monetary worth, chooses to take his pound of flesh from Antonio) Lionheart steps forward to take his bows as the empty theater in which he performs erupts in deafening applause. "I'll make an actor of you yet," he tells Dickman just before he cuts out the critic's unfeeling heart. The catch is that Dickman is convinced to participate in this "Living Theatre" as part of "audience participation." In some crucial sense, then, the choice of Dickman is arbitrary; any one of the formerly unappreciative phantom audience members might just as easily have been forced to act.

"We've all spilled our guts,"[26] and other crossovers

All throughout the film, the critics and police try to use their knowledge of Shakespeare's plays to prevent Lionheart's murders – the critics with their own literary memories and the police

[25] Frank Ardolino, "The Melodramatic Grand Guignol in *Theater of Blood,*" *Shakespeare on Film Newsletter* (April 1991): 9.
[26] Simpson and McDermott 15.

by frantically reading through printed copies of the plays. In the play, the critics never even have recourse to the Shakespeare texts; they are bound to the space of the abandoned theatre to which Lionheart has lured them. "None of us can find a way out," complains Chloe Moon of the *Observer* (Simpson and McDermott 28). But all of the characters from the two texts fail to stop the murders because they assume Lionheart will be entirely faithful to Shakespeare's plots in his Living Theatre adaptations (that he will not, for instance, actually allow Shylock to take his pound of flesh), that he will represent the text's accepted identities. The critics also fail to save themselves because they assume that Lionheart's performances are the product of his own idiosyncratic insanity. What Lionheart's victims cannot share with their colleagues is that he forces them to hear and account for their own reviews of his work just before he kills them. Lionheart forces his victims to reconsider their assumed critical distance from the maddening play of dissembled identities that his adaptations stage.

Devlin's assertion that only Lionheart "would have the temerity to rewrite Shakespeare" is undermined by the fact that the critics' bodies and minds are both necessary for the adaptations to proceed. While the critic's roles in their own Shakespearean deaths are not necessarily of their choosing, they each participate in them, falling prey to the horror cliché of wandering around unattended when a killer is on the loose. While they fault Lionheart for not hearing their criticism, they never consider that criticism might be reciprocally affected by performance – that its identity is also contingent. Even the play's *Guardian* critic, Sally Patterson, who claims to truly believe "that unless theatre criticism can change – adapt – it will become extinct" fails to see that her own assessment isolates the adaptation of criticism from art rather than placing them in a nexus (Simpson and McDermott 22). The critics want to pick and choose the ways that aesthetic, emotional, and physical boundaries are crossed. Lionheart's work, however, indicates that to be "more than a mere reviewer," is to recognize that the relationship among aesthetics, human identity, and human bodies are "more real" and permeable (22).

Simpson and McDermott's play accentuates this permeability by playing with theatrical conventions. While on the search for/ run from Lionheart, three of the critics caught in the abandoned theatre gather in a dressing room that *"employs the theatrical convention whereby there are no walls but the boundaries of the space are defined by furniture and props, which would be placed against the walls"* (56). The three find themselves unable to exit despite the fact that the door is "not locked" and they believe they cannot break down the wall because, as Merridew admonishes his colleagues, "This is not Hollywood my dear. In the real world doors are made to be stronger than the human frame. That is their *raison d'être.* If we could just break them down willy nilly, there'd be no point in having them" (57). But as the others drift off to sleep under Lionheart's spell, Oliver Larding finally "*sees the set for what it is; a room with no walls*" (61). While Larding simply and "*gently steps through*" the walls and "*smiles to himself at the oddness of what has happened,*" he cannot see, as the audience does, that if what he perceived as reality before was always an artistic conceit then he won't be able to trust his instincts now. If the props and furniture merely give a contingent identity to a space with no real walls, then what danger is Larding still in? He misses that, as Devlin has already noticed, everyone "stepped out of reality when [they] walked into this theatre" (42). If the *raison d'être* of a door is to resist the human frame then the *raison d'être* of theatre is to exist as a space outside of reality. "Isn't that [stepping out of reality]," Lionheart's accomplice daughter asks, "supposed to happen when you walk into a theatre" (42)? If nothing else, what Lionheart's adaptations of theatre into reality indicate is that in this narrative, reality is a medium whose identity is as changeable, and its self as intrinsically absent as those of the humans who move through it. The first piece of formal criticism that we hear in both the film and the play, after all, is the line cut from one of Maxwell's reviews: "Juliette McGowan attacked the role of Madame Chandebise with both hands…and strangled it to death" (11).

In light of such common border crossing, Edward Lionheart's most important performance as a murderer-adapter is one in which one of the critics takes the starring role as

Othello. Lionheart threatens to "make an actor" of Dickman, but Psaltery walks right into *Othello*. Peregrine Devlin, our erstwhile critic-hero, summarizes the play for the police: "A malicious man [Iago] persuades his benefactor [Othello] that his wife has been unfaithful and drives him into murdering her."[27] In Lionheart's seventies update of the tale, his Iago dresses as a masseuse to trick Mrs. Psaltery into a compromising position. Psaltery returns home and, hearing her groans of pleasure, wastes no time in flying into a jealous rage smothering her with the pillow as he cries, "Down, strumpet!" The ruse is fascinating because it is deeply entrenched; Lionheart has been visiting the house for weeks – "You know how much I look forward to your visits," Mrs. Psaltery croons. That integration of the murder plans into the everyday fabric of his victims' lives is the strongest indication that Lionheart is not merely revenging himself on the critics *as critics*, but bringing out how little control they have over their bodies and how poor a conception they have of their individual identities. "Lionheart certainly knew what his weakness was," Devlin says of the jealous Psaltery. Lionheart revenges himself on Psaltery by letting Psaltery expose this kink in his identity construction: his fruitless search for self-identity had been managed by his bodily control over his wife. That murderously jealous identity had been mediated by Psaltery's immersion in criticism and art. However, Lionheart's strategy of revenge exposed that identity management by taking his narrative adaptations of art into reality, disturbing as he did so the delicate balance that Psaltery had struck with his demons. All of the critics, we realize, are killed because their own fatal flaws would not let them see how Lionheart might target them: Maxwell's pride comes before his fall as Caesar, Merridew's gluttony leads him to consume (*Titus Andronicus*-style) the dogs he calls his children, Dickens's/Dickman's lust cuts out his heart, and Larding's greed leads to a Clarencian drowning in a butt of malmsey. They've so long used their public identity as critics to mediate the excesses of their privately chosen (and socially unacceptable) identities that they think the borders between them have become

[27] It seems interesting, at least, that Devlin describes Othello as Iago's benefactor, as opposed to just his supposed friend and superior officer.

immovable – that their identities are their selves. The only stable aspect of human existence, the human body, is immediately put in danger by Lionheart's embodied Other.[28] His adaptations are doubly frightening because they also massacre the Shakespearean aesthetic bodies into which the critics had invested all of their public identity stock.

Even the "entire might of the London police force" cannot protect the critics from their miscalculation about Lionheart's aims. After Lionheart's first two murders, all of the critics have a police detail assigned to them, but the false security that the police presence provides only increases the critics' vulnerability. In a horror film context, the hapless police are a necessary component of the genre, as Lionheart's impersonation of the police officers in the first scene made so abundantly clear. The police presence in the film, the kindly but useless detective and his enthusiastic yet equally useless partner, represent the dominant social order. They are physical manifestations of the wider policing function that has controlled (or that we believe controls) Western society since the nineteenth-century.[29] But as repressive as the surveillance of contemporary culture may be, it might also be something we all take comfort in. If someone is always watching us, then someone is always watching out *for* us. The complacency of such a position literally comes under attack as Lionheart overturns the apparent power relationships among art, criticism, and audiences. Quality judgments on art and artists can make critics and audiences feel safe, but that very sense of security allows deeper anxieties to subsist under the surfaces of the work.

This emotional targeting is what finally makes Lionheart so frightening and so difficult to repress; the critics keep walking into his traps because they see the theater and performances they criticize as unrelated to themselves when, at least in Lionheart's plan, their criticism of his

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[28] Ken Hirschkop and David Shepherd argue: "self-Other relations are a perpetual see-saw on which neither party can ever achieve ascendancy over the other. The site of this struggle is the body, because it is through the body that one becomes vulnerable to the Other" (161). Ken Hirschkop and David Shepherd, *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory,* Reprint ed. (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2001).

[29] Here, I am drawing on D.A. Miller's analysis of the policing function in nineteenth-century British novels (wherein, he argues, everyone is always under surveillance by everyone else). D.A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1988).

overacting was a simple repression of the echoes of themselves they saw in this work. They used "quality" used as a shield to protect them from dealing with the homology. Simpson and McDermott put Lionheart's implicit target into writing. When the seven critics arrive at the abandoned theatre, they all sport letters that "each promise something different" (13). The texts themselves serve as bait, the distractions that draw the critics in and keep them occupied so that Lionheart can, in his own words, teach them that "make believe is more real than you thought" (44). In his original performances, Lionheart aimed to "be" the character, to take refuge the identities Shakespeare wrote for him. What he aims for in his revenge is to disrupt his victims' control of the personal identities they've constructed for themselves. "These fingers," Lionheart tells his Joan of Arc before she fries to death in a hair dryer/electric chair, "can stir up your deepest fears and then wipe the slate clean" (72).

Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow: Accruing Value in *The Talented Mr. Ripley*

Lionheart himself constructs his many identities through a mélange of Shakespearean monologues – he knows, even if we will not admit it, that there is no Lionheart apart from the one he has constructed in Achilles and Hamlet and Richard III. It is, Lionheart confesses one critic in the play, "almost as if my very life had taken on a Shakespearean aspect" (22). His daughter and accomplice, Miranda, tells Jack Devlin: "When I was little I imagined that before he went to bed he peeled off the face he was wearing, and underneath was someone I'd never known" (69). While her implication is that this person beneath is the "real" Lionheart, what the sentence actually says is quite different. Beneath the mask of performed emotions is "someone" – neither a possessor of true emotion nor the essence of Lionheart himself. Lionheart's performance of identity is culled from an extensive chain of allusion, the core of which is "never known." His many scenes of adaptation bring that emptiness to light.

Scholars, in their own pursuit of meanings, have been quick to point out the allusions to Henry James throughout Patricia Highsmith's *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (1951), which make Tom

an agent as well as a subject of adaptation.[30] The self-hating Tom may identify himself as a faulty text to be rewritten, but he also effects the adaptation of fictional texts into reality. When wealthy Herbert Greenleaf asks Tom Ripley (a poor young man of obscure origins) to lure his son Dickie back home from Italy, he very much has the script for the adventure in his mind: "Mr. Greenleaf was chuckling again, asking him if he had read a certain book by Henry James.

> 'I'm sorry to say that I haven't sir, not that one,' Tom said.
> 'Well, no matter.' Mr. Greenleaf smiled."[31]

The novel that Tom has not read is James's *The Ambassadors* (1903). Later, on his first-class transatlantic crossing, Tom tries to find the book. In an encapsulation of the class mobility issues with which Highsmith is concerned, Tom – who comes to desire Dickie's uppercrust lifestyle as much as he desires Dickie – finds that "first-class passengers were not allowed to take books from the cabin-class library" (35). Tom never reads the novel. So even in moving up Tom finds that class stands in his way. This reference to James has been seen primarily as a marker of class difference or a sly clue from Highsmith that her rewriting of the Jamesian Americans Abroad plot (where the lifestyle and not the life becomes the target) will be very different than the original.[32] Mr. Greenleaf's initial question, his knowing smile, marks Tom as an enactor of the James plot; his assurance that Tom's lack of knowledge is "no matter" gives Tom free reign over the material. Assuming that his version of the ensuing plot will be adapted to bring Dickie home, that reality is merely another medium into which this stable tale can be adapted, Mr. Greenleaf

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[30] Andrew Wilson, *Beautiful Shadow: A Life of Patricia Highsmith* (NY: Bloomsbury 2003) 192-193. Further references will be cited parenthetically as *Beautiful Life.* Kenneth Payne, "Tom Ripley's American Way of Life in Patricia Highsmith's *The Talented Mr. Ripley,*" *The Lamar journal of the humanities* 27.2 (2002): 33-41. 39-40.

[31] Patricia Highsmith, *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992) 34.

[32] Golson 20, Fiona Peters, "The Contraction of the Heart: Anxiety, Radical Evil and Proximity in Patricia Highsmith's Ripley Novels," *Cultural Expressions of Evil and Wickedness: Wrath, Sex, Crime,* ed. Terrie Waddell (New York: Rodopi, 2003) 190-191. 190; Edward A. Shannon, "Where Was the Sex? Fetishism and Dirty Minds in Patricia Highsmith's *The Talented Mr. Ripley*," *Modern Language Studies* 34.1 (Spring 2004): 16-27. 25; David Cochran, *American Noir: Underground Writers and Filmmakers of the Postwar Era* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000). Cochran notes that Henry James replaced Theodore Dreiser as a literary icon for postwar liberals who chose individualism and the "natural social order" over radical politics (6). Since Cochran rightly places Highsmith outside of this ironically mainstream liberalism, her use of James in this way suggests a critique of their position.

lets Tom go his own way. But Tom, despite his efforts to perform the role of a trustworthy vessel for the mission, is terrified. In a brief mirror scene, Tom catches himself in the mirror and realizes that he has a "pained, frightened expression […] still on his face" (24). With no access to the text Mr. Greenleaf wants him to adapt, frightened Tom can only try to escape it: "he knew as soon as he hit the lobby he would fly out of the door and keep on running, running, all the way home" (24). Tom, the unknowing audience/ rebellious adapter, goes on his own way, aware of his source material's existence but unable to access its authority. *The Ambassadors* represents the false promises of stable sources: a text that gives comfort to Mr. Greenleaf but which means little to Tom. Like the critics, whose knowledge of Shakespeare Lionheart uses against them, Mr. Greenleaf assumes that his allusion to one text will guarantee *Tom*'s actions.

Tom shares Mr. Greenleaf's impulse to root his actions in a stable precursor text, but Tom identifies a very different authority for his adaptation. Tom's friend, Cleo, hearing of the trip, exclaims: "'*Tom*-mie! How too, too marvelous! It's just like out of Shakespeare or something!' That was just what Tom thought too. That was just what he had needed someone to say" (27-28). Why Tommie "needed someone to say" that his excursion was "just like out of Shakespeare or something" suggests Tom's efforts to accumulate cultural capital. But as the novel continues it becomes clear that he is not just using Shakespeare as an allusion to the status he hopes to acquire through his adventure; it is an aim to stabilize the identity of the man who undertakes the adventure, Tom himself, through a fictional referent. Tom, readers of Shakespeare may later realize, imagines himself in *Macbeth*: "to think of tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow being Dickie Greenleaf" (126)![33] As Alex Tuss also points out, Tom resembles Macbeth in both his usurpation of another's place and in his ability to "dissemble and equivocate to escape detection."[34] Harold Bloom, in a different context, has argued that the mere act of reading or experiencing *Macbeth* makes us all "murderers in and of the spirit" (518). More than

[33] William Shakespeare, *Macbeth* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1967) V.v.19.
[34]Alex Tuss, "Masculine Identity and Success: A Critical Analysis of Patricia Highsmith's *The Talented Mr. Ripley* and Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club*," *Journal of Men's Studies* 12.2 (Winter 2004): 93-102. 95.

Psaltery, whose jealousy allows him to be tricked by Lionheart into playing Othello, Tom as Macbeth comes from within – a preexisting capability that Mr. Greenleaf's opening the door between fiction and life merely allows; he has a murderous capability that Cleo inadvertently validates. In Anthony Minghella's adaptation of Highsmith's novel, Tom (Matt Damon) shares this allusion with Dickie who, going through Tom's bags exclaims, "I love that you brought Shakespeare with you, but not clothes." For Tom, like Lionheart, Shakespeare provides the alienating armor of identity (Lacan 6). But Tom is more willing to improvise than Lionheart.

Bloom's analysis draws the connection between the play and the morbid delight we take in Tom's adaptation. If Tom is (as he so desperately seems to be) silently adapting *Macbeth* (the story of a man who kills to attain his rightful identity) then so are we all; we have a "terrified sympathy" with Macbeth as we do with Tom (Bloom 517). Minghella's Tom later uses *Macbeth* to interpret Dickie's handwriting. On the back of a postcard Dickie copies out two key lines: "Stars hide your fires,/ Let not light see my black and deep desires" (I.iv.II.50-51). Tom tells Dickie that the writing, which hovers above the lines, reveals his vanity. But Tom's allusion sharing literally plays out the function of his later actions.

Asking Dickie to copy out his source text onto a postcard adapts the text to a new medium and appropriates it for increased circulation in the world; the postcard can be shared and mailed – it is an everyday medium of communication far more portable than Tom's old volume of Shakespeare. Further, Tom uses that adapted text as a way to interpret Dickie's true self – one that the adaptation both reveals and stabilizes. This poor player, who struts and frets upon the stage, relishes the performance opportunities afforded by his murder and subsequent impersonation of Dickie; "He began to feel happy even in his dreary role as Thomas Ripley" (194). Because Tom hates "going back to himself as he would have hated putting on a suit of shabby clothes" he displaces his fear of his own emptiness with the pleasure of repetition with a difference: "He took pleasure in it, overdoing almost the old Tom Ripley reticence with strangers, the inferiority in every duck of the head and wistful, sidelong glance" (194). While to

Highsmith's readers and Minghella's audience, these references to James and Shakespeare remain allusions that may be ignored or dismissed, for the characters they are the texts that form the bases of their changing life stories.

Tom and Dickie's Contingency

Although a successful writer in her own right, when Patricia Highsmith published *The Talented Mr. Ripley* in 1955 she was probably best known for being the author of the novel from which Alfred Hitchock's *Strangers on a Train* (1951) had been adapted. *Strangers on a Train* was Highsmith's first published novel and its tale of two mirror characters, one of which is an amoral and obsessive murderer, set the tone for much of her subsequent work. Her novels and short stories explore the gray space that contains fluid concepts of good and evil. Highsmith's work tended to be underappreciated in the United States where her writing was too middlebrow for intellectuals and too morally ambiguous for mass culture consumers (she was hugely popular in Europe where she spent her later years). Nevertheless, she won the Edgar Award from the Mystery Writers of American in 1956 for *Ripley*. Andrew Wilson (who won the award himself for writing Highsmith's biography) recalls that in searching through Highsmith's "literary remains" he found the award certificate,

> turned ochre with age, mildew pitting its surface. On the scroll Highsmith had added, 'Mr Ripley and...' before her own name. She thought that her character Tom Ripley […] deserved the honour as much as she did. 'I often had the feeling Ripley was writing it and I was merely typing,' she said.[35]

Highsmith's declaration that "Ripley was writing" his own novel while she was "merely typing" suggests that Mr. Ripley and his talents do not belong to her novel, but that the novel belongs to them – that her text is a product of everything Ripley's feelings and actions represent. Rather than being safely subsumed by the text, Ripley preceded it, dictating to Highsmith as he later would to Jude Law's Dickie in the film. The text is somehow a true representation of Tom's self.

[35] Andrew Wilson, "Talk of the Town: Murder He Wrote – The Prize for Most Dismal Life," *The Independent on Sunday*, 16 May 2004, par. 4.

Moreover, in influencing her writing on the award, Ripley still threatens the space outside the novel. Her statement is a conceit of artistic inspiration and a claim on the reality effect of the text. But, it is also a conceit that relieves Highsmith of responsibility for what her text contains; her character has his own stable self. Much like Tom's choice of a suit that "he had never seen Dickie wearing" in impersonations of his victim, Highsmith positions the novel as of her, but not from her: it is beyond her and the novel's existence becomes contingent on Tom's pleasure. That sense of contingency – the contingency through which her printed text exists is accentuated by the fact that Highsmith *writes in* the attribution to Ripley.

Tom Ripley becomes enamored of Dickie Greenleaf and his lifestyle and so he kills Dickie and assumes his identity. Tom is meticulous in his subsequent reproduction of Dickie – not necessarily in his fidelity to adapting himself to Dickie's appearance (though he is proud of that) but in his recognition of the tangible details that constituted Dickie's social identity. Tom re-parts his hair, changes his voice, and gains weight all because he recognizes that, besides his birth certificate and passport, these contingent details are the only things that make Dickie Dickie. Tom's understanding of the way Dickie must be carefully reconstructed as an individual in the world resonates with later postmodern rejections of the "essential essence" of texts. The pieces of identity that Tom needs to cobble together to recreate Dickie are the only elements that constitute his being in the world and his whole body goes to filling up Dickie's absence: "to plug up the hole means originally to make a sacrifice of my body in order that the plentitude of my being may exist" (Sartre 613). Everyone's existence, in other words, is entirely contingent on their outward expression and in Highsmith's world those contingent identities are primarily formed through communication media (letters, checks, wills, newspaper articles). Her own decision to retroactively write in Tom's existence on the Edgar award creates him as an object of the past for the future in a manner little different from Tom's own recreation of Dickie.

All of the aesthetic boundary crossings in Edward Lionheart's performances displace the perpetual absence of self that requires him to identify the critics as objects of his anguish.

Lionheart's existence in the diegetic present must be explained through a literal recreation of the past (a flashback in the film and a restaging in the play) when he is brought back from death by the tramps. Returning to life, he ponders the nature of his existence: "My other self is dead […] / I have turned away from my former self; / I will from henceforth rather be myself, / Mighty and to be fear'd / Away with slavish weeds and servile thoughts! / I shall forget myself to be myself" (Simpson and McDermott 54). His excessive use of versions of "self" showcases its lack of essence. Lionheart deals with that insubstantiality, finally, by refusing to fear his critics and choosing, instead, "to be feared." As I discuss above, Lionheart's method of creating "myself" is to *re*create his final repertory season of Shakespeare on the bodies of the critics who ignored and reviled him. Self-referentiality, Lionheart's action concedes, is the only way to even conceive of the self. But that echoing existence requires validation in the world. Theatrical performance, Sally Patterson reminds Lionheart and the theatre audience, "is very much a thing of the moment, once the moment has gone…." (24). Lionheart's object of revenge is not merely the institution of theatre criticism, but the circle of critics who denied him the last Critics Circle Award he had the chance to receive. In an ephemeral mode of creating existence (live theatre) reviews and awards become the only proof of past – they garner not only cultural capital but also promise to constitute Lionheart's longed-for proof of self. In the film, the first thing the tramps clamor for when Lionheard falls into their midst is not Lionheart's wallet, but the award that he had snatched from the critics before leaping off of the balcony.

Highsmith's Tom refuses the knowledge of being and nothingness even while he accepts it in practice. Tom recognizes, for instance, "that Dickie had never used the subjunctive as often as it should be used in Italian. Tom studiously kept himself from learning the proper uses of the subjunctive" (136). As the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it, subjunctive forms "are employed to denote an action or a state as conceived (and not as a fact) and therefore used to

express a wish, command, exhortation, or a contingent, hypothetical, or prospective event."[36] In other words, Dickie's language was restricted to facts. Tom can see the flaws in not recognizing hypotheticals. Nevertheless, he chooses to maintain Dickie's faulty constructions. Tom gravitates towards Dickie's lazy certainty because it justifies his own desire for security. Tom remains faithful to the Dickie that was, ignoring, as it suits him, the Dickie he might have been. He remembers one specific example of Dickie's incorrect conjugation as they waited for a late friend: "It should have been 'sie arrivata' in the subjunctive after an expression of fearing" (136). Although Tom is beginning to realize that such "an expression of fearing" may be required he chooses instead to "studiously" avoid "learning the proper uses" of such expressions.

Furthermore, the subjunctive as the mood of uncertain futures is an ideal linguistic characterization of Highsmith's nineteen-fifties America. As David Cochran points out, the whole post-war period generated an atmosphere of "contingency" where "the social order barely contained a moral chaos" (3).[37] And so Tom, running from his empty past in a way only a sociopath could accept with ease, doesn't just retain Dickie's difficulty with the subjunctive – because it is always the "contingent, hypothetical, or prospective event" that Tom fears his empty self won't be able to manage. As Tom digs himself further and further into the hole of Dickie's existence and his own, he simultaneously fears that the being of Thomas Ripley will disappear and that it won't; he is startled by "how strangely easy it was to forget the exact timbre of Tom Ripley's voice" (122).

Ripley's Reflections: What Tom Fears

In the middle of Highsmith's novel there is a mirror scene where Tom rehearses for the murders and identity theft that he will effect later in the novel. Finding himself alone in Dickie's bedroom, Tom dons "a new-looking grey flannel suit he had never seen Dickie wearing" and "re-

[36] "subjunctive," *The Oxford English Dictionary* <www.oed.com>.
[37] Film noirs like *In a Lonely Place* (Ray 1950), Cochran points out, were perfect examples of this contingency.

parted his hair and put the part a little more to one side, the way Dickie wore his" (78). In Dickie's guise, Tom plays at killing Marge – the woman he sees "interfering between" the two men. The whole scene is enacted "into the mirror in Dickie's voice" (78). But Tom is not alone. The real Dickie discovers him and their uncomfortable confrontation leaves Tom "petrified with fear" (79). Certainly, this is a narrative crux of the text and its most disarming scene of adaptation, where an adapter caught by the source in the act. From this moment, the relationship between the two men progressively deteriorates until Tom finally realizes how easy it would be to kill Dickie: "he could simply say that some accident has happened. He could—he had just thought of something brilliant: *he could become Dickie Greenleaf himself*" (100, my emphasis). That flash of brilliance, while new to Tom, has been implied to the reader throughout the novel – and the mirror scene is the crux that makes Tom's leap relatively unsurprising. Tom has been becoming Dickie all along. Highsmith's syntax here is especially off-putting. The phrase "he could become Dickie Greenleaf himself" has flagrantly unstable referents. It says that Tom, he himself, "could become Dickie Greenleaf." But the construction also contains that hero-worship, that Tom could become, more reverently, "Dickie Greenleaf himself." Dickie Greenleaf, in this sentence, is both the object and the medium of Tom's efforts to "become" and the uncertainty of identity is a major source of fear in the novel.

Indeed, both Chris Straayer and Katherine Golsan see this mirror scene as a key to the identity reformation that structures the rest of the novel. Straayer argues that where Highsmith's novel represents the "poststructural disobedience" of both sexual and class identity, its first film adaptation, *Plein Soleil*, indicates a fixity of both identities that resonates with 1950s discourses on the subject.[38] Andrew Wilson agrees that "the flux-like nature of identity and the difference between appearance and reality" is the central theme of the novel (*Beautiful Life* 192). But even when identifying the fluidity of personal identity in Highsmith's novel, current critics tend to

[38] Chris Straayer, "The Talented Poststructuralist: Heteromasculinity, Gay Artifice, and Class Passing," *Masculinity: Bodies, Movies, Culture,* ed. Peter Lehman (New York: Routledge, 2001) 115-129. 128.

focus on homosexual identity as the core of the text – as if sexual preference is the true core of human being. Edward A. Shannon, considering the novel in light of Minghella's adaptation, argues that Dickie's murder results from the playboy's insinuations of Tom's homosexuality: his "unmasking of Tom's true identity" (Shannon 19). Shannon finally concludes, though, that Tom's identity lies in a very American expression of commodity fetishism.

It is clear throughout the novel that Tom gets more pleasure from commodities than from people. He has disdain for "those bastards" who consider themselves Tom's friends and adores the pieces of his new life as Dickie: "The cuff links, the white silk shirts, even the old clothes […] they were all his and he loved them all" (31; 126). For all of these critics, the affective representations of fear in the text always have fixed objects: class and/or sexual identity. The link makes sense because, David Cochran argues, "Homosexuality, in the Cold War period, served as a common bogeyman in much the same way communism did" (Cochran 126). That is, discourses on sexuality and modes of consumption tended to intersect. But Kenneth Payne contends that the Cold War era did not so much produce the commodity identity Tom creates as it "exaggerated," beliefs, "deep in the American grain" that Highsmith wanted to caution her reader against accepting too easily: namely, the "romantic idealization of the American self" (Payne 40). Perceived class, commodity and sexual identity drive Tom's actions but they do not belong to him.

Even if there is an *American* conception of self, however, what Tom cannot see in the mirror is any sort of individual self apart from those identities. Russell Harrison has thoughtfully explored Tom's commodity fetishism as an existential phenomenon. He argues that Tom's "flight into objects," while very much a criticism of American commodity culture, might more properly be understood as

> a fear of a loss of control. Commodities are the perfect focus for this cathexis because it is their essence to be possessed. The power that such objects possess in Highsmith's

> novels derives from their role as the repository of emotions whose "correct" object lies elsewhere. It is the power of suppression and displacement."[39]

Like Lionheart who grasps onto the Critics Circle Award as the object that will prove his existence to the world, Tom grasps onto commodity objects to prove himself to himself. What's frightening for Tom is not only that he *knows* there are only false identities imposed on him by American mass culture, but also that he cannot see alternatives beyond them – because when he looks at himself he recognizes only vague fear.

Katherine Golsan significantly, for my argument, points out that Tom's mirror scene with Dickie is one of the few that exists in both of the film adaptations of Highsmith's novel: *Plein Soleil* and *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (Minghella 1999). "In all three works," Golsan argues, "These key scenes each stage a different version of Tom's project and point to the final outcome in terms of how the new identity will be constituted" (21). But if we consider the Tom of Highsmith's novel – the amoral sociopath – as our figure of adaptation, then there is a second mirror scene that must also be considered. I would agree that Dickie's discovery of Tom in front of the mirror is the narrative center of the text but the second mirror scene holds the affective core of the text. The performance of the first mirror scene, for Tom, is planned and conscious – a moment where he can – in Lacanian terms – be at once the Self and the Other. In the second mirror scene, as his identity-theft scheme threatens to unravel, Tom catches himself unawares:

> He caught sight of himself in the mirror, the corners of his mouth turned down, his eyes anxious and scared. He looked as if he were trying to convey the emotions of fear and shock by his posture and his expression, and because the way he looked was involuntary and real, he suddenly became twice as frightened. He folded the letter [a threat from the police] and pocketed it, then took it out of his pocket and tore it to bits. (Highsmith 191)

If the first scene is a recognition by Others of what lies behind the image Tom projects, then the second scene is a self-recognition – his recognition that there is no self behind the identities he projects. This unfixed fear lies behind all of the adaptations Tom effects. Hazel Barnes, explicating Sartre's position on emotion, argues that emotion, rather than having any independent

[39] Russell Harrison, *Patricia Highsmith* (New York: Twayne 1997) x.

power "is simply a way by which consciousness chooses to live out its relationship to the world."[40] The third-person narrator that throughout the novel almost exclusively focalizes through Tom tries to rationalize the image as a performance little different from his performance of Dickie: he looked "as if he were trying to convey the emotions of fear and shock" (191). But his recognition that the fear manifested in the mirror is "involuntary and real" leaves him "twice as frightened" (191). Rather than dealing with this fear Tom turns to the text in his hand for mediation, and tears it to pieces: unable to destroy his empty, helpless, self (which, having no solid existence, he cannot destroy) he destroys the text that allowed such fear to manifest and adapts to the new situation it prompts.

Real Nobodies: Ripley's Audience

The clash of internal and external forces at work in *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, and the unsettling texts that clash can produce, also taps into the affective climate, the dialectic of fear and security, in 1950s American culture. From one perspective, the Cold War environment fostered threats from the communist aggressor (both external and internal) and produced a culture of fear that belied the polished images of security and prosperity flooding the marketplace.[41] "For many people," Joanna Bourke notes, "the Cold War was more frightening than the Second World War" (259). That culture of fear manifested in underground art "that thrived on chaos, ambiguity, irony, and juxtaposition—characteristics notably absent from the period's dominant middlebrow culture" (Cochran xiii). On the other hand, many Americans – those masses who consumed midcult and popcult media – found real confidence in the expanding American economy.[42] In the wake of the Great Depression and World-War II, young American

[40] Hazel E. Barnes, "Translator's Introduction," *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* (New York: Philosophical Library 1956) ix-xliv. xv.
[41] See Cochran. See also Andrew J. Dunar, *America in the Fifties* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 2006) and Randall Bennet Woods, *Quest for Identity: America Since 1945* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2005).
[42] For more on intellectuals in this period see Norman Jumonville, *Critical Crossings: The New York Intellectuals in Postwar America* (Berkeley, CA: Berkeley UP, 1991). The term "midcult" was coined by

heterosexual couples expressed their newfound hope in two key ways: consumption of market products and production of babies. These two expressions of capitalist confidence fed off of each other.[43] But considering the baby boom from the perspective of the country's underlying malaise, the production of more bodies seems to increase the level of risk to the American population; the more bodies there are the more internal and external threats there can be to notions of identity that are already unstable. Tom manages these fears by projecting them onto two types of bodies: human and textual.

Linda Hutcheon argues that adaptations allow us to be both Self and Other at once (174). I have been arguing that in the figure of the murderer-adapter, we can see how defensive adaptations manage the fear of our lack of self. Adaptations among media allay the emptiness in our being by accentuating the different textual bodies in which a narrative life can exist. In the scene I describe above, the letter from the police, written to Dickie Greenleaf, asks him to "present" himself" — it is Dickie's "presence [that] would be most appreciated" — to answer questions about the supposedly missing Thomas Ripley (191). If Tom could have produced a perfect copy of Dickie, he would not feel such fear but looking into the mirror reminds him that such a copy would be impossible. The copy is impossible because his Dickie must be adapted into a version Tom can perform and impossible because even performing a perfect Dickie would not erase Tom, however empty a vessel he might have been. After being Dickie Greenleaf for months, he can put on the old Tom, but with disgust: "he hated going back to himself as he would have hated putting on a shabby suit" (192). Adapting to the circumstances is a necessity for Tom's survival, but his ability to adapt does not, itself, protect him from fearing the impossibility of his multilayered presence — the "real" Dickie, Tom's performance of Dickie, and Thomas Ripley, — fulfilling all of his needs at once. Tom defends himself against the real fear lying

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Dwight MacDonald. MacDonald argued that middlebrow culture "was not mass culture made better, but high culture made worse. He identified "Midcult" as Norman Rockwell, the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, *Harper's*, the *Atlantic*, the *New Yorker*, the Book of the Month Club, *Readers' Digest*, and the Luce publications, among other insufficiently intellectual ventures" (Jumonville 152).

[43] Andrew J. Dunar, *America in the Fifties* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 2006) 174-175.

behind his performance of Dickie Greenleaf. He recognizes that he cannot reproduce both Tom's and Dickie's "presence," that his performance will never be complete, but he channels that anxiety through another medium: a text that he can tear "to bits."

In this scene, the medium becomes the "real" mechanism that allows Tom to manage his fear. Tom may use objects to prove himself to himself, but he uses his control of texts and media of communication (even if that control is in his imagination) to prove his existence to the world. Highsmith develops the sense of Tom's performances as *adaptations*—and consequently of Tom himself as an embodiment of adaptation—early in the novel. Tom, of course, is amoral; he is a sociopath whose only real concern is Tom. Tom is also a performer – a chameleon continuously adapting to different roles as he sees fit. One minute, "he began to play a role on the ship, that of a courteous young man with a serious job ahead of him" and the next, "a young man with a private income, not long out of Princeton, perhaps" (34). But beneath it all is his own face: "he had always thought he had the world's dullest face, a thoroughly forgettable face with a look of docility that he could not understand and a look also of vague fright that he had never been able to erase" (34).

The constant fear that haunts Tom drives all of his performances. Tom's chameleon-like transformations are specifically aimed to efface a fear, a "vague fright," he doesn't understand to produce "A clean slate" (35)! The fear, in many ways, derives from Tom's sense of his own emptiness: not merely an unstable identity but his fearful sense is no such object as "self" at all. There are only identities. As Straayer puts it, Tom's talent's for impersonation "springs into action in the absence of any essential identity" (123). Of course what Straayer inadvertently suggests is that there is, in some sense, an essential identity that can fulfill the presence Tom knows is impossible – an object that can be held up for cataloguing.[44] The critical recurrence to

[44] Straayer's point is part of the insightful argument that "*Purple Noon* maintains a notion of fixed identity in relation to both class and sexual orientation while *The Talented Mr. Ripley* asserts identity as artificial and flexible. What in the film is class passing is a matter of becoming in the novel" (128). Nevertheless, I

the object of self in *The Talented Mr. Ripley* suggests an underlying hopefulness in their writing. A hope that, *really*, the self has the being of an object rather than a hole of nothingness that requires "a sacrifice of my body in order that the plentitude of my being may exist" (Sartre 84).

The reader roots for Tom because he is the character through which we are exclusively focalized – the rest of the characters are ciphers – but the very fact that the excessively empty character is our only point of empathy is equally frightening. For instance, when Tom thinks, as he regretfully reassumes the role of Tom Ripley following his threat from the police, we see in him the same social anxieties we saw pushing for space in *Pride and Prejudice*: "Hadn't he learned something from these last months? If you wanted to be cheerful, or melancholic, or wistful, or thoughtful, or courteous, you simply had to *act* those things with every gesture" (Highsmith 193)? Tom's machinations suggest that is no existence prior to the performance of it. There are no true selves, but merely the characters we perform. For Tom to realize this, he has to murder and dispose of the body who most closely represents what he wants to be – because there literally isn't room for both of them in the same gray flannel suit. When Tom decides to become Dickie, the decision is less about the person and lifestyle that Dickie represents than about "the real annihilation of his past and of himself, Tom Ripley, who was made up of the past, and his rebirth as a completely new person" (127). The ease of that annihilation makes Highsmith's Ripley frightening, but it can only happen because Tom himself is so frightened of that emptiness – the armor of an alienating identity that is slipped on and off as easily as a costume: the versatile "cap" he dons on the ship or that suit Tom slips on and off as he transitions between Dickie and Tom.

But part of the reason sociopathic murderers make compelling central characters (Jeff Lindsay's Dexter Morgan and Brett Easton Ellis's Patrick Bateman are more recent examples) is that they are very good at playing the social games everyone plays. They are empty, but they also

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would suggest that artificial flexible identities are still objects and all of Tom's becoming is process of protecting himself from considering that knowledge.

have the capability to be charming; they would do very well in Jane Austen's ordered world. They are reminders of how empty most of our social interactions are, how we pretend to react "correctly" to situations. Fictional sociopaths are not frightening simply because of their actions, but because they hint that they are just like us and that we are just like them. Graham Greene, for one, cites that uncomfortable knowledge as essential to Highsmith's fiction:

> with a sense of fear we think, "Perhaps I really belong *here,"* and going out into the familiar street we pass with a shiver of apprehension the offices of the American Express, the centre, for so many of Miss Highsmith's dubious men, of their rootless European experience, where letters are to be picked up (though the name on the envelope is probably false) and travellers' cheques are to be cashed (with a forged signature).[45]

In literary terms, if Highsmith can convince us that Tom is a text that is adaptable into Dickie she forces us to reconsider not only the implications of textual adaptation, but of the perhaps unspeakable impulses behind it: Those texts to which we have lent so much cultural weight may, after all, contain nothing. That fear of textual emptiness is the reason Tom is so persistent in imagining how others will react to his adaptations. Tom, in fact, plays out the whole scene of adaptation himself: he forges Dickie's signature all over the place, he imagines and composes the melodramatic news report that will come out when they find the bloodstained boat in which he killed Dickie, and holds "imaginary conversations with [Dickie's friends] Marge and Fausto and Freddie in his hotel room" (121). Tom painstakingly visualizes the way his fictions will play out for others and finds the most important part of his adaptation is how well he captures the spirit of his subject: "The main thing about impersonation, Tom thought, was to maintain the mood and temperament of the person one was impersonating, and to assume the facial expressions that went with them. The rest fell into place" (131). Nevertheless, though Tom's understanding of Dickie is perfect, he likes to preserve all of Dickie's imperfections. He maintains his distinction from Dickie – keeping him as the reference point against which his performance will always be

[45] Graham Greene, "Introduction," *The Snail-Watcher and Other Stories* by Patricia Highsmith (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970) xi-xii.

matched. But in that distancing, he can never completely characterize "Dickie" or "Tom" again. Tom's performances, his rehearsals, his subjunctive consideration of his audience's reactions, are frightening because with each permutation of Dickie or Tom or James or *Macbeth*, the adaptations threaten to reveal not only their own emptiness but also the emptiness of their "original" texts. While the circulation of new versions, of repetitions with a difference, among different media ensures the texts' survival, it also continuously questions the value of that survival in the absence of any "essential identity." To this point, the newspaper article that finally ends Tom's fears that he will be persecuted for Dickie's murder leaves him "shaky and lightheaded": "In any case," it reads "it is futile to search for 'Richard Greenleaf' any longer, because even if he is alive, he has not his 'Richard Greenleaf' passport…." (287). Indeed, 'Richard Greenleaf' was only ever 'Richard Greenleaf' through his representation in other media, and without such mediation it is, indeed "futile to search for 'Richard Greenleaf' any longer" (287).

Guilt Beyond Reason

The emotionally driven commitment to proving the substance of the original and its adaptations – their contribution to the sum of human knowledge – is the last we hear from Tom, as he measures his present "luck":

> He considered that he had been lucky beyond reason in escaping detection for two murders, lucky from the time he had assumed Dickie's identity until now. In the first part of his life fate had been grossly unfair, he thought, but the period with Dickie and afterwards had more than compensated for it. (Highsmith 283-284)

In Tom's stream of consciousness, he shifts almost imperceptibly from considering the media of his various performances (from forgery to murder and impersonation and back again) to considering the emotional implications of those actions: the *fairness* of life and whether or not the performances "compensated" for the "grossly unfair" past that still haunts him. It turns out that they do: Tom manages to make himself Dickie's sole heir and is thus well "compensated" in the

capitalist economy in which he functions. He is convinced of his happiness and coaxed away from his fears by the tangibility, the authenticity, of the text that brings him the news: "Was it a joke? But the Burke-Greenleaf letterpaper in his hand felt authentic – thick and slightly pebbled and the letterhead engraved" (289). The letter grants him authentic freedom from his fears and his past and, most importantly, "the freedom, like everything else, seemed combined, his and Dickie's combined" (289).

What has use, for the version of a man that Tom has become, is his ability to purchase happiness and calm. Adaptation has become the way station between Tom's fear and his pleasure. It grants stability to the protean quality of self that haunts him. He finds relief in his performance as Dickie because he can accept that *Dickie* only exists in other media (his will, his letters, his clothes) and that Dickie's body was just a vessel that Tom could substitute with his own presence. The objects—the signs of class and culture—that Dickie's now forever unchanging identity grant Tom an otherwise unattainable stability. The signs of Dickie's mediated existence become a repository that sufficiently manages Tom's fear of emptiness; knowing he can never be rid of the fear, Tom embraces its material effects. It matters less what kinds of objects Tom finally uses to mark an identity but that he needs to mark identity by external means at all. As in his exuberance that someone, *anyone*, would validate his life plans by comparing them to Shakespeare, Tom's love for recognizable "quality" objects is a figure for his own desire to be a recognizable fixed subject; the better the quality the more likely to be recognized (this is his Critics Circle Award). Tom's last words in the novel are to a taxi driver: "'To a hotel, please,' Tom said. 'Il meglio albergo, Il meglio, il meglio!'" – the best.

But while Highsmith's Tom is momentarily freed from the "vague fear" that plagued him by accepting his role as the consummate consumer (he returns to the ebb and flow of emotional and material pleasure and defensive adaptation in Highsmith's four subsequent Ripley novels), Anthony Minghella's Tom reflects that fear as guilt. The defining quality of Tom Ripley may be his lack of guilt as much as it is his constant fear – but what both emotions manifest is anxiety

about the future (the fear in Highsmith) or about the past (the guilt in Minghella). For Katherine Golsan the protagonist's guilt is a figure for Minghella's guilt as an adapter: "In keeping with his version of Tom Ripley, adaptation, like murder, has moral consequences." Tom (Matt Damon) wants nothing more than "To erase everything, starting with myself."[46] What that desire to erase himself suggests, what the film as a whole propones, is that beneath all of Tom's shifting performances of identity, there is a stable "essential" identity beneath them all. The "vague fear" that Highsmith's Tom "had never been able to erase," reveals the frightening anxiety that to erase the fear would leave an echoing emptiness in its place rather than producing a new face. But displacing the fear with guilt, lets Minghella's adaptation produce tangible, stable identities that Tom simply refuses to grasp.

The guilt that composes the surface emotion of the film masks the existential fear of Highsmith's novel – to feel guilt suggests that we are *not* empty. Some of the most potent criticisms of the film reflect this defensive adaptation's offensive against the absence of self. Jude Law was nominated for an Academy Award for his performance as Dickie Greenleaf and many reviewers complained that a major fault with the film was his disappearance from it. Ravaging Matt Damon's performance as Tom, James Berardinelli locks on Law's Dickie as a stable alternative: "Oddly, Jude Law, who portrays Dickie, seems to have all the qualities that would make a good Tom."[47] New York Times critic Janet Maslin halts her own review to rhapsodize:

> A word about the film's Dickie Greenleaf: this is a star-making role for the preternaturally talented English actor Jude Law. Beyond being devastatingly good-looking, Mr. Law gives Dickie the manic, teasing powers of manipulation that make him ardently courted by every man or woman he knows. During the first half of the film, Dickie is pure eros and adrenaline, a combination not many actors could handle with this much aplomb.[48]

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[46] *The Talented Mr. Ripley,* dir. Anthony Minghella, perf. Matt Damon, Jude Law, Gwyneth Paltrow, Philip Seymour Hoffman, and Cate Blanchett, DVD, Miramax 1999.
[47] James Berardinelli. Rev. of *The Talented Mr. Ripley,* Dir. Anthony Minghella, Reelviews. 25 Dec. 1999.
[48] Janet Maslin, "Stealing a New Life: Carnal, Glamorous, and Worth the Price," Rev. of *The Talented Mr. Ripley,* The New York Times 24 Dec. 1999: E1-E2. E1.

Throughout the reviews, in fact, it is the supporting players who receive the most praise – especially Cate Blanchett as Meredith Logue and Phillip Seymour Hoffman as the ill-fated Freddie Miles. Ironically, while nearly all of the reviews comment on plot relationships between the novel and the film or on the psychological shift of Tom from a sociopath to a tragically repressed homosexual (implicitly: his true, stable identity – the same stable identity that most contemporary critics of the novel also recur to) none of the critics seem to notice that the supporting players belong almost exclusively to the film. They compare Minghella/Damon's tragically guilty Tom (mostly unfavorably) to Highsmith's Tom and his "charming amorality." Both Minghella's script – as it adds and expands on the role of minor characters in the novel, lends weight to the other bodies, making Tom's attacks on them and his transgressions on them worthy of guilt. They make Tom and his troubles more completely the Other that threatens ordered society rather than a troubling embodiment of its fears. Lending the minor characters in Tom's performances more weight – physically and narratively – the film adaptation makes the pasts that Highsmith's Tom sheds so easily, more threatening to the whole social order. His final murder of Peter Smith-Kingsley is forced, as it were, by the physical reappearance of Meredith Logue and her family: bodies Tom thought he had left behind in his time as Dickie. The reviewers praise the charm of *The Talented Mr. Ripley*'s embodied supporting characters while, like Berardinelli, simultaneously questioning Matt Damon's "flat" performance and his inability "to generate any sense of menace." They condemn Minghella for mitigating Tom's "charming amorality" with pop-psych guilt, but are only selectively interested in fidelity to Highsmith's novel.

While it is not my aim to outline the values and failings of Minghella's film *as a film*, it is important to remember that Tom succeeds in his travails *because* he is not in the least threatening to those around him. His menacing charm for the reader lies in our access to his internal consciousness (terrifying though it is). What Tom cannily understands is that his charm lies in the very emptiness of which he is so afraid – his appeal to others, therefore, lies in what he allows

them to imagine about him (and what he imagines about them). While on his transatlantic crossing: "His aloofness was causing a little comment among the passengers. […] He imagined the speculations of the passengers. Is he an American? I *think* so, but he doesn't act like an American […] he must have something very important on his mind" (Highsmith 40). The pliability of identity is what Tom revels in because it keeps him from considering that the "something" on his mind is *nothing*. The seeming turn in Minghella's adaptation toward reinstituting the 1950s consumerist illusions of stable identity nonetheless also functions on the spectrum of being and nothingness.

As if in a prefatory answer to critics of Minghella's guilt-ridden defensive adaptation, Sartre called guilt the one possible virtue under existentialism:

> It is to pretend that one is born with a determined self instead of recognizing that one spends one's life pursuing and making oneself. It is the refusal to face the anguish which accompanies the recognition of our absolute freedom. Thus guilt is a lack of authenticity, which comes close to being the one new and absolute virtue in existentialism. (xxxiii)

Minghella's film about guilt remains frightening not because we are coconspirators in the futures Tom plans, but because we are constantly reminded of the body count that Tom leaves behind. It also remains frightening because for all of the professions that Minghella's Tom is running away from his identity as a homosexual or a social-climbing American consumer, he is the central representative that for all his efforts to adapt, all of the emotions that he can feel and all of the attitudes he can affect, Tom is what we fear most: that each of us is, after all, a very "real nobody" – a *body* that, like Peter Smith-Kingsley and Lionheart's critics, will have to be disposed of.

Wiping the Slate Clean

When Edward Lionheart tells his Joan of Arc that, "These fingers can stir up your deepest fears and then wipe the slate clean," it sounds like a threat (Simpson and McDermott 72). Tom Ripley, of course, yearns for "a clean slate" (Highsmith 35)! To Tom, Lionheart's threat would

be a promise that the vague fear of nothingness that informs all his actions can be raised and wiped away, leaving not a hole but a ready slate behind. Ultimately, the differing fates of Lionheart and Tom set up a model for defensive adaptation. Lionheart, his actions overtly tied to the success and authenticity in his artistic pursuits, dies. In the play, he is cut down by a final bad review from Devlin, who ends with a jade's trick: Lionheart's greatest crime, Devlin charges, is that he "imitates humanity so abominably" (Simpson and McDermott 94). Vincent Price's Lionheart sets his theatre ablaze, and in a stunning amalgam of King Lear and Quasimodo, dies gruesomely, thrust by a rush of fire from the roof and into the seats of the audience he never won over. And yet Devlin's final spoken review represses the perpetual absence of self towards which Lionheart's adaptations of theatre into reality gesture. The threat Lionheart poses and the fears he enacts are thrust back in to the world of fiction and criticism. "He did know," Peregrine Devlin concedes to the still perplexed police chief, "how to make an exit." Like a good horror story, *Theatre of Blood* reestablishes its aesthetic boundaries to dissipate fear. The only whisper that Lionheart's murderer-adapter might have residual effects is in the final shot of the still-burning theatre in Hickox's film, over which the film credits are superimposed.

Tom, whose performances adapt fears of the empty self to the many media forms that constitute identity in the world, lives on. The fear he contains is neither resolved nor stopped, but managed by the fact that he is "lucky beyond reason," his charm, and the refusal of Tom and others to consider what drives his assumption of Dickie's identity. Like Minghella's Peter Smith-Kingsley it insists that, "Tom is not nobody." Like Marge, that proclaiming there is a single "you" will make it so: "I know it was you - I know it was you, Tom. I know it was you. I know you killed Dickie. I know it was you." Edward Lionheart, we remember, saw the miscalulation of the stable "you": "You; it's you. But you're dead," insists the *Financial Times* critic. Solemnly, Lionheart, purveyor of fear replies, "No, another critical miscalculation on your part [...]. It is you who are dead. I am well." The murderer-adapter, in the end, sacrifices everyone else's bodies to substitute for his own absence—their adaptations and the circulation of those

adaptations express the fundamental selfishness that can accompany our frightful quest for self-identity: “you are dead.” Only “I am well.”

CHAPTER III

SWALLOWING GUILT: ADAPTATION AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN ANTHONY TROLLOPE'S *THE WARDEN* AND GEORGE COLMAN'S *THE IRON CHEST*

No one can read the will of John Hiram. The source text that drives the plot of Anthony Trollope's *The Warden* (1851) only exists through the description of Trollope's narrator, in editorials in a London newspaper, in letters, in bills presented at Parliament, and in the first installment of a novel. The allegations of improper adaptation cast against George Colman's play, *The Iron Chest* (1796), are based on more accessible texts: William Godwin's *Enquiry concerning Political Justice* (1793) and *Caleb Williams* (1795). In both cases, however, the charges of infidelity imputed to the adapters of these otherwise unrelated texts – an ancient will and a popular novel – serves to defend against the deeper guilt the texts tap into.

Fidelity, as I discuss in my introduction, has always been a nasty word in adaptation studies. As a term primarily linked to legal contracts, fidelity language suggests that "unfaithful" adaptations have somehow broken trust with the "original" artist and the public who encounters the texts. As Robert Stam argues persistently, even liberal language that asks whether the "spirit," rather than the "letter" of a text has been met suggests that fidelity is the standard by which adaptations should be judged.[1] This persistence of legal language in adaptation assessment, I will suggest in this chapter, may actually say less about the artistic legitimacy (or illegitimacy) of the practice than it does about our senses of social responsibility. All of the texts in this chapter ask the same questions: Why does it seem impossible for the law to be both properly interpreted and to be socially just? How responsible is the individual for social

[1] Stam has made this point in various pieces, but see particularly: Robert Stam, "Introduction: The Theory and Practice of Adaptation," *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Adaptation* (London: Blackwell, 2005) 1-51.

injustice? Social desire to see "justice" done to these texts may, in part, be linked to the desire to see justice done in a public sphere. These texts are part of a long tradition of literature that indicates how hard it is to come by justice among men. While true relief for social injustices may continuously recede in the horizon, these texts demonstrate how adaptation has become one means of palliating our insatiable, but often ineffectual, social consciences.

A Mouth-piece for Justice

In the German folktale, "The Singing Bone," collected by the Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm during the nineteenth-century, the basic story is this: Two brothers set out to find a Wild Boar that has been terrorizing the countryside. The King has promised his only daughter in marriage to the man who captures it. When the good-hearted younger brother beats the elder to the prize, the elder kills him, buries the body, and takes the credit and the princess for himself. Years later, a peasant passing by the younger brother's burial place spots a white bone and fashions it into a mouth-piece for his horn. The peasant is understandably surprised when he tries to play the instrument and the bone begins singing: "My brother slew me, and buried my bones / Under the sand and under the stones: / *I* killed the boar as he came from his lair, / But *he* won the prize of the lady fair."[2] The peasant brings the incredible instrument to the King, who understands the meaning of the song. The guilty brother is drowned in the river; the younger brother's bones are recovered and given a beautiful monument.

In this story, the body of one treated unjustly is literally fashioned into an artistic medium. As I argue in Chapter II, victims' bodies can be useful objects for the murderer-adapters to rage against the contestability of their own identities and their ever-receding self-identities. Here, the younger brother's body is bereft of his identity but *only* in this state can the crimes, as the narrator tells us twice, come "to light" (137 and 138). Only when the body of the wronged

[2] Jacob Ludwig C. Grimm, *Household Stories Collected by the Brothers Grimm*, trans. with illustr. by E.H. Wehnert (London: Abbey and Co., 1843) 135-138. 138.

brother is formed into an instrument, "a mouth-piece," can the hidden guilt and neglected social responsibility allow action to be taken, if not justice to be served (138). Like a text shifting among media this step towards justice requires transformation of the body into an artistic medium. Although there is no "original" text from which the song is culled, the boy's need to set the story straight – a need literally in his bones – demonstrates a deep anxiety that justice be served. Even without the chance of recovering his stolen identity, the boy's bones lament the miscarriage of justice. That adaptation of the *purpose* of the younger brother's skeleton becomes the only way the right tale can be told. Rather than holding a body together, his singing bone reveals the cracks in the social system in which it has now functioned in two very different capacities. The song that his body is adapted to sing reveals the crime latent in the elder brother's heroic story – the story that the kingdom had so easily accepted.

The crimes the bone "sings of itself" are two-fold (138). The fratricide is forefront in the indictment and the charges against "my brother" heighten the particular injustice of this murder. But, significantly, the bone devotes a whole couplet not to his body's early death but to the fact that the rightful rewards of his life were administered unjustly. While the arm of the law – the King – responds to the bone's song by killing the elder brother "for his punishment" he can do little to rectify the social injustice of his daughter's misappropriated hand in marriage (138). Nor can he, by giving the brother's bones a "splendid tomb" make amends for the inability of the law to catch the injustice early enough to make any real difference – to *not* give rewards to the guilty brother. That charge pricks against the social conscience of the reader. How responsible is the King for his belated response to the injustices inflicted on his people? From his hands-off solution to the Wild Boar "which laid waste the fields of the peasants, killed the cattle, and often tore to pieces the inhabitants," to his failure to gauge the character of their hero, the King tends to let social solutions come to him (135). Perhaps he might try, in future, to avoid efforts to save the country that pit brother against brother.

The King's failures as arbiter of justice speak to the precarious order to which this kingdom returns at the end of the tale. Everyone at court, after all, had failed to interrogate the wicked brother's assertion that the boar had torn his sibling to pieces; "as he did not come back, everyone believed the tale to be true" (137). Their easy acceptance of "the tale" is undermined by the younger brother's offensive adaptation of the oral tale into music – an adaptation that reveals their social responsibility for his death. But if the singing bone's adaptation is retributive, the King's response to it is defensive. He can only reply by allowing his inadvertent complicity in the brother's guilt to be swallowed both linguistically (rather than confess he merely "could not deny the deed") and physically ("he was sewed up in a sack and drowned") (138). In my analysis of *The Warden* and of *The Iron Chest* as an adaptation of *Caleb Williams* and *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, the law becomes a structuring agent for the texts, but one whose strict interpretation is at odds with justice for the social responsibility that the texts contain. Rather than making broad claims about the nature of the real world legal systems, in this chapter I consider how these literary texts, their adaptations, and their receptions, represent artistic manifestations of underlying guilt about the individual's imperfect ability to reconcile a social conscience with the monolithic establishment of the "law" in civil society.[3] Out of the disjunction between the law and justice these texts generate overwhelming senses of guilt, guilt that is mediated by textual adaptation.

[3] Law and literature scholars navigate two courses of analysis: law in literature and law as literature. As Kieran Dolin has pointed out, law and literature are unusually intertwined: "law itself can structure literary representations" (3) Along these lines, James Boyd White has argued that "law *is* already literature, and thus any reading of either a literary or a legal text is at once an act of 'creation' and of 'translation' between discourses"(qtd. in Ward 20). Kieran Dolin, *Fiction and the Law: Legal Discourse in Victorian and Modernist Literature* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1999); Ian Ward, *Law and Literature: Possibilities and Perspectives* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1995); Dieter Paul Polloczek, *Literature and Legal Discourse: Equity and Ethics from Sterne to Conrad* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1999). Dieter Paul Polloczek makes a similar claim, from a different perspective, about the relationship between ethics and the law as represented in literature. Polloczek examines how "cross-overs" between literary and legal fictions demonstrate how literature only marginally affects "dominant" justice; texts tied to legal issues expose the "problematic relations" individual ethical impulses and their institutional equivalent (vii).

In many ways, my focus on guilt intersects with Peter Brooks' analysis of the cultural problem of confession.[4] Brooks argues that the performative speech-act of confession can "serve many motives—shame, guilt, revenge, self-justification, self-abasement—but the deeper sources of shame and guilt are blocked from confession by repression and resistance" (52-53). By extension, I argue that accusations of guilt in textual adaptation, like the act of confession, swallow deeper sources of guilt: defensive adaptations about the difficulty of assigning guilt justly become adaptations whose association with "the deeper sources of shame and guilt" is, literally, swallowed. Defensive adaptations that manage the disjunction tend to swallow the guilty subject whole. The result is that defensive adaptations about guilt leave their sources of guilt unprocessed and undigested. As they circulate in the public sphere, then, their strongest lines of defense become the fact that their infidelity to their sources is the only thing that their audiences can see.

Anthony Trollope's *The Warden* is not another iteration of the Cain and Abel story where blood cries out from the ground for justice. Nevertheless, the questions of social conscience and moral responsibility that the plot raises, and the characters' modes of dealing with those questions, take their cue from "The Singing Bones" scene of adaptation. In Trollope's novel, printed and spoken words cause no end of anguish and guilt. The slew of publicly circulated texts that question the execution of John Hiram's will have two things in common: they concentrate on Mr. Harding and the Church as the guilty parties in this supposed miscarriage of justice and they rely on indistinct or imprecise sources of authority. In response, Mr. Harding preserves his identity against an injustice he has no authority to make right by claiming the powers of both naming and adaptation. Trollope's hero adapts the messy stories of his alleged exploitation of a legal document, and the lives of several old men, to music.

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[4] Peter Brooks, *Troubling Confessions: Speaking Guilt in Law & Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000).

The Warden's Will

Anthony Trollope's fiction is rife with lawyers and legal complications. *The Warden* is of particular interest because of the way the "legal fiction" of John Hiram's will is explicitly and extravagantly absent in the novel; it is present only through representation in other media. As readers of Trollope's novel, we are repeatedly denied access to the will on whose proper or improper interpretation the plot and the emotion of the novel turns. Without a copy of the will to call our own, we can only watch the text's interpreters and adapters at work.

The facts were these: John Hiram died in 1434. John Hiram was a woolstapler whose will bequeathed his home and "certain meadows and closes near the town" for the retirement support of "twelve superannuated wool-carders" who were required to be natives of Barchester.[5] He appointed funds for the erection of an alms-house and a "fitting" residence for an alms-house warden who "was also to receive a certain sum annually out of the rents" for the meadows and closes (Trollope 2). Further, the precentor of the cathedral, if the "bishop in each case approved," might always have the option of "being also" the warden (2). For four hundred years the bishop of Barchester, under the auspices of the Church of England, presided over the execution of that will.

These are also facts: Wool-carding no longer a profession in Barchester, church officials "generally appointed hangers-on of their own" who were provided room and board and lived on a small daily allowance (2). The bulk of Hiram's increasingly prosperous estate had fallen to the annuity of the warden. In the novelistic "present time" of 1850s reform, "Murmurs, very slight murmurs, had been heard in Barchester,—few indeed and far between,—that the proceeds of John Hiram's property had not been fairly divided: but they can hardly be said to have been of such a nature as to have caused uneasiness to any one" (2-4). Nevertheless, the murmur did cause uneasiness to the Warden, Mr. Harding, who "had heard it" (4).

[5] Anthony Trollope, *The Warden* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 1998) 2.

The problem with legal documents, Trollope suggests, is that even if a law changes, the execution of the law in the past cannot. The "true question" of the novel may be: "Was John Hiram's will fairly carried out?" (21). The deep problem, however is that even if it was *not* fairly administered the debt to justice is one that Harding "could never repay" (20). Wills are especially fraught documents because the very nature of a "will" suggest that what is written can be identified as the literally true will, or intention, of its author. But no will could ever encompass all future possible changes of law and society, and (short of spiritualism) their authors are beyond reach. Left with the text, it becomes as much of a legacy as the property Hiram meant to distribute. The reformers' imputed guilt does not exonerate them from being slow to action, nor does Harding's sacrifice of his income and his name make the bedesmen (or their forebears) any richer: when Harding resigns at the end of the novel "the twopence a day [Harding's] own peculiar gift, must of necessity be withdrawn" (158). There is no remedy for past victims; like John Hiram, they are out of reach. Their grievances can never be answered even should monuments be erected in their name. What drives this plot is not money but questions of legal guilt (Who *deserves* what and who gets to decide?) and social responsibility (How do we determine, under laws meant to restrict human interaction, what we owe to our fellow men?). The will cannot arbitrate its own execution. So, what can we do with a text that does not sing of itself?

In *The Warden,* there are two key effects of the murmurings about the will: on one side there is the public, printed response engineered by journalists, politicians, reformers, and novelists who use the Hiram's supposed intentions as a reference point to support their individual causes. On the other is Mr. Hardings's defensive adaptation of the painful emotions raised by the controversy. John Bold, a wealthy reformer, and Archdeacon Grantly, Mr. Harding's son-in-law, both use fidelity rhetoric to support their "letter" (Bold) and "spirit" (Grantly) based interpretations of the will. Most critics note that Trollope treats the positions taken by both men with more than a touch of ridicule: "Bold is not right in how he prosecutes his reform, but

Archdeacon Grantly is not right in arguing for the status quo and Harding's right to such a comfortable sinecure."[6] But the will grants both men a background text to lend their own interpretations authority. John Bold finds advocates to support his suspicion that the warden earns more than he deserves. Grantly writes "somewhat loud" responses to this and other such wills in the form of "letters in the written press" and "the pamphlet signed 'Sacerdos' on the subject of the Earl of Guildford and St. Cross, in which it is so clearly argued that the manners of the present times do not admit to the literal adhesion to the very words of the founder's will" (6).[7] These types of responses emerge publicly in the formal legal system in the bills presented at parliament to regulate the execution of ancient wills. At the same time, the controversy becomes fodder for a set of texts that adapt the story to appeal to the social consciences of their readers.

John Bold and Archdeacon Grantly are personally invested in the outcome of the case (Bold is in love with Harding's younger daughter) but the controversy over the will and the questions of social conscience that it threatens to raise also become publicly circulated texts proliferated in all different media and telling a host of tales. So his readers don't miss the significance of the various printed versions of the tale that are being circulated, Trollope cordons off three of them into one chapter: Chapter 15 is titled, "Tom Towers, Dr. Anticant, and Mr. Sentiment." Tom Towers, editor of the *Jupiter* newspaper, writes a series of anonymous editorials about the case. These articles aim to manipulate their public's social consciences by minimizing deeper social guilt and maximizing specific guilt of Mr. Harding as an individual and the abstract institution of "the Church." Only in them, Towers declares, "could such a state of moral indifference be found" (53). K.M. Newton sees Trollope making a point about journalists

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[6] Timothy Ziegenhagen, "Trollope's Professional Gentleman: Medical Training and Medical Practice in *Doctor Thorne* and *The Warden*," *Studies in the Novel* 38.2 (2006): 154-172. 155.

[7] Trollope here references real life charity trust affairs and the relative importance to *The Warden* of the newspaper articles that were published in the *Times* during the 1850s has been explored by several critics and is almost always noted in analyses of the novel. See: Carol H. Ganzel, "*The Times* Correspondent and *The Warden*" *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (1967): 325-336; John Sutherland, "Trollope, the *Times,* and *The Warden,*" in *Victorian Jouralism: Exotic and Domestic: Essays in Honour of P.D. Edwards,* eds. Barbara Garlick and Margaret Harris (St. Lucia, Queensland, Australia: Queensland UP, 1998) 62-74.

in his scathing representation of Tom Towers' editorials on the Warden's guilt: "Newspapers are not interested in truth but in power through manipulating opinion."[8] The *Jupiter* editorials lay all responsibility at the door of one man. They focus the guilt on Harding, naming him as the subject of power in the case. Certainly, the named subject concerns Trollope – his greatest quarrel with Towers is not with his opinions but with the anonymity he takes as the editor: His narrator resents that "no one could answer him" (109). In that way, the editor makes his readers and the accused functionally helpless – they cannot truly address the source of the problem without the color of the editorials while Towers himself exists "knowing within his breast that he was a god"; if no one can answer him then he is beyond guilt and his conscience can be clear (110). If the narrator assigns guilt to Tom Towers and the Press for choosing to remain nameless and Tom Towers' editorials assign guilt to Harding by naming him, what both sides effect is an unquestioned implication that naming a source will so well localize guilt and everyone else will be relieved of responsibility. Implicitly: they will have been manipulated against their will.

These editorials give rise to two publicly circulated adaptations but, unlike the defensive adaptation that Harding composes later in the novel, these adaptations, staying faithful to the spirit of their dubious source texts from the *Jupiter*, magnify the guilt they contain. Like the singing bone's offensive adaptation, these texts sing the guilt of the Warden and the Church and thus seem to exonerate everyone else from any responsibility. The adaptations written by Dr. Pessimist Anticant and Mr. Popular Sentiment, Trollope's satirical performance of Carlyle's and Dickens's literary voices, have been seen as Trollope's effort to "purify Victorian realism" by raging against Carlyle, Dickens, and other writers who published in the midst of social crises rather than waiting to see how they developed.[9] Dr. Pessimist Anticant's adaptation of the *Jupiter* articles, by focusing on charity, removes the troubling helplessness inherent in executing

[8] K.M. Newton, "Allegory in Trollope's *The Warden*," *Essays in Criticism: A Quarterly Journal of Literary Criticism* 54.2 (2002): 128-43. 135

[9] Jerome Meckier, "The Cant of Reform: Trollope Rewrites Dickens in *The Warden*, " *Studies in the Novel* 15.3 (1983): 202-223. 220.

an outdated will. The guilt Pessimist Anticant inspires, by condemning "Our modern friend" is barely troubling to his reader (115). If the modern times are uncharitable it is "their" fault. You, the individual, can improve it be being so but bear no responsibility if you are not. Moreover, you can't possibly be as uncharitable as this one "godly man of latter days," the undeserving warden whose only accomplishment, besides remarkable greed, is that he manages to "swallow the bread prepared […] for these impoverished carders of wool" (115). Pessimist Anticant's commentary distances and distracts from the problems of Hiram's will even as he uses it as a centerpiece to his colorful plea for charity. In his zeal to indict Mr. Harding's lack of charity, he fails to propose means for more equitable modes of charity (good charity work is all in the past) or to imagine how the will itself might be more justly carried out (he has surely never read it).

In the same vein, Mr. Popular Sentiment's social problem novel constructs such an extravagant version of the "real" story that whatever effect his work has (and the narrator imagines it will have some) it will hardly be connected to improving charitable relations among men. What the narrator proposes Mr. Popular Sentiment's text will do, in fact, is distract the readers from social problems by focusing on sentiment for sentiment's sake rather than suggesting solutions or more responsible responses. Like Dr. Pessimist Anticant's rant about modern charity, which also calls on its readers' sense of abstract moral justice, Mr. Popular Sentiment's first number calls on transcendent notions of good and evil. The Warden is cast as a "Mephistopheles" who wears "huge loose shoes adapted to many corns and various bunions" (120). The problem here is not just the extremity but that these texts mask the fact that life is rarely so clear – that social problems are rarely situations of simple good and evil. While these two offensive adaptations are very different in content and style, each tale imputes social responsibility to others rather than allowing their authors or audiences to see themselves part of the systems they critique. That denial of personal responsibility, as we have seen in "The Singing Bone," is what makes continued social injustice possible.

Trollope, however, does not only represent misguided senses of social responsibility. Over the course of the story, Mr. Harding comes to believe that there is some justice in the charges laid at his door. He comes to believe that, intentionally or not, he has been neglecting his social responsibility to the poor by being paid so well to care for them. While the printed response sparks debate, and fosters Harding's emotional response, only Harding's mode of affect manages to finally have any palliative effect. Poor Mr. Harding is shamed into giving up his position and his income. The income is a painful sacrifice. Dr. Grantly's anger over the "unanswerable truth" that Harding owes to the bishop, the church, his predecessors, and his followers, his "unflinching assistance of perfect brotherhood in this matter" is disconcerting (71). But the guilt of his imputed social irresponsibility, his being "accused by others and not acquitted by himself," is unbearable (71). He knows, however, that he cannot answer his accusers, particularly the anonymous editorialist, in their own media. Archdeacon Grantly warns: "A man may have the best of causes, the best of talents, and the best of tempers; he may write as well as Addison, or as strongly as Junius; but even with all this he cannot successfully answer, when attacked by the *Jupiter*. In such matters it is omnipotent" (54). Instead, Harding answers the text in the medium with which he is most comfortable.

Throughout the text Harding's pain of guilt is insistently linked to his music. When Bold sets off to inform Harding of his plans to take legal action to see that Hiram's will is properly executed, he comes upon the warden just as he finishes playing his violoncello for the bedesmen:

> He walked on awhile in silence before he recommenced his attack, during which Mr. Harding, who had still the bow in his hand, played rapidly on an imaginary violoncello. "I fear there is reason to think that John Hiram's will is not carried out to the letter, Mr. Harding," said the young man at last. (19)

Here, the two modes of managing social responsibility split: the editorial and fictionalized accounts of Hiram's will displace social guilt by imputing selfishness and "moral indifference" to Harding and the executors. Harding's anxious playing "on an imaginary violoncello" directly manages the aspersions cast on his social responsibility – charges against which Harding is

otherwise helpless. At first, Harding avoids music because he fears it will be manifest his guilt: "for he knew how grievous a sound of wailing, how piteous a lamentation, it would produce" (76). But without the music, Harding finds himself at home: "doing nothing, thinking of nothing, looking at nothing; he was merely suffering" (74). Here we have a typical link between art and emotion but the distinction is that Harding finally deals with his social conscience by adapting it into the performance actions of his music.

Harding's defensive adaptation of his emotion into music is important because he doubts his capacity to deal with the words of the will *as words*. "I don't know," he tells attorney-general, Sir Abraham Haphazard, "whether I ever read John Hiram's will, but were I to read it now I could not understand it" (135). In Haphazard, Harding looks for an impartial mediator who can assess the literal meaning of the will's words. But when Sir Abraham "couldn't exactly say in so many words that Mr. Harding was legally entitled to, &c. &c., &c," Mr. Harding can only respond by playing a "slow tune on an imaginary violoncello" (135). The narrator, replacing Haphazard's words with "&c.," expresses his own sense that the legal explanation is insufficient. Harding's response, though, goes unquestioned. With all of the texts that tell Hiram's tale in public circulation, Harding finally has the textual backing (whether he has read any of the texts besides the *Jupiter* or not, he's heard the murmurs) to effect an adaptation of them that will defend him against the allegations cast his way.

As Haphazard and Harding's discussion of Harding's "sheer Quixotism" in insisting to give up his post because it is *just* intensifies, Harding finally finds words unsatisfactory and again reverts to his music to mediate his guilt:

> And, as he finished what he had to say, he played up such a tune as never before had graced the chambers of any attorney general. He was standing up, gallantly fronting Sir Abraham, and his right arm passed with bold and rapid sweeps before him, as through he were embracing some huge instrument, which allowed him to stand thus erect; and with the fingers of his left hand he stopped, with preternatural velocity, a multitude of strings, which ranged from the top of his collar to the bottom of the lappet of his coat. Sir Abraham listened and looked in wonder. As he had never before seen Mr. Harding, the meaning of these wild gesticulations was lost upon him; but he perceived that the

> gentleman who had a few minutes since been so subdued as to be unable to speak without hesitation, was now impassioned,—nay, almost violent. (137)

This scene is traditionally analyzed as a moment of comedy. How silly Mr. Harding must look! But Ramon Salidivar argues that it is also a scene showcasing "Septimus Harding's pathetic attempt to find a medium in which to express his desired emancipation from the rigid legal, clerical, and social codes to which he has been bound."[10] Harding may look ridiculous to Haphazard with his wild gesticulations, but rather than feeling pathetic Harding leaves the interview in a "glow of comfort" as his silent musical adaptation confirms his decision to resign his post: he leaves the guilt to others (137). Similarly, Earle Bo sees this moment as "the act of a particular private agent before a particular public audience performatively demonstrating his idea of what it is to act morally."[11] We must see Harding's performance as an adaptation because it is only in light of the flurry of other texts *about the will and its execution* that he can begin to imagine how he fits into this developing narrative of responsibility. His defensive adaptation may not see the same level of circulation as the *Jupiter* articles or the offensive adaptations by Dr. Pessimist Anticant and Mr. Popular Sentiment, but this performance before "a particular public audience" places it in the same realm.

The absence of music itself is significant in that Harding's passion swallows any possibility of hearing the music or of interlopers understanding its meaning. Harding's guilt finally becomes something he can control – can play at will. It appears to outsiders as silent noise, "impassioned,—nay, almost violent" but that does not diminish its effectiveness for Harding. The guilt of the wardenship is something Harding will leave behind. But, he promises Eleanor, he "will take the music" – the music will bury the guilt of the past behind him (102). Music contains that guilt and it becomes his refuge.

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[10] Ramon Salidivar, "Trollope's *The Warden* and the fiction of Realism," *Journal of Narrative Technique* 11.3 (1981): 166-183. 175.
[11] Earle Bo, "Policing and Performing Liberal Individuality in Anthony Trollope's *The Warden*," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 61:1 (2006): 1-31. 20.

With his musical adaptation in tow, Mr. Harding makes the decision to take action – any kind of action. His resignation at the end of the novel, and the letters he writes to confirm it, gives him power and power to declare his powerlessness repeatedly: "No, no,' he always says when so addressed, 'not Warden now, only precentor'" (165). As the spirit of John Hiram's will can never be properly fulfilled (confirmed by the failure to fill the position in the immediate aftermath of the affair), Harding retains the power established in his relationship with music and removes himself from the scene of guilt. That is the only way to combat his guilt and make his powerlessness to restore the will a sort of power in itself: He gives himself a new name. Indeed, both Hardings who resided in the warden's residence take new names. John Bold's strategy for dealing with his guilt – not of recognizing the injustices of the law itself but of embroiling Harding in the case – is managed in a similar fashion. Bold, after all, substitutes his textual fidelity rhetoric with emotional fidelity. Asking Eleanor Harding to marry him and promising to drop the suit, Bold defends against his guilt with the promise of marital fidelity and Eleanor becomes Mrs. Bold.[12]

By the end of *The Warden,* no one decides who is "right" or good or evil. The whole case of "The Queen on behalf of the Woolcarders of Barchester v. Trustees under the will of the late John Hiram" is dismissed (Trollope 122). The case breaks down "not in substance but on a point of procedure," on a technicality of improperly attributed defendants.[13] What we remember in the link here is that the whole premise of the case is a legal fiction because "Wool-carding in Barchester there was no longer any; so the bishop, dean, and warden, who took it in turn to put in the old men, generally appointed some hangers-on of their own" (Trollope 2). The bedesmen of the present time are no more legally entitled to the property than the warden.

[12] How well the eleventh-hour shift to marital fidelity manages Bold's guilt is open for debate, but by the opening of Trollope's follow-up to *The Warden*, *Barchester Towers* (1857), Bold has been dead many months.
[13] R.D. McMaster, *Trollope and the Law* (London: Macmillan Press, 1986) 113.

Despite this triumph of Harding's defensive adaptation over his social anxiety, however, *The Warden* also demonstrates the inherent problem in swallowing guilt that "The Singing Bone" only hints at. The emotional investment generated by the emphasis on social conscience finally has no effect on anyone but Harding. Though his adaptation fixes a localized problem it will not change the deeper problems presented by the novel, the fact that the system of law itself, its enforcers, and the people meant to benefit by it, do not consistently respond to shifting senses of social responsibility. It is much easier, as we have seen, for Mr. Sentiment to cast demons and angels, just as it is much easier for readers of *The Warden* to focus on how "clearly" wrong the many tales of Hiram's will are than how helpless we are to substantively refute them: for the reader, Hiram's will is nowhere to be seen.[14] We are treated to such descriptions of and "reprinted" responses to the will's contents. But the ace Trollope and his narrator hold is that the adaptations we read are always mediated through the narrator. The only element the reader is equipped to refute is the evil that all of the adaptations impart to Mr. Harding; Trollope displaces the reader's critical helplessness (one he imposes by refusing to excerpt Hiram's will) with an increasing sense of righteousness garnered from the instinct to defend Harding. The narrator's persistent qualification of facts, or his use of qualifications in relating the dialogue of his characters, finally mimics the effect of the murmuring that so disturbs Mr. Harding. Murmurs are indistinct. When Harding gives his final talk to the bedesman, we learn that "a sort of murmur ran round the room, intended, perhaps, to express regret at his departure; but it was but a murmur, and might have meant that or anything else" (158). Everything we hear through the narrator has a murmuring quality about it that displaces the possibility of real social change. The untapped social conscience that the execution of the will of John Hiram should spew forth remains whole and undigested, but nonetheless remains.

[14] Throughout the text, Trollope's narrator plays this doubling game: he cannot present facts without qualifying them because, like Hiram's will, these facts are open to interpretation once they are put into words.

Man Devouring Man

It's man devouring man, my dear,
And who are we
To deny it in here?
– Stephen Sondheim, *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*

Defensive adaptations, like editorials, can talk about the problem of legal guilt versus a more abstract social responsibility, without being required to fill the gap between them. Such an understanding of defensive adaptations may be particularly useful in exploring adaptations that emerge at moments of particular political turmoil, when the lower stakes they present may be equally (though unconsciously) attractive to artists, critics, and audiences. The discourse that erupts around William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* and George Colman's *The Iron Chest* distracted, and still distracts, those who encounter the texts from their inability to eradicate the guilt they contain. These adaptations from the brutal 1790s are disturbing because they engage readers and audiences in the same cycles of guilt and guilting that they represent in their narratives.[15]

The title character of *Caleb Williams* narrates Godwin's novel from his jail cell, he claims, "to console myself in my insupportable distress" (200). For years, this poor young man has been ruthlessly pursued and defamed by his wealthy former employer, Mr. Falkland. In order to explain the "theatre of calamity" that has been his life Caleb begins by giving his readers the history of Falkland's life.[16] Although he draws the history from other sources, especially from

[15] For more on the 1790s in Britain see: Damian Walford Davies, *Presences that Disturb: Models of Romantic Identity in the Literature and Culture of the 1790s* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2002); James A. Epstein, *Radical Expression: Political Language, Ritual, and Symbol in England, 1790-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Chris Evans, *Debating the Revolution: Britain in the 1790s* (London: IB Taurus, 2006); David S. Karr, "Effervescent Passions: Theatricality and the Division of Political Culture in 1790s England." Diss. Vanderbilt U, 2002; Paul Keen, *The Crisis of Literature in the 1790s* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1999); Ian Hampshire-Monk, "On not inventing the English Revolution: the radical failure of the 1790s as linguistic non-performance," in *English Radicalism, 1550-1850***,** eds. Glenn Burgess and Matthew Festenstein (New York : Cambridge University Press, 2007) 135-156.
[16] William Godwin, *Caleb Williams,* eds. Gary Handwerk and A.A. Markley (Ontario: Broadview Literary Texts, 2000) 55-434. 59. Further references will be cited parenthetically as *CW*.

Falkland's steward, Mr. Collins, he avows: "scrupulous fidelity restrains me from altering the manner of Mr. Collins's narrative to adapt it to the precepts of my own taste" (*CW* 179). This landowner, once known for his "indefatigable humanity" was driven to murder a relentlessly tyrannical neighbor, Mr. Tyrrel, who threatened his good name (*CW* 105). His true crime, however, is that he allows a farmer and his son who had clashed with Tyrrel in the past (The Hawkinses) to be executed for his crime. When Caleb goes to work in Falkland's home, years later, his "relentless propensity" to curiosity leads him to question why his employer, so seemingly good, now shrinks from intercourse with the world (187). As a result, he begins to suspect Falkland of committing the murder and fraud. "Is this," he wonders, "the fruit of conscious guilt, or of the disgust that a man of honour conceives at guilt undeservedly imputed?" (187). Caleb finally pushes Falkland into a confession and Falkland retaliates by constructing an elaborate scheme of pursuit that continuously threatens to "swallow" Caleb whole (235).

Despite Falkland's apparently inhuman pursuit of Caleb, he also utters the lines that best encapsulate Godwin's intended effect of the novel: "detested be the universe, and the laws that govern it! Honour, justice, virtue are all the juggle of knaves! If it were in my power I would instantly crush the whole system into nothing!" (192). It is a system wherein "every man is fated to be, more or less, the tyrant or the slave" and where the law are suited to the wealthy rather than to justice so that real guilt, and the good of the people, is always less important than social status (238). The rest of the novel charts Caleb's harrowing adventures and captivity. Although the names and times have been changed, George Colman's play, *The Iron Chest,* proceeds along much the same lines, except that rather than a tale told retrospectively by one character, Colman's play enacts the whole "theatre of calamity" for its audience.

The 1796 play, *The Iron Chest*, penned by Haymarket Theatre manager George Colman the Younger, became a popular vehicle for showcasing the talent of nineteenth-century tragedians. Critical and popular assessments of the play, however, were tempestuous from the

start. William Hazlitt decided that Colman "jumps at a conclusion, but misses his end."[17] Godwin conceived of *Caleb Williams* as a text that could propagate the moral philosophy of his lengthy *Enquiry concerning Political Justice*; in shifting his genre from political treatise to novel he hoped to reach a wider audience.[18] Colman, in contrast, chose to adapt *Caleb Williams* at the (potentially lucrative) request of Richard Brinsley Sheridan. Colman's biographer, Jeremy Bagster-Collins, calls his acceptance "a dangerous experiment for any playwright."[19] It was an experiment, however, that Colman performed with enthusiasm. In the "Advertisement to the Reader" appearing with the 1796 publication of *The Iron Chest,* George Colman acknowledges the central source for the play:

> I am indebted for the groundwork of this play to a novel entitled "Things as they are, or the Adventures of Caleb Williams; written by William Godwin." Much of Mr. Godwin's story I have omitted; much, which I have adopted, I have compress'd; much I have added, and much have I taken the liberty to alter. (ii)

Key among these adaptations, Colman assures his audience, is that he has "cautiously avoided all tendency to that which, vulgarly, (and wrongly, in many instances,) is termed Politicks; with which, many have told me, Caleb Williams teems" (ii). Like the rest of Colman's preface (which lambastes Mr. Kemble's performance in the role of Sir Edward Mortimer) this promise is somewhat contentious. Although apparently denying that his play possesses any political implications, or the he might be guilty of sedition, Colman merely separates himself from that which is "vulgarly," and "wrongly," "termed Politicks." Moreover, Colman seems to taunt, if any "political" implications remain in this now published work, he is absolved of all possible

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[17] William Hazlitt, *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt,* ed. P. P. Howe Vol. 5. (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1930) 343.

[18] There are several excellent essays on the *Caleb Williams* as a fictional reworking of *Political Justice.* For recent examples, see: Evan Radcliffe, "Godwin from 'Metaphysician' to Novelist: *Political Justice, Caleb Williams,* and the Tension between Philisophical Argument and Narrative," *Modern Philology* 97.4 (2000): 528-553; Gavin Edwards, "William Godwin's Foreign Language: Stories and Families in *Caleb Williams* and *Political Justice*," *Studies in Romanticism* 39.4 (2000): 533-552.

[19] Jeremy F. Bagster-Collins, *George Colman the Younger: 1762-1836* (Morningside Heights, NY: King's Crown Press, 1946) 83.

persecution because it is the responsibility of the Lord Chamberlain's office to "check" such works, "before they meet the eye of the Publick" (ii).

To Godwin, the message is not so taunting as it is to Kemble and the Lord Chamberlain's office, but it does signal the material ideological shift in Colman's play: where Godwin's tale is successful in its treatment of "incident," "arrangement," "character," and "language," *The Iron Chest* is the result of Colman's having "till'd the land" (ii). Colman's Preface had literalized the metaphor of *The Iron Chest*, deeming the play not a "clumsy commodity" but one that will "hold together" (i). In his Advertisement, the play becomes the produce of tilled land – something a socially integrated public may actually consume to their physical benefit.

But Colman's tactic, which also bowed to contemporary theater laws that required all plays to pass through the Lord Chamberlain's office for certification of political safety, generated criticism on two fronts: from those who faulted Colman for writing a poor adaptation (and, admittedly, a far from perfect play) and from Colman himself, who loudly criticized the production.[20] Like the editorials and shilling numbers that distract Trollope's readers from their own insurmountable disconnection with John Hiram's will in Anthony Trollope's *The Warden*, these lines of criticism focus attention on the act of adaptation (or its performance) rather than the content of the adaptation or anything but the purported content of the source material. George Colman's dramatization of *Caleb Williams*, with its complete lack of overt contemporary political commentary and its extravagant displacement from the contemporary political scene in some ways comments on the ideological abstractions that we will see the novel version. Narratively, however, Godwin's guilt of abstraction is forcefully indicted through George Colman's use of literal eating and drinking as a substitute for the symbolic human consumption in Godwin's text; both men have their characters swallow their guilt.

[20] For more on the Licensing Act of 1737 see: Vincent J. Liesenfeld, *The Licensing Act of 1737* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1978).

The Politics of Consumption

Concisely identifying a key difference between the craft of the novelist and the art of the dramatist, George Colman determines that as an adapter he was "overloaded with Mr. Godwin's good things, and driven to relinquish a large portion of them, as sailors are sometimes obliged to lighten the ship, by throwing their valuables overboard."[21] Colman's metaphor is apt for my analysis of *The Iron Chest*. Colman implies that he retained the basic necessities among Godwin's "good things"; valuables are so called because they are expendable. In what follows, I argue that Colman quietly displaced the socio-political commentary of Godwin's text by way of literalization. Godwin's novel dramatizes the dangers inherent in a political environment that ingests its citizens' voices to the benefit of a few powerful men – men who themselves are not exempt from the system's destructive mode of consumption. The drawn-out implications and insinuations of *Caleb Williams* become luxuries that neither the dramatist nor his characters can afford. Taking up Godwin's metaphors of consumption, Colman's interpretation of *Caleb Williams* directs attention to its characters' consumption of food – the powerless men whose intellectual potential has been consumed by political injustice are the only characters who consistently exhibit the rational sense to eat and drink. The socially powerful or socially misguided characters in Colman's play exist on metaphorical or anticipated food alone.

William Godwin railed against the political systems in which powerful men could consume the words of rational men could under vague charges of seditious libel and "constructive treason" in order to serve their own purposes; many critics have documented his rancour.[22]

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[21] George Colman, *Random Records* (London: H. Colburn and R. Bentley, 1830) 183-184. Hereafter *RR*

[22] See especially: Randa Helfield, "Constructive treason and Godwin's treasonous constructions," *Mosaic* 28.2 (1995): 43-65; Gary and A.A. Markley Handwerk, "Introduction," *Caleb Williams* (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2000) 1-47. In early 1793, Godwin wrote a series of letters in defense of Daniel Crichton, one of many British citizens who had been arrested under charges of seditious libel in the wake of Frances declaration of war against Britain. Godwin argued that the real threat to the British Constitution

Indeed, Godwin showcases the power of destructive intrusions of political power on rational intellect in the 1795 preface to *Caleb Williams*. Godwin asserts that his preface to the 1794 edition was "withdrawn […] in compliance with the alarms of booksellers" responding to the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act in 1794 (*CW* 55). The booksellers' withdrawal, Godwin implies, consumed the original preface as an independent text. Correspondingly, the prefatory voice of 12 May 1794 is effectively consumed by the author's 1795 voice. Although set consecutively, the original preface can no longer exist independently of its 1795 successor, nor can the 1795 voice function on its own. Godwin's retaliation for the consumption of his voice consumes the tyrannical action of the bookseller (and, by extension, the government that caused their panic) for his own use. Consequently, the effect of social injustice remains imprinted both in the philosophy and on the pages of *Caleb Williams*. As the successive prefaces demonstrate, Godwin's political voice threatens (but largely fails) to consume the fictional narrative production.[23]

The politics of consumption also run throughout *Political Justice*. The slippery relationship between the necessity of real food and the market consumption of goods and ideas pervades Godwin's writing; he employs familiar harvest metaphors to elucidate his theories about the political and intellectual responsibilities of men to other men. The central concern of Godwin's philosophy, Pamela Clemit summarizes, is his "faith in the power of rational judgment" that, when properly consulted, is the right of "each man."[24] He argues:

"came not from radicals [like himself], but from an orchestrated campaign of political repression aiming to silence all political dissent" (Handwerk and Markley 14). Randa Helfield has also explored the connections between *Caleb Williams* and the charge of "constructive treason" that was leveled against several members of the London Correspondence Society in 1794.

[23] Garret Sullivan makes a similar point: "transformations in the production and consumption of printed texts […] threatens to undermine the stable relationship between text and reader that Godwin both posits and assumes in *Political Justice*"(327). Sullivan is more interested in "mechanics of surveillance" but for the purpose of the present argument, Sullivan's discussion of Caleb's published narrative productions is useful (324-325). Garrett A. Sullivan, " 'A Story to be Hastily Gobbled Up': *Caleb Williams* and Print Culture," *Studies in Romanticism* 32.1 (1994): 323-337.

[24] Pamela Clemit, *The Godwinian Novel: The Rational Fictions of Godwin, Brockden Brown, Mary Shelley* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993) 4.

> It is unjust, if one man be deprived of leisure to cultivate his rational powers, while another man contributes not a single effort to add to the common stock. The faculties of one man are like the faculties of another man. Justice directs that each man unless he be employed more beneficially to the public, should contribute to the cultivation of the common harvest, of which each man consumes a share. (*Political Justice* II.327)

Godwin's enquiry produces the recommendation of a "frugal diet" of both food and goods to the man of "extreme opulence" so that the middle-class man may live with more luxury to access the "activity of the mind" (II.328-329). Through widespread cultivation of rational judgment, necessities such as food will naturally be provided for all under the terms of liberated justice.

With the increasing danger posed to the free exchange of printed and spoken words under the order of his day, Godwin's novelistic rendering of this philosophy displaces the necessity of real food with a harvest of narrative voices. For Godwin, what comes out of a man's mouth is as important to survival as what goes in. In Caleb Williams' confessional history, tyrannical figures consume weaker voices for their own benefit and the most overarching culprit, if the last acknowledged, is the narrator himself. In Caleb Williams' memoirs, all of the narrative voices are consumed by Caleb's first-person confessional narrative. Confession, according to Peter Brooks, has a doubling effect: "The very act of confessing necessarily produces guilt in order to be functional" and tends to produce an impression of power in the confessor even if none exists (22). Caleb performs the various voices of the men and women in his story – as a single overarching voice – ostensibly to "avoid confusion" (*CW* 66). But by surrendering their tales to Caleb, his informants condemn themselves to his narrative tyranny.

Caleb's informants become elements of "necessary labour"– procuring for Caleb the leisure to cultivate the "activity of the mind" (*PJ* 327, 329). Despite his claims of artless simplicity, Caleb adulterates even his own voice: "I shall on some occasions annex to appearances an explanation which I was far from possessing at the time, and was only suggested to me through the medium of subsequent events" (*CW* 194). The human sources of these annexed points are never identified. Caleb's method of narration, consequently, is guilty of violently dehumanizing other characters. His "various" information is from "other quarters" and

he may effortlessly "drop the person" of Collins when telling his story. Falkland's self-vindicating actions against Caleb and the Hawkinses might make him a "contracted scale […] copy of what monarchs are," but Caleb's narrative dominance puts him in a parallel relationship to the formerly independent voices he regurgitates (261). Caleb's human consumption, moreover, serves only to "console" him in his "unsupportable distress" (200). The voices of others lose value beyond what they can offer to Caleb's purposes; even if Caleb quotes with scrupulous faith he is still the dictator of others' words.

Caleb's consumption of voices might be understood as retaliation in kind for his repeated loss of voice in his relationship with Falkland. Following an oblique confrontation with Falkland about his role in the Hawkins' deaths (the father and son hanged for Falkland's crime) Caleb finds himself bereft of speech: "My mouth was closed; I felt as if deprived of all share of activity, and was only able silently and passively to quit the apartment" (193). After escaping from prison, Caleb hears public-house patrons "fall almost immediately into conversation about my history" and the conversation completely replaces any interest Caleb has in his "repast" of "bread and cheese" (330). Caleb's voice, at that moment, has been so consumed by Falkland's agents that he employs a "conscious disguise" (an Irish Brogue) only to find that the new voice accounts for his second arrest (335). Falkland's consumption of Caleb culminates in the street hawker's pamphlet containing "the MOST WONDERFUL AND SURPRISING HISTORY AND MIRACULOUS ADVENTURES OF CALEB WILLIAMS" (368). This narrative of his imputed guilt becomes Caleb's breaking point: he laments the "miserable fame to have my story *bawled forth* by hawkers and ballad-mongers" (374, my emphasis). By virtue of this previously existing narrative, the memoirs Caleb writes, then become a truly defensive adaptation of his own story.

Caleb repeatedly requests forgiveness for "dwelling thus long on preliminary circumstances" (here, the whole of Falkland's past) (*CW* 200). Understanding Caleb's tale as a "conscious disguise" for his vengeance against Falkland draws attention to the fact that he consumes another man's life to explain his own. Moreover, Caleb's written effort will be far

more lasting than Falkland's ephemeral pursuit of his enemy. In turn, Caleb promises after Falkland's death, to renounce an "overweening regard" for himself by "drawing ever-fresh nourishment" from Falkland as he thinks "only of thee" (434). But if the nourishment threatens to be "nightshade," it still leaves Caleb as the consumer rather than the consumed – he performs a lasting consumption that survives in print. Caleb's sacrifice of both socially powerful and powerless voices to his own revenge against Falkland reveals how deeply his resentment "extended itself to the whole machine of society" (268). By personifying resentment Caleb attempts to renounce his responsibility to his fellow men. Nonetheless, Caleb imbibes all other voices for his own purposes of self-vindication because he regards "the whole human species as so many hangmen and torturers" (268). Caleb can only consume voices because the machine of society has already consumed their souls. Yet, Caleb's consumption of voices into written language produces stories of guilt to which all of his characters remain eternally subject.

Early in the reconstruction of his life, Caleb Williams reveals that youthful "curiosity" had "produced in [him] an invincible attachment to books of narrative and romance" (CW 60). Caleb Williams, however, does not confess to reading such productions but to consuming them: "I read, I devoured compositions of this sort" (60). Caleb succeeds this self-correction by acknowledging that these narratives "took possession of [his] soul" (60). The possession of Caleb's soul by narrative consumption prepares Godwin's readers to experience a comparably fundamental transformation. Godwin feared that his novel would be "gobbled up" by readers and "swallowed in a pusillanimous and unanimated mood, without chewing and digestion" (450). The vocabulary of Godwin's concerns echoes the place of his narrative as both a representation of and a subject for aggressively systematic human consumption and digestion. It is through the multi-level consumption of narrative voices in *Caleb Williams* that Godwin threatens to trap the reader in the destructively dehumanizing social system he critiques – but whose systems of

market consumption Godwin and his reader must nevertheless participate in to achieve the true intellectual autonomy that he promotes.[25]

The public reception of Godwin's novel, Garratt Sullivan asserts, did not reflect the socio-political concerns of the author's 1795 preface: "Despite Godwin's 'moral'—the novel as indictment of the inequities inherent in existing power structures—the 'tendency' of *Caleb Williams* is to please its reader and, by extension, to leave untroubled the reality of upper-class power" (337). When Godwin reissued his novel in the 1831, he compressed its title: *Things as they Are or The Adventures of Caleb Williams* became *Caleb Williams.* Godwin's alteration, which has traditionally been viewed as a redirection of "interpretive focus from the protagonist in his political context to an examination of the psychology of the protagonist," enacts the type of narrative consumption that Godwin wrote into his text.[26] But rather than the state of "things as they are," it is the words of Caleb Williams that consume readers' attentions. The final narrative voice Caleb consumes turns out to be the very political voice that Godwin had hoped to encourage in his reader.

William Godwin's novel indicts the tyranny of powerful men over the mass population, in part, by making his self-vindicating narrator as tyrannous and dehumanizing in his relationships with his fellow men as the political systems at the heart of the social problem he identifies. The problem, the anxiety, Caleb Williams inadvertently uncovers is that "rational" responses to human injustices do not necessarily also suffice to address real human needs. After all, when Caleb hears his name being unjustly bandied about in a public inn and assumes a linguistic disguise to discover more about the situation, he both deserts his identity and ignores the food in front of him. Rational reason *may* be an answer to political injustice. In order to achieve a just society we should, as Godwin suggests, be detached enough to save a genius from a

[25] Many critics explore the role Godwin constructs for the reader of his text; Pamela Clemit encompasses the basic approach, asserting that, "By offering several subjective accounts, of which Caleb's is the main one, Godwin appeals directly to the reader as true arbiter of political justice" (56).
[26] Kristen Leaver, "Pursuing Conversations: *Caleb Williams* and the Romantic Construction of the Reader," *Studies in Romanticism* 33.4 (1994): 589-610. 594.

burning building before our own mothers. But as George Colman's defensive adaptation argues, family and food are not expendable goods. The most potent drive for social responsibility requires well-nourished human bodies and is found in our affective connections to other.

Fasting from Politics

Colman's *The Iron Chest* marks a generic shift that extends Godwin's own translation of philosophy into fiction. Conscious that the Lord Chamberlain's office checked the attempts of dramatic authors who felt tempted to dabble in politics, Colman submerged the socio-political immediacy of *Caleb Williams* in the post-Elizabethan setting of *The Iron Chest.* At the most superficial level, *The Iron Chest* generically shifts *Caleb Williams* into drama but, like Godwin's novel, Colman's play expresses an internal generic tension. One way that Godwin handled the generic shift from philosophy to fiction was to root the style, structure, and content of the novel not only in his own *Political Justice* but also in a wide generic range of printed texts that had preceded it into the public sphere: "As numerous commentators—and Godwin himself— have emphasized, *Caleb Williams* is a thoroughly allusive text which feeds off the novels of Richardson and Defoe, tales of religious persecution, fairy-tales, John Howard's *The State of the Prisons* (1777), [and] *The Newgate Calendar.*"[27] At the time, commentators on *The Iron Chest*, Hazlitt included, noticed that the play is a "*mélange* of the tragic and the comic" but lightly complained that the "two plots (the serious and the ludicrous) do not seem going on and gaining ground at the same time" (343). Philip Cox identifies the uneasy generic relationships in the play as part of a wider shift in generic modes; he reads *The Iron Chest* as "an embryonic melodrama in which the developing form of the melodrama attempts to assert itself against the residual form of the tragedy."[28] In terms of audience, furthermore, Cox notes that melodrama would "increasingly

[27] Damian Walford Davies, "The Politics of Allusion: *Caleb Williams, The Iron Chest, Middlemarch,* and the *Armoire de Fer*." *The Review of English Studies* 53 (2002): 526-543. 529.
[28] Philip Cox*, Reading Adaptations: Novels and Verse Narratives on the Stage, 1790-1840* (New York: Manchester UP, 2000) 33.

become" the "proletarian" art form where the novel would remain a largely bourgeois genre of literature (36). The mode of Colman's play, in other words, positions it as a redirection of Godwin's novel. The "plot was reduced" for dramatic purposes and the metaphorical narrative consumption that we see in *Caleb Williams* is reimagined in the literal terms of food consumption used only as parable in *Political Justice.*[29] In Colman's play, as in Godwin's treatise, "produce" is "necessary for […] subsistence" and the cultivation of food is always an "innocent and laudable action" (*PJ* II.302). Whereas *Caleb Williams* focuses on various methods of narrative consumption, *The Iron Chest* returns to the basic necessity of the consumption of food and drink.

Colman's shift from novel to drama is not merely generic convenience but a realization of the theatrical metaphors in *Caleb Williams*. According to David Karr "Godwin particularly lamented the role of theater and spectacle in ruling human beings, and argued that such modes could and should be jettisoned" and Caleb Williams repeatedly invokes the language of the theatre to describe his various misfortunes (xxvii). Caleb's memoirs open with the stark declaration: "My life has for several years been a theatre of calamity" (*CW* 59). The confrontation between Falkland and Tyrrel is "acted upon too public a stage" and as that feud comes to a head, Caleb promises to "lift the curtain, and bring forward the last act of the tragedy" (157; 145). Over the years he spends fleeing from Falkland, Caleb plays a series of different characters. Monika Fludernik has examined the relationship between theatrical metaphors and the figure of sympathy in *Caleb Williams*; she argues that the emotionally-loaded theatrical nature of the various trials presented in the text, and the artifice required to survive in the political arena, exposes the danger sympathy poses to the rationality of political principles.[30] In shifting Caleb's "theatre of calamity" to the playhouse, Colman locks the story further in theatrics. However, Colman also demonstrates that the "reality" of drama can inspire consumers of the text to

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[29] William St. Clair, *The Godwins and the Shelleys: The Biography of the Family* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1989) 132.
[30] Monika Fludernik, "Spectacle, Theatre, and Sympathy in *Caleb Williams*," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 14.1 (2001): 1-30. 30.

immediate action – even if that action is only, as "a reporter who was there on the first night claimed implausibly," to see "the audience 'with on one voice cr[y] out' in support of the play's ill leading man, 'No, no, Kemble, it is not your fault!'" (St. Clair qtd. 122). Colman apparently "did not even send [Godwin] an order for his opening performance," a slight with which Godwin reportedly spoke "with great bitterness."[31] Nevertheless, the *Caleb Williams* author was allegedly in the audience for the notoriously bad first performance of *The Iron Chest* (St. Clair 122). Whether Godwin recognized Colman's reinterpretation of *Caleb Williams'* political implications is unclear. Godwin's reaction to the play itself, apparently, has been consumed by time.

In contrast to the consumed narrative voice of *Caleb Williams, The Iron Chest,* holds numerous, autonomous narrative voices in its wide cast of characters. Although *Caleb Williams* outpaces *The Iron Chest* in its number of characters, the characters in *The Iron Chest* – if alive – all speak and sing for themselves. This distribution of narrative power, though a necessary shift in a dramatization, is itself representative of Colman's shift of the story's concerns into a faith in collectivity that Godwin would reject: "Rather than collectivity, Godwin insists on individuality, in part because he perceives the public as an amorphous and fickle entity, ill defined, always in flux."[32] But the wages of such individuality, in *Caleb Williams,* is the sacrifice of an untold number of narrative voices to Caleb's memoirs. Colman's Caleb surrogate, Wilford, is merely one voice among many. Whereas Caleb Williams is the only figure to recognize the consequences of political injustice, in Colman's text the collective theater audience is allowed to see the machinations of injustice. "Theatrical adaptations," Philip Cox posits, "heighten this element of collectivity by taking a text which is explicitly the work of an 'individual author' and reproducing it within a context in which not only the reproduction but also its reception is a collective experience" (41). Godwin's text is increasingly claustrophobic and isolating. By

[31] Ford K. Brown, *The Life of William Godwin,* 1926, Reprint Ed (Folcroft PA: Folcroft Library Editions, 1972) 87.
[32] Carl Fisher, "The Crowd and the Public in Godwin's *Caleb Williams," Women, Revolution, and the Novels of the 1790s,* ed. Linda Lang-Peralta (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State UP, 1999) 47-68. 63.

removing Godwin's title from its identification with a single character, Colman opens up literal and figurative understanding of "the iron chest," which, as Colman states in his preface, is "fit for all the purposes for which it was intended" (i).

In his memoir, Colman again separated himself from the "political tendency of the book; which is thought, by many, to inculcate leveling principles, and disrespect of the Laws of our Country" (*RR* 183). Explicitly, Colman separates the play not from politics, but from the "tendency" of the novel's "leveling principles" and "disrespect" for English "Laws." His adaptation of Godwin's philosophy, finally, closely resembles the question posed by Edmund Burke in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790): "What is the use of discussing a man's abstract right to food or medicine?"[33] Food and drink consumption, rather than intellectual narrative consumption, becomes the driving force in Colman's adaptation.

In his first scene, Colman immediately establishes his play's concern with the complexities of consumption: the Rawbolds, paupers living in the New Forest, are poachers.[34] Eldest son Samson Rawbold solemnly jokes that his father's late return from deer hunting means, "the Sun will rise and roast the venison on his shoulders" (*IC* 1). He berates the "rich men [who] have no bowels for us lowly! They little think, while they are gorging on a fat haunch of a goodly buck, what fatigues we poor honest souls undergo in stealing it" (2). Samson's joke sets

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[33] Edmund Burke, *Burke's reflections on the Revolution in France, &c. &c. in a letter intended to have been sent to a gentleman in Paris*, A new edition London, 1793. Based on information from English Short Title Catalogue. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online.* Accessed 19 January 2008. 19-20.

[34] George Colman, *The Iron Chest: A Play, in Three Acts,* 1796. *Literature Online.* Hereafter cited as *IC.* The Rawbolds have no direct correlative in *Caleb Williams*. To a point, they resemble the Hawkinses, but the Hawkinses only seem to exist in *Caleb Williams* to simultaneously exacerbate Falkland's guilt and his admirable qualities. The Rawbolds are more autonomous and certainly don't die for Mortimer's crimes. The excising of the Hawkins characters, though apparently a mere deletion is also literalization of a narrative move that Godwin makes in *Caleb Williams.* Bagster-Collins laments that "a singular obtuseness made [Coleman] discard the Hawkinses […] mere mention […] would have sufficed; the characters themselves need not have appeared" (86). But Gary Handwerk cannily notices that Caleb Williams was the first to excise the Hawkinses: "As the first murder left an interpretive surplus exceeding utilitarian ethical calculations--the Hawkinses's unmerited deaths for Falkland's crime (which Caleb's eulogy of Falkland cannot explain and must therefore erase)" (954). Godwin metaphorically erases the Hawkinses – Falkland is "most admirable" even "in spite" of their "miserable end"; Colman literally erases them (*CW* 428).

up a basic dichotomy in the text: While tyrannical men consume both the weak and their own emotions, the disempowered repeatedly engage in (or plan) actual eating and drinking. This consciousness of basic human needs counters Mortimer and Wilford's (the Falkland and Caleb Williams surrogates) concern for their own fame and terms of justice. Certainly, while everyone in the play talks of the Rawbolds as poachers and smugglers, the family is never prosecuted. They seem to escape implications of guilt because their crimes serve basic human requirements. Samson roundly queries, "Woulds't have us be rogues, and let our family starve? Give up poaching and deer stealing! Oons! Dost think we have no conscience?" (3). To be a rogue is to let one's family starve; laws in this world are subordinate to survival and immediate social responsibility is granted more weight than legal guilt.

Wilford, as Sir Edward Mortimer's secretary, seems to possess an imperfect ability to follow either natural laws or human laws. Though Samson defies "any secretary's nose not to smell stolen venison the moment 'tis thrust in our hovel," and fears that Wilford will detect "the hind quarter in the pantry," Wilford does neither (*IC* 9). Wilford's social concern is more for words than useful actions; he does not even speak of food as such. The only items Wilford exhorts Rawbold to eat are his words against Mortimer: "had you been any but my Barbara's father, and spoken so much against him, my indignation had work'd into my knuckles, and cram'd the words down your rusty throat " (11). As Rawbold points out, Wilford seems only partially able to consult his "own conscience" (10). While Barbara's younger brothers and sisters cry, "Give us food, good brother, pray!/ For we eat [sic] nothing yesterday," Wilford can only say, "Adieu, adieu, I must be going" (13).

At the very least, it is conspicuous that the keeper's "head man" does not legally procure food for the family of the woman he plans to marry and arrives only under Mortimer's auspices to grant them "twenty marks" (*IC* 12). Wilford extols Mortimer's private charity, which "bids him assist the needy, before their necessities drive them to crimes which his public duty must punish" (12). As with Falkland, Mortimer's division is self-serving rather than disinterestedly benevolent.

Both Falkland as magistrate and Mortimer as Keeper see their own senses of guilt seeping into their public duty, but Mortimer's charity, in particular, merely replicates the social problems that stem from the unjust poaching laws he enforces. The Rawbolds, we see, are still forced to eat the poached buck; they cannot consume money. And, as Samson's rush to work at Lady Helen's indicates, the Rawbolds' illegal actions are forced by the inability of the government or the gentry to provide sufficient legal methods of subsistence. And yet, Mortimer and Wilford's dependence on monetary charity delays the family's ability to consume actual food – they can neither immediately benefit from their charity or (due to Wilford's presence) from the poached buck. Mortimer's charity falls short because it is mediated in its intentions (to sooth his own guilt), its exchange (he sends his secretary), and its substance; twenty marks require a trip to market to buy food. The only other characters in the play who frequent the market are (literally) thieves.

Colman's altered role of the steward reflects the overarching refocus from narrative consumption to food consumption: Falkland's property steward, Collins (whose primary role in *Caleb Williams* is to furnish Caleb's earliest narrative food) is replaced by Mortimer's household steward, Adam Winterton.[35] If the role of a steward is primarily organizational – someone who manages – then Colman's reassignment of this role might be read as an organizational principle for the text as a whole. Winterton is introduced in the midst of planning dinner for Sir Edward which, though it is "all kill'd and ready" turns out to be "the very same bill of fare we served yesterday" (16). Winterton chuckles that he has planned "Thursday twice over" and the Cook blames the faltering in practical planning to over-education: "This comes of being able to read" (16). Winterton's imperfect reading distracts him from practical performance of his duty, which, in this case, is the proper distribution of food.

[35] That Collins must spend ten years in the West Indies in service to Falkland might arguably be Falkland's revenge for Collins' inadvertently destructive narrative consumption; his health is "wholly broken by his West Indian expedition" (*CW* 426). Godwin's destroyers of men, therefore, seem more aware of the systems of consumption than any of the tyrants in *The Iron Chest.*

As the above scene suggests, Mortimer's home becomes a place where systems of consumption are stagnated or disrupted. Wilford later refuses Winterton's offer of "a cup of Canary, from my corner cupboard yonder," replying tersely "Not a drop" (*IC* 20). Colman's alliteration ("cup," "Canary," "corner," "cupboard") draws our attention to Winterton's liquor of choice.[36] After some wheedling, Wilford accepts the Canary Winterton's "kindness offer'd" (23). This exchange of drink becomes the catalyst for the iron chest plot; consumption marks narrative progression. Winterton's enjoyment of the Canary leads him to reveal the details of Mortimer's trial for murder – a revelation that causes Wilford to drop his glass after only one drink. That is, Mortimer's guilt disrupts Wilford's processes of consumption. Drink becomes insufficient for Wilford to cope with Mortimer's past actions: "My throat's parch'd, and my blood freezes. A quart of brandy couldn't moisten the one nor thaw the other" (27). Disruption of food and drink consumption is, from this point, aligned with the disruption of humane behavior.

Both Wilford and Mortimer refer repeatedly to the latter's murder of Lady Helen's uncle as "butchery." Wilford is grateful that "the law of the land […] will not suffer us to butcher" even brutes (*IC* 26). Believing that Mortimer killed his opponent in a duel, Wilford decries "another kind of butchery which the law allows not; true humanity shudders at, and false honour justifies" (26). Wilford does not disrespect the "law of the land," but his words reveal that law, in itself, is not a deterrent to manifestations of "false honour." The social constructions of the "duty" of maintaining reputation one's through duelling, which would be largely associated with aristocrats like Mortimer, is set against "true humanity" – distinguishing the aristocracy from the rest of humanity.[37] Mortimer himself later recalls "the moment when I gave the blow, Butcher'd a fellow-creature in the dark" (*IC* 66). These lines of dialogue translate Mortimer's action into

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[36] Canary is defined by the OED as "a light sweet wine from the Canary Islands."

[37] This is something of an overstatement but the fact that all of the aristocrats and agents of the law (and, of course, these are the same) are absent from the stage at the close of the play suggests that Colman does mean to efface the power of the aristocracy. J.A. Cannon, "duelling" *The Oxford Companion to British History*, Ed. John Cannon, Oxford University Press, 1997. *Oxford Reference Online*. <www.oxfordreference.com>

the language of food preparation. Mortimer's butchery, however, is useless because it breaks laws of humanity and can only feed his personal "flame of Honour" (30).

Mortimer's self-alignment with metaphorical consumption is symptomatic of the almost uniformly self-interested and self-destructive consumption the powerful engage in throughout the play. After confessing his crime to Wilford, Mortimer argues that he has paid enough for having made fame his "idol" because "Anguish knaws" at him (*IC* 35). He is further described as consuming melancholy rather than actual food: "Like a leech sucking the blood-drops from a care-worn hear, he gorges on't—then renders up his food" (50). In retreating from his past act of butchery, Mortimer displaces the importance of food and the nature of his crime filters down through those humans now in his charge. Winterton conjectures that he too might have been in such anguish as Mortimer "in these woods, had [he] not drank plenty of canary" (86). Wilford, in this vein, fears that his suspicion of Mortimer's crime may "choak" him but professes: "The lips of a woman are a sovereign cordial for melancholy" (35-36). Nevertheless, when Mortimer confesses, Wilford exclaims, "What you that—Mur—the murder—I am choak'd" (66).

Lady Helen's food from Mortimer is similarly metaphorical. Her maid Blanche snidely remarks that Mortimer's advice and bounty are little different than a crow's of "its nestling: he croaks first, and then gives her food" (17). But though these consumption metaphors seem to sustain characters like Mortimer, Lady Helen, and Wilford (who aspires to exist among them), Samson later points out, "very good meat is, cent per cent, Dearer than very good argument" (14). Mortimer has the luxury to "know not" how to answer Fitzharding when he asks "Come, what's for dinner? Od! I mean to eat abundantly" (54). The poverty-stricken Samson, however, in pursuit of "any thing better, that might get [him] bread" runs "hungrily" to Lady Helen's house "some half hour" after hearing that she *might* have need of a footman (55-56). The thwarted consumption systems in the New Forest are constructed as the product of Mortimer's original act of human butchery.

By Act III of the play, as Sir Edward's human butchery threatens to come to light, comestibles have been confined to the recesses of the Mortimer lodge. Samson Rawbold is seen drinking with Blanche who warns: "be cautious of drinking, Samson. Consider where you are. We are now, remember, in Sir Edward Mortimer's Lodge" (*IC* 81). Blanche's comment overtly refers to Samson's subordinate class position, but the syntax of her comment indicates that literal food consumption is somehow excluded from Mortimer's home. But Samson revises her caution; they are "In the Butler's room;—where drinking has always a privilege" (81). Samson's actual consumption is countered by the consumption of his poaching activities by the rich for whom he "furnish'd daily food for conversation" (90). Samson acknowledges, then, "conversation had fared better upon them than I" (90). He may have been a poacher, but Samson points out that the rich "lay us by the heels when we do that for hunger which they practice for amusement" (82). While the rich hunt animals for sport, they seem hungry enough to identify the poor as imperfect food.

Wealthy men consume the stories of poaching and, as Wilford becomes a target for Mortimer's guilt, this imagery of the hunt places him as Mortimer's next meal. The generous and always hungry Fitzharding find himself "half tempted to wish the game too nimble for the dogs, that hunt him at the heels" but determines that Wilford is all appearance and "all within, it seems, is dirty rooms, stale eggs, prick'd wine, sour beer, Rank bacon, [and] musty beef" (*IC* 104). But if such is true of Wilford's internal stores, the fault might still be laid with Mortimer, who deems himself a subject of Fate that "like a mildew, Ruins the virtuous crop I would reap, and all my crop is weeds" (52-53). Discovering the truth of the rotten meal that is "all within" necessitates the climactic opening of the iron chest to reveal Mortimer's "Narrative of my murder of" Lady Helen's uncle and the bloody weapon (124). As I argue above, in terms of Colman's defense of publicly available and immediate action, Philip Cox points out precisely that "the written text of Mortimer's confession needs a public performance in order for it to have social effect" (36).

Tangible proof of Mortimer's crime becomes vital lest Wilford, like the rest of the play's microcosm, should fall prey to Mortimer's narrative butchery.[38]

Mortimer senses that his "crop is weeds" and his metaphor reflects the effect of his guilt-driven management of the New Forest. The butchering of men is not confined to the upper-classes; the impulse affects all of the social levels the text. Samson feels free to chide his sister because he takes "rubs" from his father "who is above" him and hands them down to Barbara "below" him:" "Tis the way of office – where every miserable devil domineers it over the next more miserable devil that's under him" (*IC* 2). Mortimer's guilt leads him to pardon the poacher who Winterton warrants will become "a sturdy poacher" and the man's hunting dog, which he "has lived this year upon" is shot by "Black Martin Wincot, the groom keeper" (28). Armstrong (the head thief in the play) sets himself and the other robbers of the New Forest as mere representatives of humanity, no different than "Lawyers, Physicians, Placemen, all—all plunder and slay, but all pretend to humanity" (38). He, like Rawbold, blames the world from having "driven" him "to take that desperately, which wanting I should starve" (41). But, finding that his men have attacked Wilford in the forest, Armstrong cautions, "wantonness prompts us to butchery" (79). The thieves in his den are as careless about real food as Sir Edward himself. Their errand boy warns, "Why, indeed, Judith the credit of your cookery is lost among thieves. They never come punctual to their meals" (72). When the thieves do return, the "meat is scorched to cinders" (73).

Failure to consume available food is, consequently, also portrayed as a socially irresponsible threat. Winterton is disgruntled to learn that Samson cracked a bottle of liquor in his absence: "Question any man, of my age, and he will say the same. Domesticks never broke bottles in Queen Elizabeth's time. Servants were better then—aye, marry, and the bottles were better bottles. 'Tis a degenerate world" (85)! While Winterton's repeated laments for the

[38] Although this moment puts more faith in reading as beneficial than the play as a whole (see above), this written narrative is, essentially, a script for the implications of guilt that Mortimer has been performing for years.

glorious past might be dismissed as mere comic sentimentality, their reference to degrading social systems is actualized by the presence of the robbers – who construct their den in the ruins of an Abbey.[39]

Colman removes his play from the political present, but in drawing attention to that removal from time throughout the play, he simultaneously suggests that the "political" issues at stake in *The Iron Chest* are not necessarily governed by time. If the problems of consumption and survival grappled with in Colman's play are not immediately issues of "contemporary" English justice, Colman makes them issues of more elemental systems of social justice and injustice.[40] In publication, Colman pointedly notes that the piece "is, now, printed as it was acted on the first night" and is therefore the result of, rather than simply an incitement to, action (*IC* xxii).

But Colman, in his Preface, reminds loyal readers that he has seen the horns of the John Kemble who "already tossed and gored me, severely—I must make an effort, or he batters me down, and leaves me to bite the dust" (iii). His litany of complaints against the actor whose "emotions and passions were so rare, and so feeble, that they season'd his general insipidity, like a single grain of wretched pepper thrown into the largest dose of water-gruel that ever was administer'd to an invalid" finally reads "somewhat like the Tavern bill" (xvii; xv). Colman blames the failure of the play both on Kemble's poor acting and on the fact that Kemble prematurely pronounced the play "ripe for exhibition" (vi). Indeed, much of Colman's Preface

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[39] I am not suggesting that there is a religious element in this text – that Colman is either for or against the Catholics – but that a place of supposed morality becomes a den of avowed thieves. Mark Schoenfield has pointed out to me that the issue of Catholicism does reflect back onto the Italian pre-plot of *Caleb Williams*. If Falkland's Italian plot represents an chivalric romance that the psychological realism of Caleb's plot supercedes, then perhaps the crumbling abbey represents a literal degradation from European modes of morality and aristocracy that failed to provide for the basic needs of the people they controlled.

[40] I agree, to a point, with Kenneth Graham's assertion (in his extraordinarily thorough full-length study of *Caleb Williams)* that the "play's ideology is reactionary" (57). Graham, however, continues to argue that:

> It is satisfied with sanctioned class and sex distinctions: men and women are destined to become husbands and wives; master servant relationships are a social ideal; its values are charity and gratitude; it teaches faith in British justice. The ideology runs completely counter to Godwin's philosophy and embraces the prejudices that separate classes. (57)

Rather, I argue that the ideology Colman propones through his literalized consumption is pre-social and governmental, which is at least as unreachable a state as Godwin's rational direct democracy.

retaliates against Kemble's not allowing his play to be properly consumed. Colman attempts to consume Kemble, Mortimer-like, by "guarding [his] own reputation" (xx). What the machinations of the play and its preceding Preface and Advertisement make clear is that *The Iron Chest*, ultimately, is a play "doom'd to struggle" not with political intricacies, but with the vanities of actors and the "decision of a London audience" (xxii). Its "Songs, Duets, and Chorusses" are not "Lyrick poetry" but "are intended merely as vehicles for musical effect" (xxiii). They do not, like the song of the singing bone, reveal buried injustices. So when the play ends in a chorus sung by Wilford and all the servants – because Wilford "cannot speak now" – Colman contains his produce in the highly theatrical realm "for which it was intended" (127). Colman presents a dramatic argument for a truly humane social system where everyone can, as the actors warble in the final song, live in providential "harmony" beyond the grasp of law and aristocracy. This entirely theatrical moment makes the play safe, its political message undigestible, by closing off any real potential behind the pleasant "musical effect." What saves Colman's play from prosecution also closes off the possibility of any wider political threats within the world of the play. The servants launch into song because Wilford will not explain the truth of his acquittal to his peers. He declares: "Sir Edward's brother will explain further: I cannot" (*IC* 49). Wilford places the power for interpreting Mortimer's illness with his social successor. Further, he demeans his public's rational capability by redirecting its praise: "Clamour not now your congratulations to me" but to "Providence" (49). The singers exalting "white-robed Mercy's throne" may be unaware of their radical disempowerment but the play is not. Despite his persecution, Wilford remains as pointedly unconcerned about the real effects of wide social injustice as he is at the beginning of the play; throughout, he sees only the threats to his and Mortimer's personal reputations. As in *Caleb Williams*, individual identification of tyranny does not guarantee its social remedy. Carl Fisher also sees this problem emerging in Godwin's novel: "the public become accomplices and agents for the status quo, unaware of either the need for or the possibility of change" (48). The people remained constrained by realities of debilitating

habits, whether those habits are political, social, physical, or generic.

Just Desserts

In the course of adaptations beginning in *Political Justice* and ending *The Iron Chest*, the possibility of tangible reaction to the texts creeps closer to realization, even if the nature of that action shifts (for lack of a better word) dramatically. The action taken, however, is not to right the wrongs of man. The lasting effect of Colman's play had much to do with justice, but not human justice. While critical regard for the play itself paled in comparison to that for Godwin's novel, Colman's virulent preface invoked a flurry of attention so memorable at the time that William Hazlitt could publish a review nearly twenty years later avowing, "the history of the Iron Chest is well known to dramatic readers" (343). Bagster-Collins reports that "For several weeks" after the first performance "the *Oracle* printed almost daily similar jibes at Colman" and when the preface was published in 1796 it "brought down a storm on Colman's head" (91-92). Various satires and epigrams mocking Colman or Kemble or both flooded publications such as the *Oracle,* the *Monthly Mirror* and the *Times*.[41] In all cases, Colman's drama is consumed by critical imputations of guilt that displace any urges towards social responsibility his text might actually contain. That consumption means that even though the text's strongest criticism of Godwin's novel and political theory is its tendency to abstract human needs, Colman finally defends against that reality by repeatedly (and in print) fanning attention away from the content of the play by imputing guilt to his own troubles of adaptation and production, and the critics followed.

Swallowing Guilt in the Western Tradition

[41] My account is barely adequate – Bagster-Collins devotes the same number of pages in his text to the reactions to preface that he does to the analysis and reviews of the play itself.

The problem of the law versus social responsibility that all of these texts raise is common to Western literature and thought. Outside of the two sets of texts I've examined at length, there is group of narratives that establish adaptation as a mode of dealing with that anxiety. In the tales that folklore scholar, Joseph F. Nagy, identifies as part of The Singing Bone Pattern, which appear in "many different narrative traditions and genres," from the Ancient Greeks and Romans on, the performance of music "serves ultimately to uphold cultural values and keep society 'honest': it is through the performance of music that the cosmic order is saved, cultural institutions such as the family and marriage are restored to their proper forms, or crime and criminality are exposed."[42] Beyond the basic performance of music as a way of keeping society "honest," these tales combine that art form with a physical transformation.

This pattern in folk literature establishes a tradition of swallowing guilt when justice is something the law is not in a position to really administer; if the adaptation manages to "keep society 'honest'" (in Nagy's terms) the honesty in the story comes too late. What these stories aim to do, however, is establish a "the cultural principle of reciprocity" (189). In the future the listeners to the tale might take into account their fundamental responsibility to each other, and learn when the tellers of tales should be questioned. But, not all adaptations that swallow the guilt of social responsibility are so easy to spot. The King, after all, only "understood [the bone's adaptation] perfectly" because he was on the inside of the situation. To the people, like the peasant, the "wonderful little bone" is that: a novelty, a piece of unusual music performed by an unexpected source. Haphazard and the *Jupiter* readers never have a chance to understand Harding's defensive musical adaptation. George Colman's play defends so well against the social responsibilities that Godwin's novel neglects that even he might not have recognized its potential. But just because these texts, and others like them, do not sing their social consciences very loudly does not make them less valuable to their audiences. Certainly, they require more work to hear than other socially conscious tales. But even in discussing the unscrupulous and unfaithful ways

[42] Joseph F. Nagy, "Vengeful Music in Traditional Narrative," *Folklore* 95.2 (1984): 182-90. 182; 189.

they move through media, as the reactions to the singing bones and Colman's play demonstrate, these tales of swallowed guilt still put the terms of justice and injustice on our lips.

CHAPTER IV

THE INTERRUPTED LIVES OF ELIZABETH GASKELL'S *NORTH AND SOUTH* AND ELLEN WOOD'S *EAST LYNNE*

The problem these fifty-nine years has been this: how can a novelist achieve atonement when, with her absolute power of deciding outcomes, she is also God? There is no one, no entity or higher form that she can appeal to, or be reconciled with, or that can forgive her. There is nothing outside her. In her imagination she has set the limits and the terms. No atonement for God, or novelists, even if they are atheists. It was always an impossible task, and that was precisely the point. The attempt was all.

~Ian McEwan, Atonement

A 2007 episode of the popular BBC television program, *Doctor Who* introduced a frightening new monster to the Doctor's world: the Weeping Angels.[1] These creatures, which turn to stone when looked upon, can only move –faster than light – when their victims are not looking. "Don't blink," The Doctor warns, "blink and you're dead. […] Don't turn your back, don't look away, and don't blink." By "dead," however, The Doctor actually means that the Weeping Angels' victims are thrown back into another time and place. From there, they cannot resume with their previous lives. "You live," The Doctor tells one victim, "to death." Victims of the Weeping Angels leave behind the possibilities of the lives they might have had. The Weeping Angels feed off that energy – the emotional resonance of their victims' interrupted lives sustains them until they can attack again. One of the worst threats the Other can pose, "Blink" suggests, is to the *possibilities* of a life, rather than a threat to the body. A threat to the body is tangible; the only tangibility that the Weeping Angels offer is the painful certainty that one's life has been interrupted. "What might have been" can never be recovered; what has been will never

[1] "Blink," *Doctor Who*, perf. David Tennant, Freema Agyeman, Carey Mulligan, and Finlay Robertson, writ. Stephen Moffat, dir. Hettie Macdonald, British Broadcasting Corporation, 9 June 2007.

compensate for the loss – at least for those the victim leaves behind. Even outside the realm of science fiction, the threat of interrupted lives hovers on the edges of many texts.

In the science fiction/ fantasy genres lives can be rewritten and rescued. In the real world such satisfactory recovery or self-defense is less readily available. Yet in the world of realist and domestic fiction, the fear of interrupted lives still threatens the characters. Young men lost in war, young mothers lost in childbirth, star-crossed lovers who take their lives – all of these interrupted lives leave the pain of "what might have been" in their wake. In the two works I discuss in this chapter, Ellen Wood's sensation novel, *East Lynne* and its dramatic and filmic variations, and Elizabeth Gaskell's industrial novel, *North and South*, psychic pain caused by the loss of a loved one is transmuted into formal interruptions. These formal interruptions in the texts restage the interruptions in the lives of the characters. That specter of interruption, in a variety of forms, haunts these texts and their characters. Interrupted lives might be most successfully dealt with in adaptations that are so interrupted themselves that they ultimately fail.

As we have seen in Chapters I and II, defensive adaptations tend to deal with fears about intangible qualities of existence: questions of self and identity (in *Theatre of Blood* and *The Talented Mr. Ripley*) and questions of social anxiety (in the *Pride and Prejudice* texts). Adaptations in and of these texts replace and redirect fears of nothingness by creating new tangible objects that formally combat it. I have been arguing that the creative process of adapting a text from one medium to another deals with problems that have no legal remedies. In defensive adaptations questions of social responsibility, as we saw in Chapter III, often swallow legal guilt. While adaptations of swallowed guilt resist being heard, as in Mr. Harding's silent concert, adaptations of interrupted lives defend against the pain of being seen for what they are. By their nature, interrupted lives are intangible problems that adaptation is particularly suited to deal with – marked by inescapable in-betweenness, adaptation can imaginatively contain the energy that an interrupted life may leave behind.

The epigraph to this chapter is from the conclusion of Ian McEwan's *Atonement.* As a

child, Briony Tallis created a lie that wrongly put her sister's lover in prison. But despite readers having just read of their tragic years of separation and their poignant reunion, Briony ultimately confesses that the two would never see each other again before both died during World War II. The whole novel, McEwan's final chapter suggests, was just a fictional attempt to atone for those lost years. Briony tries to fix the spoken bad words of her childhood with a host of printed good words. But can a formal answer to such a real interruption, McEwan asks via his fictional narrator, achieve either catharsis or atonement? Interruption, then, is not just my term for what Franco Moretti identifies as the "too late" trope of melodrama – the idea that such narratives are affectively driven by a character's delayed recognition of some truth.[2] Peter Brooks, in his psychoanalytic study of plots, argues that narratives are driven by desire. That desire, he contends, "is the wish for the end, for fulfillment, but fulfillment must be delayed so that we can understand it in relation to origin and to desire itself. The story of Shahrazad again suggests itself as the story of stories."[3] Interruption or delay, in Brooks' term, is required to understand plots. Interruptions, from that perspective, actually give audiences *more* time. The "art of interruption" is the dominant narrative technique in *The Thousand and One Nights.*[4] Only through interruptions like those stories with which Shahrazad separates night from day, Robert Van Leewen argues, "can new meanings be created from existing ones (183-184). The whole notion that something can be interrupted is, in one sense, comforting because it promises coherence. In this way, he concludes, "the events between beginning and end are no longer fragments; they are rather part of a whole determined by the interrelationships between events—causality, repetitions and a general sense of order" (184). With every interruption these theorists point to, however, comes the threat that the frame story will not resume. Every interruption, in fact, ensures that the

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[2] Franco Moretti, "Kindergarten," *Signs Taken for Wonders: Essays in the Sociology of Literary Forms,* trans. Susan Fischer, David Forgacs and David Miller (New York: Verso, 1988). 160

[3] Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1984) 111.

[4] Richard Van Leeuwen, "The Art of Interruption: *The Thousand and One Nights* and Jan Potócki," *Middle Eastern Literatures* 7.2 (Jul 2004): 183-198. 183.

story will never be quite the same again. The sense of loss bound up with the narrative interruptions that readers desire indicates that for all the necessity of interruption in the construction of a successful narrative, those same interruptions may be devastating. Interruption of lives is tragic and inevitable, a problem that we cannot fix but which we must learn to deal with. Interruption, however, is the worst possible threat that can be aimed at a narrative. While there are fates worse than death, tales of interrupted lives tell us, for a narrative that only exists in the telling interruption may mean eradication. Briony's narrative, after all, traps her sister and her lover in a never-ending loop of interruption where they cannot even live to death. Scenes of adaptation and individual adaptations about interrupted lives can stage those fears in a fictional space; defensive adaptations separate the lives from their narrative interruptions. Those adaptations, however, are simultaneously the safest space for those interruptions and the most vulnerable to their effects.

In Ellen Wood's *East Lynne* (1861) and Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1855) two young men lose the lives they might have had when they are unjustly accused of crimes and must flee old lives for new ones. It makes sense that these two Victorian-era women would compose novels about such interruptions. Linda Hughes and Michael K. Lund argue in their recent book that, in Victorian society, "female lives were also defined by their vulnerability to interruption."[5] Hughes and Lund explain the reason, as Florence Nightingale famously wrote, was that "Women are never supposed to have any occupation of sufficient importance *not* to be interrupted."[6] Gaskell's and Wood's texts have served feminist critics well and their narratives and modes of publication say much about the gender discrepancies of their period. But without diminishing the importance of those arguments, I argue that Wood and Gaskell's place as Victorian women perfectly positioned them to explore interruption on a broader spectrum. Their texts are not only

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[5] Linda K. Hughes and Michael Lund, *Victorian Publishing and Mrs. Gaskell* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999) 105. This point is made in reference to serial publishing of the era, which forced interrupted reading experiences.

[6] Florence Nightingale, *Cassandra: An Essay,* eds. Myra Stark and Cynthia Macdonald (New York: Feminist Press, 1979) 32.

about interrupted daily life, but also about the kind of interrupted lives that *Doctor Who*'s Weeping Angels could feast on. In the work of Gaskell, Wood, and Wood's many adapters, interruption as it affects their fellow women *and* men creeps throughout their texts.

These two texts, *East Lynne* and *North and South*, which appear within five years of each other, both contain a man whose story functions at the edges of the novels' central plot. Each man leaves behind him a well of pain that manifests most potently in the declining health of his mother, who responds hysterically to the loss. The residual energy of the men's lives may center on the pain of their mothers, but the effects of their interrupted lives reverberate throughout the narratives. In *East Lynne*, the central interrupted life is that of Isabel Vane, who deserts her family in adultery. Lady Isabel returns to her children, masochistically reveling in her pain at "what might have been," by disguising herself as a governess and haunting the margins of a life she herself should have had. But over the property lines in West Lynne, the Hare family has seen their son more violently interrupted. Falsely accused of murder, Richard Hare flees his home to live a transient existence, taking on false identities so he can melt into the crowd for more than a decade. When he is finally exonerated, his mother, who has spent his lost years physically deteriorating, fully recovers, and Richard seems to repress his fugitive years. Wood's novel is plagued by interruptions, but Wood's text cannot imagine a viable coping strategy for them.

In Gaskell's novel, the heroine's brother, Frederick Hale, leads a mutiny and flees to Spain to avoid prosecution. He must construct an entirely new life, leaving his family to cope with his absence. Mrs. Hale defends against her son's interrupted life by literally swallowing the "bad words" of a newspaper article that condemns him to exile. As we have seen in *The Warden*, personal defensive adaptations can be restorative; Mr. Harding's unmediated and localized adaptation of the *Jupiter* articles into a silent concert allows him to move on from his guilt. But, because Mrs. Hale is not an artist, she lacks the creative capacity to channel the pain of the offending text into another medium. As a result, she channels the emotional pain caused by the text into her own physical pain. Where defensive adaptations succeed, they displace and repress

the distress that inspired them, and part of their work is to help us forget that the distressing pain was ever there at all. But, sometimes, as in Mrs. Hale's case, when defensive adaptations are themselves interrupted, the distress they contain is concentrated and redirected. Mrs. Hale's children must pick up where their mother left off; they must adapt themselves. In the *East Lynne* adaptations, interruptions become part of their form. The residual energy of Richard's interrupted life is managed throughout the many adaptations of *East Lynne*; the restless spirits and voices of the interruptions that cannot be judged in simplistic morals or remedied by legal means emerge in formal and narrative strategies their audiences are meant to ignore but that nevertheless repeatedly identify themselves.

Interrupting Voices in *East Lynne*

After the death of her profligate father leaves her penniless, young Lady Isabel Vane agrees to marry the wealthy and virtuous country lawyer, Robert Carlyle (who has purchased her family home, East Lynne) even though she is deeply attracted to Captain Francis Levison (a profligate fellow himself). Although the Carlyles are happy for a time, when Isabel encounters Levison years later she finds herself susceptible to his advances. Her own attraction, combined with Levison's dastardly efforts to convince Isabel of Carlyle's infidelity, leads Isabel to desert her husband and children to live in sin with Levison. Isabel soon repents her position, but it is too late. Later, a train accident leaves her illegitimate child dead and Isabel disfigured. Isabel allows the world to believe she is dead. In disguise, Isabel becomes the governess to her own children in the household of Carlyle and his new wife. Suffering great emotional pain, Isabel watches her oldest child die and soon follows him. Only at the moment of her death does Isabel reveal herself, and her suffering, to Carlyle, who forgives her before she dies. Levison is punished when his hubris brings him back to the town of West Lynne to run against Carlyle for MP and his role in a local murder is finally revealed.

It is telling that what most readers would agree is a fairly accurate description of the plot contains barely a mention of a family with which I will be greatly concerned in the rest of this chapter: the Hare family. Barbara Hare, the woman who loves Carlyle in vain only to become his wife after Isabel's desertion, is the daughter of a cantankerous judge. Barbara's brother, Richard Hare, had disappeared long ago under suspicion of murder and was convicted in a case their father presided over. Barbara and Carlyle work for nearly a decade to clear his name – their efforts lead to Isabel's belief that Carlyle is unfaithful. For years, Richard lives anonymously in poverty while the real murderer, Sir Francis *nee* Captain Levison, lives comfortably in the open. While Richard is away, his mother falls ill. Like Mrs. Hale, Mrs. Hare (the similarity between their names is a striking coincidence) expresses her psychic pain of loss physically, living as an invalid while Richard roams England working as a laborer. When Richard is finally acquitted ten years later, he finds his mother "was a young and happy woman again."[7] Although Richard's case seems cold, witnesses appear to testify that Richard Hare did not murder the father of his fickle sweetheart, Afy Hallijohn. Levison committed the murder while living under an assumed name. Richard, having been acquitted, "resumed his position in life, so far as attire went, and in that, at least, was a gentleman again; in speech also. With his working dress, Richard had thrown off his working manners" (631). The rapidity with which middle-class Richard and Mrs. Hare recover their lost years is conspicuous in contrast to Isabel's genteel, steady physical and mental decline, and falls in line with Wood's efforts to position the resilient middle-classes against the weak aristocracy.

Wood, by beginning the novel by first introducing William, Earl of Mount Severn – in a chapter entitled "Lady Isabel" – establishes *East Lynne*'s broad pattern of interruptions. The Earl had once been a promising lawyer, but "he had grown old before his time" (41). He had been promising and industrious, Wood's narrator reveals, because:

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[7] Ellen Wood, *East Lynne*, ed. Andrew Maunder (Orchard Park, NY: Broadview Literary Press, 2000) 672.

> The possibility of his succeeding to the earldom never occurred to him, for three healthy lives, two of them young, stood between him and the title. Yet those lives died off; one of apoplexy, one of fever in Africa, the third boating at Oxford; and the young Temple student, William Vane, suddenly found himself Earl of Mount Severn, and the lawful possessor of sixty thousand a year. (42)

Wood uses uncharacteristically ambiguous language in this account of how plain William Vane's life was so suddenly interrupted. It is not relatives or men who stand between William and the title; not people but "lives." The "lives" die off. Wood's syntax does not confirm the order in which they died, their relationship to William or each other, merely the locations. William "found himself" Earl – the change in life and the loss of an old life happens almost imperceptibly; he has no control over it and there is no returning to his former life. The loss of "lives" is the catalyst for *East Lynne*'s whole narrative.

Carlyle interrupts the castles in the air with an effort to put a stopper in the accumulating debts of the earl's life – he buys the earl's home. However, Carlyle's lifelong connection to the Hare family and his subsequent marriage to Isabel reattaches the Earl's family to the interrupted lives that his purchase of East Lynne is meant to resolve. The accumulating years of Richard's exile are continuously placed against the passing years at East Lynne. After one of Richard's surreptitious ventures home, Barbara sighs for his state, and her own:

> "Ay to wait on," she murmured, "to wait on in dreary pain; to wait on, perhaps forever! And poor Richard – wearing out his days in poverty and exile!"
>
> Lady Isabel recovered, and grew strong; and a few years passed smoothly on, no special event occurring to note them." (244)

This one of many moments when Wood plays the two plots against each other, but what is most striking about the juxtaposition of these two sentences is that it is entirely about time: time denied to the characters and, more significantly, time pointedly denied to Wood's readers.

Although the plot focuses on East Lynne as the center of pain, Wood's narrative disperses the pain of interruption to all of her characters, most clearly in the subplot of Richard Hare's loss of domestic comfort as a parallel to Lady Isabel's self-imposed loss. Mrs. Hare laments to Archibald Carlyle:

> "Mr. Hare wonders at my ill-health, Archibald. Barbara ridicules it; but there lies the source of all my misery, mental and bodily. Oh, Richard! Richard!
>
> There was a distressing pause: for the topic admitted of neither hope nor consolation" (67).

Mrs. Hare's reaction to Richard's loss is what Freud would call hysterical – attaching an intangible feeling to a tangible physical reaction. Isabel's melodramatic central plot provides a location for "a woman's pain" and Mrs. Hare hysterically expresses the pain of "what might have been." However, interruption is not confined to these characters and the pain of interruption also insidiously seeps through much of Wood's dialogue. I argue that Wood's use of interruption in her writing is her hysterical formal response to the social problem posed by her narrative.

The word "interrupt," or its variants, appears insistently throughout *East Lynne*; references to interruptions appear just as often. Wood has a stock of words that she uses repeatedly in her dialogues – characters declare and remark and retort and decry. Nevertheless, the recurrence of the word, "interrupted" is marked and its threat is palpable. Characters like Richard live "dreading interruption" (102). Many of the novel's references to interruption cluster around Richard and Barbara and their positions of loss rival Isabel's. Yet the fact of interruption in the text reminds us that the problem is pervasive – the Hares and Isabel may be the most disrupted characters, but those around them also suffer the pain of interruption, and have minimal opportunities for expressing it because their focus is all on Isabel. Carlyle, by banning mention of Isabel from his household may serve his own needs but his children and the servants are never allowed to mourn for their loss. Blanche Challoner, the decent girl who spends years waiting for Levison to marry her (only to have him marry her sister), seems to pop up in the narrative solely to emphasize how many lives Levison manages to interrupt.

Most characters never interrupt themselves. Only the masochistic Isabel ever interrupts herself; when she has a chance to write to her family after the train accident, "she interrupted [the nurse taking dictation] feeling how undesirable it was to make known her private affairs, even in that strange place" (375). Young William Carlyle interrupts himself – but only on his deathbed:

"said William, interrupting himself" (550). Alternatively, Justice Hare, for instance, merely "stopped himself in the utterance" when referring to the absconded Isabel years after the event (367). Mr. Carlyle and Barbara also "stopped" their utterances, rather than interrupting them (68, 71). The danger of interruption is something ruthlessly imposed on a speaker and on a life.

In one sense, these constant dialogic interruptions are linguistic expressions of the plot delays that Peter Brooks argues must occur in order for a plot to reach the right end at the right time. From a publication angle, the interruptions ensure that *East Lynne*'s misunderstandings will fill enough pages to fulfill its serialization commitment – and they also increase suspense. But Wood's interruptions take on special meaning because her narrator carefully identifies moments when people are *not* interrupted. Mr. Carlyle, when working, insists that he "must not be interrupted" (85). Telling the story of how she suspects Levison as the real murderer in the case for which her brother is accused, "Barbara paused. Mr. Carlyle did not interrupt her" (545). Lady Levison, the unfortunate woman who marries Sir Francis listens to his dark past "without interruption" (626). As Lady Isabel speaks her last words to her husband there is, "A pause of labored breathing. Mr. Carlyle did not interrupt it" (682). These gestures of non-interruption seem generous in light of the plethora of interruptions in the novel – to continue uninterrupted is a gift. Nevertheless, Wood's narrator, decisively marking opportunities for interruption even when that path is not taken, maintains a sense of the danger interruption poses.

Indeed, characters actively and indignantly rebel against linguistic interruption – or use it as a weapon. One of the housemaids at *East Lynne* admonishes her fellow housemaid, Joyce, declaring, "and I wish to goodness that you wouldn't interrupt me!" (227). Lady Isabel, who may accept her own interruption, reacts physically when interruptions threaten her son. Under the guise of governess Madame Vine, Isabel tries to mask her physical breakdown on hearing the news of William's illness by masking her personal pain with the impression of generous non-interruption: "Pray do not interrupt your conversation to pay attention to me! I thank you; I thank you both. I am subject to – slight spasms, and they made me look ill for the moment" (582).

These protestations from the characters are ineffectual. Talkative Joyce still interrupts; Mr. Carlyle and the doctor were already more than happy to ignore Madam Vine.

Interruption has more effect as a weapon. When Isabel suggests that her children accompany her convalescence, Miss Cornelia (Carlyle's spinster sister) "turned sharply round to interrupt the gladness" (248). Lady Isabel, childish creature that she is at the start of the novel, rarely interrupts, but as she experiences more and more pain she takes advantage of interruption. In her last interview with Levison after he has ascended to a baronetcy, she interrupts him several times, "sharply," "passionately," "not allowing him to finish his sentence" (347-348). Isabel's effort to control Levison's language is the only revenge she can manage to take against him and her own past silence. As the instigator of her adultery, she expected Levison to make "all the reparation in [his] power" for her and their child (348). Levison will not bring her back from "beyond the pale of the world" (349). He can no longer give their child the name and inheritance of a future life that was rightly his. Isabel tries to make her own reparations for her interrupted life by interrupting the very thing that always gave Sir Francis the power to manage his own life: she interrupts his stream of fine, tempting words. Interrupting Levison's words is precisely the tactic that finally destroys him.

Levison's role as the prime agent of interruption – the factor that makes him a quintessential melodrama villain and will lead to his portrayal as a tempting devil in Hollywood film versions – is all the more disturbing because of how easy and how common his temptations are. When Wood punishes her dastardly villain, she does so by making sure that he suffers multiple interruptions, still making only a small, atoning dent in his soul count. While he stands before the town of West Lynne, vainly trying to run an effective campaign against Carlyle, a West Lynne native, he is interrupted not once, but three times. Levison draws a "remarkably dense" crowd, "a few to cheer, a great many to jeer and hiss" (536). Barbara's carriage, slowly pushing through the crowd, gets stuck in the throng and "Levison's speech came to a stand-still also" (536). Resolute, he "remained at his post, not looking at Barbara, not looking at anything in

particular, but waiting until the interruption should have passed" (536). Wood scholars have often observed that Barbara and Isabel are foils whose lives cross each other, each ending where the other began in their relationships to Carlyle. But these two women intersect at the moments they interrupt Levison's speech. When Levison begins to speak again, he is at odds with rabble-rousing Otway Bethel and his friends, who derisively whisper, "Hush, old gentleman! We interrupt the eloquence" (538). Only moments later, there is "Another interruption to the crowd, even as he spoke, caused by the railway van bringing up some luggage" (539). This trinity of interruption implicates more and more people in the novel's system of interrupted lives; the whole crowd experiences the interruptions as other travelers pass them by.

Drawing attention to her excessive use of the word suggests Wood's underlying awareness that interruption is a crucial component in her tale – that the tragedy she lays out for Isabel and the sensational murder plot she builds up around Levison, the Hallijohns, and the Hares is linguistically underscored by the narrative directions she does not take and the alternate lives she will not let any of her characters live. Further, Wood's insistence on the term itself emphases that the problem cannot be confined to Isabel's plight alone. That Levison's words are the medium tying interruption to the whole of West Lynne is not surprising. Levison's end, (convicted and hanged for murder) becomes an ironic conclusion to his insincere apology in his early meeting with Isabel when he breaks her mother's cross: "I feel that it can never be atoned for," whispered he; "that the heartfelt homage of my whole life would not be sufficient for compensation" (58).

When Richard does return home, and a court agrees that Levison and not Richard murdered Afy Hallijohn's father, the community of West Lynne that had convicted him in spirit realizes the truth: "Richard had been innocent all the while; they had been more guilty than he" (640). From a gender perspective, the progress of Wood's tale suggests that male problems have legal remedies while women's problems, as Ellen Rosenman and E. Ann Kaplan (among others)

have argued, exact pain "until eternity" (Wood 684).[8] But unlike Lady Isabel, who gets a whole narrative of her pain, Richard's ordeal is only referenced in veiled terms. The whole of it is encapsulated in his rebuff of Afy Hallijohn's advances. Afy sobs: "is this to be all my recompense for the years I have spent pining after you?" (670). Afy calls attention to the missing space in Richard's life but his jovial and dismissive answer "showed Afy that he took her reproach for what it was worth" – and what it's worth is nothing (670). His time, the words admit, is completely lost. Wood's comic turn ensures that, unlike Isabel, Richard is allowed no mourning – nor are her readers encouraged to mourn for him. His mother's response is, after all, too much. By ignoring Richard's lost years and removing them as consequences, Wood leaves Richard's interrupted life as an open problem. Even the interrupted life that has a legal solution, Wood's comic resolution admits, cannot atone for all the lost years that Richard, his family, and those in West Lynne who convicted him wrongly have had to accept. Not even the whole of Richard's future life can atone for it. As the scene of adaptation in *North and South* and the chain of *East Lynne* adaptations will suggest, atonement might be impossible. Nevertheless, they will suggest that interrupted lives, while disturbing, need not lead to either death or oblivion. The interruptions can be adapted.

North and South Torn Apart

Despite the generic dissimilarity between *East Lynne* and *North and South*, their representation of painfully interrupted lives narratively links them. But where Wood's novel finally fails to address its ramifications, *North and South* confronts the problems of interrupted lives; *North and South* contains a scene of adaptation that figures the way adaptations of *East Lynne* will defend against the many interrupted lives of Wood's characters. In the 2004 BBC adaptation of *North and South* there is a tiny scene—a scene so insignificant in its content to the

[8] Ellen Bayuk Rosenman, " 'Mimic sorrows': Masochism and the gendering of pain in Victorian melodrama," *Studies in the Novel* 35.1 (Spring 2003): 22-43; E. Ann Kaplan, *Motherhood and Representation: The Mother in Popular Culture and Melodrama* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

plot of the novel that it was cut entirely from the 1975 BBC adaptation of Gaskell's book.[9] In it, Margaret Hale tells her friend, Bessy, about the circumstances surrounding her brother Frederick's exile. For years, the Hale family has striven to hide his existence. As she tells the story, the scene cuts between the cold, grey cottage in which Bessy and Margaret sit and the hazy, golden past of Margaret's memory.[10] Frederick had joined the navy and, under the care of a vicious captain, felt he "had no choice" but to mutiny. As Margaret recounts the news of the mutiny reaching her parents, the scene cuts to a shot from inside the Hale's parlor: a window pane in medium long shot frames a sunny garden where Mrs. Hale stands in seeming anticipation. The camera tracks in as Mr. Hale walks into frame, carrying a newspaper containing "a list of the mutineers." Finally, in a close-up of their hands, we see Mrs. Hale pull the newspaper from Mr. Hale's unwilling grip. The camera tracks back as Mrs. Hale looks at the paper briefly and collapses into tears. The track back seems to signal the end of the scene, but as the camera again reaches a medium long shot, Mrs. Hale sobs and the exterior sound (silent before) suddenly overwhelm the scene: we both watch and listen as Mrs. Hale tears the paper to shreds. Her jerky movements and the sound of tearing paper overwhelm the image. The offending newspaper now in pieces, Mrs. Hale storms out of frame and leaves her husband helpless in her wake.

This throw-away scene in the film restages a similarly brief and far more troubled scene in the novel. In this scene, Mrs. Hale recounts the newspaper incident to Margaret:

> [Mr. Hale] gave me a wicked newspaper to read, calling our Frederick a 'traitor of the blackest dye,' 'a base, ungrateful disgrace to his profession.' 'Oh! I cannot tell you what bad words they did not use. I took the paper in my hands as soon as I read it – I tore it up into little bits – I tore it – Oh! I believe, Margaret, I tore it with my teeth.'[11]

Mrs. Hale is confronted by a painful text, a "wicked" text that contains nothing but "bad words." They are "a lie" and unlike rumors or news Mr. Hale could have "heard" and for which she had

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[9] "North and South," dir. Rodney Bennett, writ. David Turner, perf. Patrick Stewart, Tim Piggott-Smith and Rosalie Shanks, 4 episodes, British Broadcasting Corporation, 1 December 1975, VHS, British Film Institute Archives (BBC, 1975).

[10] "North and South," dir. Brian Percival, writ. Sandy Welch, perf. Daniela Denby-Ashe, Richard Armitage, Sinead Cusack, Anna Maxwell-Martin, and Tim Pigott-Smith, 2004, DVD, BBC Warner, 2005.

[11] Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South* (New York: Penguin Classics 2003) 108-109.

prepared herself, these bad words are solid and unchangeable before her (109). They are not "a misprint" (108). Since she cannot change them, she must destroy them, consume them. Literally eating words, with a passion she will never display again, Mrs. Hale's pain is overtly that of a helpless mother who cannot defend her son from the words cast against him. Here it is not the event of the mutiny that traumatizes but her encounter with the text that conveys the circumstances of the event to others. "And when we saw a report in the papers" she tells Margaret, "– that's to say, long before Fred's letter reached us – […] how your father and I turned sick over that list [of loyal officers], when there was no name of Frederick Hale" (108). In both instances, the medium of the "report" makes her "sick" – the fact that Frederick's name is not *printed* rather than the *idea* that he was involved in the mutiny that distresses her; they hoped his name had accidentally misprinted rather than left out purposefully – "newspapers are so careless" she tells her daughter (108). In other words, the loss of Frederick was bad enough without the "careless" newspaper harshly condemning him in bad words for all to see.

The insistence that the medium itself is involved in the interruption of Frederick's life is underscored in the later BBC adaptation of the novel; the sound of the ripping paper, the sound Mrs. Hale's textual destruction (rather than her sobs), becomes the aural star of the scene. Mrs. Hale can have no effect on the words or their meaning. She cannot adapt them, like Trollope's Mr. Harding, into music. When Mr. Harding had been long bombarded by pamphlets and newspapers proclaiming his guilt, he finally exploded into a silent musical adaptation as his emotive answer to the accusations against him. That adaptation defends him against the guilt imputed to him. The swallowed adaptation fails to have a wide reach, but it protects Harding from the pangs of his own conscience. In contrast, the thoroughly helpless Mrs. Hale can only defend against her pain by tearing the original text "into little bits" with her teeth. By doing so, the normally passive Mrs. Hale obliterates the threatening text but cannot defend against the interrupted lives it portends. Her act, which leaves her cheeks "hot as fire" and her eyes burning "in her head," distracts Mrs. Hale from emotional pain, allowing her to function until a third

version of the narrative arrives "months later" in her son's letters. Nevertheless, this private correspondence cannot change Frederick's now very public reputation. The Hales must effect the interruptions of their son's life both in body and spirit; they must allow the world to believe that no such person as Frederick Hale exists. Mrs. Hale momentarily gains control over the "bad words" by destroying the text. She survives by adapting her body to the pain she is not allowed to publicly display. Because Mrs. Hale does not have the imaginative means to actually adapt the careless newspaper text into another medium separate from herself, the pain of the accusations against Frederick manifest in her own bodily deterioration.

As its title suggests, *North and South* is broadly about perceived social and ideological dichotomies. Gaskell's North and South are in England. Like the American North and South of the same period, the South was mainly agrarian and the North was industrial. Patricia Ingham asserts in her recent introduction to the novel that these appear "not only physically distant but unrelated."[12] Gaskell's narrative explores the connections between such dichotomies by redirecting attention to the terms of social responsibility. During the nineteenth-century, it was common for novels to first appear in magazines in serial format, with one part appearing monthly. *North and South* appeared in the weekly magazine, *Household Words*, between 2 September 1854 27 Janurary 1855 (Hughes and Lund 96). When Margaret Hale's father resigns from the clergy of the Church of England, he moves his wife and daughter from the tiny parish of Helstone to a mill town called, Milton-Northern. Once there, Margaret manages the household as her passive parents fail to gain footing in their new setting. She is at first appalled by the "hopeless streets" and "slovenly looseness" of the people, all of whom seems to fall far below her in traditional understandings of class (Gaskell 60). Despite her initial reservations, Margaret soon develops a strong affinity with the workers' position as their union strikes for higher wages. Margaret becomes involved in the fraught relationship between the "masters" and the "workers" through

[12] Patricia Ingham, "Introduction," *North and South* by Elizabeth Gaskell (New York: Penguin Books 1995): xii-xxvii. xiii.

her friendship with mill-workers, Nicholas and Bessy Higgins. Simultaneously, Margaret nurses an antagonistic mutual attraction to her father's student, a powerful local mill-owner, Mr. John Thornton. In the end, as readers may guess, Margaret and Thornton come to points of agreement, both about methods of business and about their relationship. Marxist and feminist critics of the 1980s and 90s faulted, "the novel's 'happy ending,' which is almost universally read as a retreat from the troubling problems of the public sphere into a romanticized private and personal reconciliation."[13] More recent criticism, however, has seen the romantic ending as a metaphor for the social conflicts of the novel.

Because Margaret uses her entrance into the public sphere of trade as code for trading her love to Thornton (she uses her inheritance to finance Thornton's business), the final pages become a representation of unity – of beliefs and of private and public spheres. Catherine Gallagher, notably, has argued that *North and South* is both a realist novel that interrogates the boundaries between public and private space and also a reflection on its own narrative methods. The result is an "anarchy of signification" that reveals the impossibility of finding absolute meaning and value, crediting instead "emotional, and preconscious meanings" (181; 184). Gallagher's argument emphasizes the way Gaskell uses her narrative methods to expose ideological tensions in daily life. The relationship between narrative and medium, in other words, can expose social tensions that circumstances of plot make otherwise easy to ignore. In the absence of absolute value, the Hales' sublimated reactions to theirs and Frederick's interrupted lives model very different modes of adaptive defense. Mrs. Hale tries to make her body into a text since she cannot sublimate her pain into art, and the project is doomed to failure. Margaret ultimately eschews the "meaningful" plot she had constructed for Frederick's life to accept that there are many life plots that have meaning and value. She accepts that living "to death" may not be the punishment it seems.

[13] Dorice Williams Elliott, "The Female Visitor and the Marriage of Classes in Gaskell's *North and South*," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 49.1 (1994): 21-49. 23.

Critics have seen various purposes for Frederick's unfortunate past in the context of the novel. That "terrible affair" that young Margaret "never understood" becomes a crux on which most of the major plot points turn: Frederick's absence causes Mrs. Hale's invalidism, Thornton misidentifies Frederick as Margaret's lover, Frederick's return leads Margaret into a lie that shames her, and Margaret at first even assumes Frederick is the reason behind her father leaving the church (Gaskell 18). Andrew Sanders sees Frederick as a tool in Margaret's "crisis of liberalism"; when set in the context of Margaret's, Mr. Hale's, and the Higgins's often conflicting views on religion, Frederick's oblique admission that is has converted to Catholicism to marry his Spanish fiancé becomes Gaskell's method of "presenting Margaret with a further crisis in her developing sense of 'the other.'"[14] Both Rosemarie Bodenheimer and Patsy Stoneman read Frederick's mutiny as a foil to the union strike that is the at the center of the plot in this industrial novel. Bodenheimer contends that even though Gaskell's treatment of the actual mutiny is brief it is as complex in its moral implications as the central social conflict between the workers and the masters: "None of the painful paradoxes and consequences of Frederick's shipboard mutiny is avoided in the brief treatment of that subplot."[15] Most recently, Julia Sun-Joo Lee has read Frederick's mutiny in transnational terms, arguing that Frederick's fugitive status links him to the American slavery. The power of the British government "to bestow or revoke citizenship" leaves "Frederick in a position of powerlessness" not especially different from that other nineteenth-century fugitive Frederick: Frederick Douglass.[16]

Yet, Frederick's loss is a problem that cannot be resolved in the plot – no ministering angel can appear to retell his history or to turn his parents into unfeeling stone. The pain of that impossible plot causes Frederick and his family to attempt different modes of adapting

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[14] Andrew Sanders, "A crisis of liberalism in *North and South*," *The Gaskell Society Journal* 10 (1996): 42-52. 49.
[15] Rosemarie Bodenheimer, "North and South: A Permanent State of Change," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 34.3 (Dec 1979): 281-301. 288; Patsy Stoneman, *Elizabeth Gaskell* (Bloomington, IL: Indiana UP, 1987).
[16] Julia Sun-Joo Lee, "The Return of the 'Unnative': The Transnational Politics of Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 61.4 (Mar 2007): 449-480. 479.

circumstances to provide a palatable future. Frederick successfully copes with the terms of his past and with his exile in Spain. Having found a Spanish wife and been "received as a junior partner" in a Spanish trading house he was "very, very happy" (Gaskell 336). Margaret, in fine Victorian middle-class fashion, at first disdains Thornton's role in trade and later reflects on the irony of her brother's new life: "Margaret smiled a little, and then sighed as she remembered afresh her old tirades against trade. Here was her preux chevalier of a brother turned merchant, trader" (336). However, those Frederick left behind him (and those he affects when he secretly returns to England) find the consequences of his absence/presence more difficult to deal with. His family must deal with the pain of both his exile and his tarnished reputation, and the fact that he cannot, even if acquitted, really be Frederick Hale again. Having taken the name of Dickinson, he no longer answers to his old family name. Frederick Hale that was, once interrupted, no longer exists.

Frederick Hale's removal from existence might help explain Mrs. Hale's violent reaction to his alleged crime. When Mrs. Hale narrates the tale of her reaction to Frederick's brutal removal from the lists of loyal English sailors, what's most striking to Gaskell's reader is how out of character the narration seems to be – it is one of only two proactive efforts Mrs. Hale ever makes. Mrs. Hale is notoriously fragile and passive, but Gaskell gives Mrs. Hale's state a clear cause. Margaret possesses, "a consciousness that her mother's delicate health, and positive dislike to Helstone, all dated from the time of the mutiny in which Frederick had been engaged" (22). Mrs. Hale does not have the capability for textual adaptation at her disposal, and so like the unfortunate critics in *Theater of Blood*, her body and the offending text become intertwined.

Margaret can tell that that the real traumatic event is buried beneath layers of time in the narrative flourish of her brother's letters, in newspapers, and the court accounts of the trials of the sailors who fatefully turned themselves in (107). As in *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, bodies must be sacrificed in order to protect the integrity of a particular narrative identity. The court's verdict is that the men "suffered themselves" to be misled by Frederick (109). For Mrs. Hale, who does not

carry the dramatization through, the effect is that, while she can deal with the disgrace of the "bad words," she physically deteriorates. Eating the newspaper's words actually transmutes her emotional pain into physical pain that she carries with her for the rest of her life – so much so that the mere mention of Frederick's name becomes a literal trigger for pain. Trying to cheer her mother up, Margaret suggests they might be able to return to Helstone:

> 'No, never! That I must take as a just penance. But, Margaret – Frederick!'
> At the mention of that one word, she suddenly cried out loud, as in some sharp agony. It seemed as if the thought of him upset all her composure, destroyed the calm, overcame the exhaustion. Wild passionate cry succeeded to cry. (129)

The "thought of him" is all it takes for Mrs. Hale's repressed psychological pain to clash with her mounting physical pain. Although Gaskell's narrator says it is only "as if" thoughts are linked to physical expressions, these "as ifs" run rampant throughout *North and South*. Mary Ann O'Farrell observes that, "Gaskell's self-conscious 'as-ifs' tend to congregate around the body […] and her anxieties tend to revolve around the place of the body in writing, the use of the body as sign."[17] The legacy of Frederick's name – the locus of Mrs. Hale's distress, the traitorous name that did *not* appear in the list of loyal officers and *last* appeared in the wicked newspaper – is written all over each of Mrs. Hale's "Wild, passionate" cries (129). The problem with the "bad words" the paper printed about Frederick was that they were unchangeable and already in circulation – only a change in form could offer new possibilities of form or meaning. The energy of possibilities, we must remember, is what *Doctor Who*'s Weeping Angels need to nourish them. As long as there are new defensive adaptations before us yet to be formalized, with words circulating "as if," the problem of interrupted lives can recede before us.

Frederick seems to contain everything that the Hale's fear: loss, shame, anger, violence, guilt, and betrayal. The only way to successfully displace the pain, the Hales' actions suggest, is to be silent and not to risk the repetition of bad words. When Mrs. Hale's illness becomes

[17] Mary Ann O'Farrell, *Telling Complexions: The Nineteenth-Century English Novel and the Blush* (Durham: Duke UP, 1997) 79.

terminal, when her body begins to fail in its role as a medium for pain, Frederick must reemerge. As we have already seen, Mrs. Hale's thwarted adaptation has lasting consequences. Although she can tear the original text to bits, her dramatization is not of the "bad words" of the original text but an account of her *reaction* to the newspaper. I have argued in earlier chapters that part of an adaptation's emotional management lies in a narrative's reconstitution in a different medium – one that can be conveyed to a different (and usually wider) audience. Like Charlie Kaufman in *Adaptation,* Mrs. Hale gives Margaret a narrative of her thwarted adaptation experience. The crisis of finding she cannot change the words in front of her becomes a narrative of its own. But while narrating the whole scene to Margaret marks her *need* for a process of adaptation, she still does not produce a defensive adaptation of the newspaper's bad words. The adaptation of pain itself fails. Frederick, after all, is still lost to her and a fugitive from his own country.

When dramatizing the event for Margaret (when she might have only summarized the newspapers bad words rather than her affective response), Mrs. Hale can again understand its import without succumbing to the "wicked" *way* the original text that told the story of her mutineer son. Mrs. Hale destroys the newspaper story, tearing it apart and swallowing its contents into her own body. While Mrs. Hale seems to simply narrate the tale to Margaret as part of the many story exchanges and dialogs through which Gaskell demonstrates her characters' moral education, in effect she regurgitates the newspaper's bad words in the only kind of dramatic adaptation she is capable of composing. This scene detailing Mrs. Hale's reaction to the newspaper is unique in that it bears almost no import for the plot or for Gaskell's major themes.[18] It shows her putting the words and their affective effect back together in performance for her daughter. The process of narration can imbue it with perspective unavailable to the news report format. The dashes and hesitations that compose her monologue contrast sharply with the cold

[18] Several critics, including Elizabeth Starr and Gordon Bigelow, have noted that narrative circulation seems to exist at the ideological center of Gaskell's text. Elizabeth Starr, " 'A great engine for good': The industry of fiction in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* and *North and South*," *Studies in the Novel* 34.4 (Winter 2002): 385-403; Gordon Bigelow, *Fiction, Famine, and the Rise of Economics in Victorian Britain and Ireland* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2003).

newspaper that designates Frederick "a bad, ungrateful disgrace to his profession" (108). Mrs. Hale displaces all of her emotional pain from the newspaper article to physical pain. Nevertheless this narration, in itself, is still a failed adaptation because it does not defend Mrs. Hale from the effect of Frederick's interrupted life. This moment transfers the burden of her failed adaptation onto Margaret.

Margaret's Defense System

The terms of a successful defensive adaptation against interrupted lives are elusive. Mrs. Hale's adaptation of her body seems efficient, but because it ends by draining her life in place of Frederick's, the interrupted lives in *North and South* are continuously in danger because of the *way* Mrs. Hale deals with the "bad words" of the newspaper; her pain is for the loss *she* suffers rather than for her son. After hearing her mother's story, Margaret takes up her family's interrupted life and learns to live with it by adapting the newspaper's bad words into good ones.

After the strike that forms the center of Gaskell's narrative, strike leader Nicholas Higgins elucidates the distinctions between bad words and good words. "Strike's end," he tells Margaret and her father, "It's o'er for this time. I'm out o' work because I ne'er asked for it. And I ne'er asked for it, because good words is scarce and bad words is plentiful" (284). For Nicholas, while good words are asking for work "like a man," bad words are when the boss says "There's no work for yo' here" (284-285). Having already seen the effects of "bad words" on Mrs. Hale, the reader gets a better picture of the difference between good and bad words. While good and bad, like North and South, might seem like opposing forces, what we see in Nicholas's explanation is that they can be responses to the same problem. Likewise, good words about Frederick could only have been printed had he not taken part in the mutiny – had his name appeared on the list of rescued officers. The "bad words" are the evaluative ones – those of having judgment passed on Frederick in a public space, and it is wicked immutability that makes the words bad; all of the Hales are privately "prouder of Frederick standing up against injustice

than if he had been simply a good officer" (109). The characters in Gaskell's novel often long to "even find the relief of words" – but their inability to speak painful "bad words" or their unwillingness to hear them often leads to greater pain (345). When the pain is already in words, as in the newspaper carrying confirmation of Frederick's mutiny, those bad words and their life interrupting implications must – as Mrs. Hale's life-draining action suggest – be adapted in any way possible.

The continued need for defensive adaptation as an answer to Frederick's interrupted life is emphasized in the second half of the novel. Frederick eventually returns to England at his dying mother's request. Mrs. Hale, whose physical adaptation of the bad words keeps the pain of Frederick's loss at bay, dies. Her palliative displacement of Frederick's loss seems to disappear with her. The chapter following Mrs. Hale's death (XXXI) introduces George Leonards, who replaces Mrs. Hale's defensive embodiment of pain with a physical embodiment of the legal and social threats that keep Frederick abroad and his existence a secret the Hale's must maintain. Leonards, an old acquaintance from the South, meets the Hale's maid, Dixon, in the street. Almost immediately, Dixon recalls in conversation with Margaret, he "began to inquire after Master Frederick, and said, what a scrape he's got into […], and how he'd be hung for mutiny if he were ever caught, and how a hundred pound reward had been offered for catching him" (249). In answer to this renewed threat, Margaret finally does what her parents never considered and encourages her brother to address his case through legal means, believing that this will allow him to recover his life in England: "you surely will try and clear yourself of the exaggerated charges brought against you, even if the charge of mutiny itself be true" (253). But Margaret misunderstands the situation.

Margaret believes that Frederick could want to bring his new Spanish wife to England and makes the argument partially "for her sake" (253). Frederick, however, knows he cannot reclaim the life he lost and has wholeheartedly taken up his new life. He wishes that "you and my father would come to Spain" (252). Unwilling to interrupt their own lives as a sacrifice for

Frederick's, however, Mr. Hale roundly declares: "No – no more removals for me,' […]. 'One removal has cost me my wife. No more removals in this life" (253). Mr. Hale's decision to cling to "this life" overtly suggests the afterlife of heaven, but also emphasizes the dual lives Frederick has been forced to lead and which Mr. Hale rejects for himself and his daughter. It has been clear, to this point in the novel, that the emotional and unexpected loss of Frederick from the Hales' daily lives had wrought "monstrous circumstances of pain" (277). The initial pain Mrs. Hale managed in that debilitating maternal act of adaptation was prompted by the unfeeling nature of the law and the "bad words" in the newspaper. Her adaptation of those words into her own bodily pain kept the pain of Frederick's interrupted life at bay while multiplying the physical effects of the interruption in her own life. At the same time, though, the passage of time compounds the problems of Frederick's court martial and the printed word. Frederick developed a new life in Spain and the Hales became a family with only one child. Mr. Hale's refusal to remove himself reveals the hidden selfishness of the Hale's pain: their pain is not only for the way Frederick's life has been interrupted but also for the way he has interrupted theirs.

Margaret is slow to accept that her brother's new life will not reconcile with his old one. Frederick tries to make her see how the passage of time is unrecoverable: "In the first place Margaret, who is to hunt up my witnesses? All of them are sailors, drafted off to other ships, except those whose evidence would go for very little, as they took part, or sympathized with the affair" (254). Although Frederick neglects to mention the sailors who have already died in the affair, their terminated lives hover in the subtext of his words. As the bodies and minds of the sailors are not available to Frederick, neither does transmuting the tale into another written form – a self-justification pamphlet – seem a viable option: "No one would read a pamphlet of self-justification so long after the deed, even if I put one out" (254). As if to match his mother's story of tearing up the newspaper's bad words, Frederick confirms that these belated "good words" on his behalf would have little effect "so long after the deed."

Margaret, Frederick warns, does not understand the legal circumstances of a court martial in which "authority weighs nine-tenths in the balance, and evidence forms only the other tenth. In such cases, evidence itself can hardly escape being influenced by the prestige of authority" (254). The initial circumstances seemed to make Frederick's case impossible – his responsibility to his men was certainly swallowed by his legal guilt and the "prestige of authority." But in the end, as Larry Uffleman summarizes, Frederick simply "cannot be cleared because too much time has elapsed for witnesses to be located."[19] The potential solutions Frederick mentions as "too late" all appear, from Frederick's language, not to have been pursued at the time of the crime – at least on Frederick's side. Frederick, hiding out in South America, did not appear as a witness for the sailors he mutinied to protect, he did not write a leaflet of self-justification from Spain, he did not stand against the court of arbitrary authority to present what evidence he had. It's as if legal arguments for his defense were incapable of being matched up to the case of the prosecution and only suggest themselves in retrospect; no one in the family seems to question why the steps had not been taken in the past. Yet, in the hands of Gaskell's narrator, Frederick appears as a calm voice of informed reason against Margaret's naïve, idealistic hopes.

But even if the case against Frederick was "very much exaggerated" as the Hales insist, his part in Leonards' death creates a second legal complication that restages Frederick's original life interruption, and thus further erases "Frederick Hale" from existence. While Margaret and Frederick are on the train platform in the moments before he escapes Frederick scuffles with Leonards, who is eager to turn Frederick in to the authorities for a reward. Leonards' fall from the train platform and subsequent death leads to a police inquiry. Margaret is recognized as "walking with the man who pushed the deceased over the platform" (267). This new clash with authority is a pain expanded by Mr. Thornton's belief that Frederick is actually Margaret's lover. Thinking that Frederick is still in England, and thus more vulnerable to prosecution, Margaret,

[19] Larry K. Uffelman, "Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*: The Novel in Progress," *The Gaskell Society Journal* 14 (2000): 73-84. 77.

with a "quick, sharp pain" knows she must try to keep him safe (268). In response to a police inspector's queries on the subject, Margaret repeatedly claims, "I was not there," (267; 269). The inspector is "struck" by the "mechanical repetition of her first reply" and reflects that it as a "dull echo of her former denial" (269). Margaret, by claiming that she was "not there" also implies that Frederick also was "not there" – and assures herself that the authorities will believe he was *never* there. Frederick turns out to have left England well before Margaret lied to the police – a fact she learns from his long awaited letter. The narrator notes Margaret's unfortunate lack of faith in God here. But striking to Gaskell's readers is that this letter bears some bad words: "it was marked 'Too late'" (279). Margaret unwillingly restages Frederick's original exile, taking the pain of the accusations against him into her own body and attempting to dramatize them more palatably. But these actions only reaffirm that Frederick Hale cannot come home again and thus prefigures their lawyer's inability to find witnesses who could acquit him. Instead, the Hales and the English authorities must continue to accept that their Frederick Hale, simply, "was not there."

In the end, the old Frederick Hale has to disappear completely into Cadiz – when he is referenced in the last pages of the book, it is rarely as Frederick Hale and increasingly as his adopted home. The narrator notes that that "There was no Spain for Margaret that autumn; although to the last she hoped that some fortunate occasion would call Frederick to Paris, whither she could easily have met with a convoy" (403). Frederick only appears in the second clause of the sentence. And finally, Frederick Hale completely disappears into implication. Edith, Margaret's spoiled cousin, is "As it is, […] always afraid of her going to Cadiz" (423). The unarticulated circumstance that leaves life "as it is" is the blank spot that Frederick's interrupted life left behind. That blank spot – the story that might have been, that life we might have led, is a recurrent fear that, as Frederick's story demonstrates, cannot be legally remedied. For the Hales the loss itself is painful but unspeakable. The pain cannot be put into words satisfactorily because it never happened. There is no relief; there are only bad words that good words can merely keep at bay. As a result, the Hales take on a mode of defensive adaptation that turns the matter of a

text into a bodily affect. The pain that the series of bad words causes can be adapted into physical pain, but the effects are as fragile as the bodies that hold them.

The Hales hold an untenable faith that bringing their son and brother home will restore Frederick Hale they knew and the lives they themselves wanted. They hesitate to accept that while Frederick's body may be essentially the same, his identity has shifted irrevocably. Only Margaret, displaying the capacity for education that her parents lack, finally realizes that "years and years of time" have made the recovery impossible and while "that bubble was very pretty, and very dear to our hearts" it "has burst like many another" (333). Frederick, now "very, very happy" in Cadiz has accepted the new version of himself. In that way he stages a separate mode of adaptation by accepting that his body can hold many successive identities. Frederick does not seek to recover his old life but by embracing his new one recognizes that that the life which remains a series of bad words to his parents can be good words for him: "It seems strange to think, that what gives us most hope for the future should be called Dolores" Margaret reflects on the name of her future sister-in-law (281). "Dolores," meaning sorrow, is a name derived for the Spanish word for pain. In this moment, we see how a bad word becomes a good word, in medium if not in matter. While the narrator ascribes such a comment to Mr. Hale's pessimistic reflections, we as readers can see Margaret shifting from her parents debilitating defensive adaptations to her brother's more hopeful version. It is in this aspect of Margaret's education, learning how to confront bad words by seeing how they can be adapted into good words (with just a twinge of sentimentality), that Gaskell's readers can see how adaptation – not just *to* circumstances but also *of* the words and texts that record them – is a crucial coping strategy for life. By the novel's end, Frederick Hale can stop being a symbol of life interrupted; rather than gathering energy from what Fredrick might have been the narrative finally gathers energy from the man Frederick has become and the woman his sister will be.

East Lynne **with Variations**

Even though *North and South* appeals to readers' moral sensibility, Gaskell's tale, like many important novels published between 1832 and 1867, claimed to faithfully represent the "condition of England" under industrialization to middle and upper-class readers.[20] Ellen Wood's sensation novel appeared to have less educational aims. Like Gaskell's novel, *East Lynne* first appeared in serial form. The tale was published in *New Monthly Magazine* from January 1860 through September 1861. Wood's work drew on melodramatic emotionalism, a tendency that made her unpopular with critics. Nevertheless, as Andrew Maunder points out, the dubious distinction of being known merely as the "least unwholesome of the sensation novelists" did not negatively affect her sales.[21] Wood's *East Lynne* was a full-fledged success, earning a quintessential earmark of publishing success: it was dramatized and performed in legitimate (and less legitimate) theaters all over Britain and North America as early as 1862. So ubiquitous were versions and performances of *East Lynne* that a catch phrase for rag-tag traveling theater troupes of the early twentieth-century was to promise: "Next week—*East Lynne*."[22]

While Wood's novel is sensational, it is also concerned with everyday problems of the nineteenth-century woman. As a domestic melodrama, focusing on the Victorian home, the novel showcases Lady Isabel's masochistic pleasure in the pain of her lost domestic life and Archibald Carlyle's stoic acceptance of his own parallel pain.[23] E. Ann Kaplan uses the novel as the centerpiece of her "maternal sacrifice paradigm" (76). This paradigm, which Kaplan suggests emerged most clearly in the nineteenth-century, is composed of the psychoanalytic pre-Symbolic yearnings that erupt under a patriarchal system leaving the mother, here Isabel, with a "fear of separation, individuation, and emotional autonomy" that is fully expressed in her desire to

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[20] Catherine Gallagher uses these dates to frame her discussion of industrial novels. The date of the first Reform Bill in England was 1832 and 1867 is the date of the Second Reform Act.
[21] Andrew Maunder, "Introduction," *East Lynne* by Ellen Wood (New York: Broadview Press, 2002) 9-35.
[22] Gilbert B. Cross, *Next week—East Lynne: domestic drama in performance, 1820-1874* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell UP, 1972).
[23] Rosenman argues that pain, an overtly feminized emotion, is the source of masochistic pleasure in many Victorian domestic melodramas and that such gendering of emotion serves to solidify gender ideologies of the period. For more on forms of melodrama, see: Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1976).

sacrifice herself for/to her children (80). The way *East Lynne* plays with maternal pain lets Ann Cvetkovich argue:

> Melodramas like *East Lynne* are pleasurable because they provide readers with the satisfaction of locating the source of a woman's pain. […] Readers can thus displace feelings that might be the product of a more systemic and nameless oppression onto a situation in which pain can be expressed because the conditions that produce it are so clear.[24]

From a socio-political perspective, Wood's refusal to deal with Richard's interrupted life in this way may be one of the text's strengths, as Ellen Rosenman convincingly argues. The arrest and conviction of Levison for the crime of murder at the very moment he challenges Carlyle politically "is the displaced resolution to Carlyle's personal, romantic pain. In this sense, *East Lynne* reverses the charge that has often been leveled against Condition of England novels such as *Felix Holt, Hard Times,* and *North and South*: that they displace political problems into the realm of personal relationships, offering false resolutions" (31). *North and South* suggests that interrupted lives, while painfully inevitable, can be fashioned into different and no less fulfilling lives. Without incorporating means of adaptation in her own pages, Woods settles for miraculous reversals of fortune that suit her genre but makes no efforts to confront the problem that plagues her whole narrative. Wood's tendency to ignore subplot resolutions has been duplicated in critical assessments of the novel – both contemporary and modern critics tend to examine Isabel's plot largely in isolation from the rest of the novel.

When Lady Isabel finally dies after all of her trials, she wishes nothing more than that she had never allowed her life to be interrupted: "Oh, that the past could be blotted out! That I could wake up and find it all a hideous dream; that I were here, as in the old days, in health and happiness, your ever-loving wife! Do *you* wish it? – that the dark past had never had place?" (682). However, one of the ways Margaret completes her education in *North and South* is by realizing, consciously or not, that while Frederick Hale's life was interrupted, her brother's life

[24] Ann Cvetkovich, *Mixed Feelings: Feminism, Mass Culture, and Victorian Sensationalism (*New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1992) 104.

was nonetheless full. In *East Lynne*, Wood wrestles with the amorphous angels of interrupted lives without managing to resolve the problem posed. That failure is very much like Isabel's own silence at key moments of distress, when speaking would seem to redirect her life in a more positive direction. Isabel's refusal to speak, which would become such a focus in analyses of the novel and its dramatic adaptations, also becomes a code for the other traumas that have no voice in *East Lynne.*[25] Like a member of the Hale family, Isabel does not merely avoid speaking of painful subjects but also of subjects that are likely to lead to pain. Isabel tries to formulate a new life with her illegitimate child, but is violently interrupted by a train accident that kills the child and disfigures Isabel. "Railway accidents," the narrator avows, "are less frequent in France than they are with us, but when they do occur they are wholesale catastrophes, the memory of which lasts for a lifetime" (373). The plot twist turns Isabel herself, this weeping angel of the domestic sphere, into the real agent of interruption. Adaptations of *East Lynne* reproduce this interruption threat formally as they try to minimize it narratively.

Isabel's subsequent return to East Lynne becomes almost an act of vengeance – unable to "recover the life she has abandoned," (to borrow a phrase from Anne Cvetkovich) or form a fulfilling new life, Isabel refuses to allow anyone else let go of her old one (102). In the scene quoted above, Isabel dies trying to force Carlyle to answer her question about the place of the "dark past." Although our hero virtuously refuses to submit to Isabel's questioning, Wood lets Carlyle fall to platitudes in the end. He entreats his new wife Barbara "to strive always to be doing right, unselfishly, under God," ignoring entirely the fact that his own striving for good was little protection against the acts of others or, as in Isabel's train accident, acts of God (Wood 691).

The issue of "what might have been" and its expression through emotional pain touches nearly every corner of Wood's text but the novel does not attempt to reconcile the problem in plot, form, or tone. Wood, consciously or not, chooses to remain silent. Gaskell was able to find

[25] For more on Isabel's reluctance to speak, see Elizabeth Jay, "Introduction," *East Lynne,* by Ellen Wood (New York: Oxford UP, 2005) vii-xliii.

a human answer to interrupted lives in her novel because of the failed scene of adaptation lodged in the text. Instead, the emotional extremism and comic scenes of Wood's genre are distraction tools, leaving the work of maintaining and addressing the persistent problem to her professional descendents. The *East Lynne* adaptations have always been about Lady Isabel, despite their titles. These adaptations become hugely popular and then die off with a wimper and a comic wink by the middle of the twentieth-century. The *East Lynne* adaptations play out across decades and the more they hysterically represent Isabel's tragedy (in all senses of the word) the better they defend against the other interrupted lives that Wood's narrative contains. I suggest that these texts are so successful as defensive adaptations that they produce their own fall from favor – their failure to be deemed relevant is the fulfillment of their defense against interrupted lives.

There were many theatrical versions of *East Lynne*.[26] The Samuel French introduction to Ned Alpert's 1941 adaptation called it the "daddy of all the old-fashioned meller drammers" and most critics would agree with that assessment.[27] Most dramatizations survive only in reviews. But the extant versions, at least, indicate that though the melodramatic content of Lady Isabel's plot was always intensified in stage versions, the Hare plot was rarely proportionately diminished and, in some cases, was expanded. Andrew Maunder explores working-class receptions of the first British adaptation of the novel, which played in the East End of London at the Effingham Theatre: J.W. Archer's *Marriage Bells; or the Cottage on the Cliff*. Maunder also points out that the hardships Richard must endure during his exile are kept at the margins of Wood's text, and stay there in West End stagings. Through reviews of Archer's play, Maunder determines that the "version is awash with references to working-class poverty – so much so that at times the adultery

[26] According to Guy Barefoot: "One source confirms at least 88 different productions of the play" (96). Guy Barefoot, "East Lynne to Gas Light: Hollywood, Melodrama and Twentieth-Century Notions of the Victorian" *Melodrama: Stage, Picture, Screen*. Ed. by Jacky Bratton, Jim Cook, Christine Gledhill. (London: BFI, 1994) 94-105.
[27] Ned Alpert, *East Lynne* (New York: Samuel French, 1941) 3.

plot and the naming and shaming of the criminal wife stops being the main focus."[28] Maunder fairly focuses on the expansion of the Richard subplot as catering to the concerns of a working-class audience as well as adding more sensation by including an onstage murder of the Hallijohn character. As this text moved through various incarnations in different media, the incomplete resolutions that Wood offers in her long novel are compressed out of the narrative. Yet, the pain of interruption that Wood introduces cannot be so simply resolved, and the mainstream adaptations of *East Lynne* defend against this gap through formal means: structure in drama, cutting and editing in television, and superimposition in film all become techniques that manifest interruption where it disappears from the narrative. These formal techniques tangibly express the intangible energy of "what might have been."

In an effort of be "faithful," as it were, these texts maintain a subplot that could easily be written out. The effect downplays the hard time Richard Hare must serve among the working classes, but the fact that the subplot remains at all suggests that it holds an interest that cutting it could not resolve. T.A. Palmer's version displaces the problem onto exigencies of dramatic form.[29] The experiential time for the audience – the way Wood insistently reminds her readers that days, months, and years have passed – gets compressed out of the narrative in a dramatization. Drama must have drama – not just discussions of it. This recovery effort is emphasized by identifying the first act, which contains the Hare murder scene, as a "prologue" followed by four acts of the real play. As a result, the play's Richard Hare gets back several of his years. If the murder event and the marriage occur onstage, but in a prologue that compartmentalizes the events, time is not lost in the same way; we just shift between scenes of action. Palmer's dramatic format minimizes the problem of interrupted lives in the narrative, but the formal resolution gets refracted back into the onstage action.

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[28] Andrew Maunder, "I will not live in Poverty and Neglect: *East Lynne* on the East End Stage," *Victorian Sensation: Essays on a Scandalous Genre,* eds. Kimberly Harrison and Richard Fantina (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2006) 173-187. 180. Archer's text does not survive.

[29] T.A. Palmer, *East Lynne; a domestic drama in a prologue and four acts* (New York: Samuel French, 1875).

Richard's visits home, and Carlyle's clandestine efforts to aid him, become entangled with the circulation of good and bad words. We watch Isabel stand on stage reading a burnt note (which is really from Barbara asking Carlyle to help her brother):

> Isa: Hare's servant! (*pause) (then goes R. and snatches note from fender)* Some of the words are obliterated by fire. But there may be enough to give me a clue to the purport (*reads) "*I fear (*the note is partially burnt) – no* longer safe – *hitherto been concealed in copse*—garden—will—after dusk—see—you—when—has—left home.—Barb." Yes. The word half calcined [sic] was "Barbara." — (*looking at note)* — has left home — "Has left home" When *she* has left home, that is the word — missing. Yes, when *I* have left (*passionately*) home! Oh, shameless woman! And, *he, my husband!* The words scarce spoken that my grief had wrung from me —can leave me to be by *her* side! False friend, false love—all false alike—all! (Palmer 17)

This is an issue, we see, of good words becoming bad words. Having gone out to meet Barbara *and* Richard, we know that Carlyle is innocent of adultery. Isabel's misinterpretation of the words and susceptibility to Levison's insinuations seals her fate and the fate of audiences investing in her. Isabel's reaction to text, her reflex to turn Richard's tragedy into her own, is the template for most responses to *East Lynne* – we see Isabel's tragedy at the expense of all the other lives. Richard's tragedy lies behind Isabel's, and she unwittingly co-opts his interrupted life. "All my future life spent in repentant expiation," Isabel later moans, "can never atone for the past, never, never" (28). That hopelessness, recasting Levison's insincere wish for atonement in Lady Isabel's hopelessly sincere voice, is the final note of the play. Poor, "lost Isabel" takes on all of the pain from Richard's lost life (44). Isabel encounters a butchered version of the original text, but what causes her drastic misinterpretation of its matter is her own self-absorption rather than any intrinsic failure of the text itself. The Hares' plight is forced behind Isabel's, and the audience is only allowed to mourn for *her*.

The subsequent excess of her expiation for everyone's lost lives is what pushes this text into the total melodrama that proliferates the stage life of *East Lynne.* Eventually the overburdening of the problem on Isabel turns the narrative towards the burlesque (as it was often played in the twentieth-century). By trying to recover Richard's life at the further expense of

Isabel's the narrative becomes unbalanced. But even here, the play mediates emotion for everyone but Isabel. In Richard's last scene in Palmer's play, he good-humouredly tells the Judge Hare, his father (who had persecuted him for the murder): "We will forget the miserable past in our newly-found happiness" (42). The tone of the scene, however, is still punctuated by lost time as the Judge entreats his son to "come to the home from which you have too long been banished—unjustly banished" (42). As they exit, Palmer calls for "*Eight bars of plaintive music before the scene is changed*" (42). Literally underscoring his pat resolution to Richard's "miserable past" with the sounds of mourning, Palmer's text relieves the *Hares* of their pain in much the same way Gaskell relieves Margaret of hers. But the production of the play thrusts that pain back at his audience's experience; they are left with the plaintive strains of music that undercut the resolution on stage.

T.A. Palmer developed his adaptation while *East Lynne* still had significant ability to draw tears from its audience. Ann Cvetkovich cites the drawing and shedding of tears as central to *East Lynne*'s social function:

> In the many stage and film productions of *East* Lynne, for example, actresses who dramatized to excess the emotions of the powerless and sentimental heroine used the role to affirm their artistic skills. For the reader of *East Lynne* as well, playing the pathetic woman is not the same as being the pathetic woman. The reader who identifies sympathetically with the suffering Isabel Vane by crying, like the actress who works herself into an emotional passion, can derive both pleasure and power from tears. (98)

East Lynne was eventually adapted several times during the silent film era in both Britain and America, but "by the mid-twentieth century," critics like Deborah Wynne sigh, "*East Lynne* had declined into a joke, a tired Victorian melodrama which was no longer capable of generating emotion."[30] These adaptations, as I mention above, increasingly focus on Isabel as the sole figure of pathos. Ned Alpert's 1941 comic adaptation makes the move explicit. When several

[30] Deborah Wynne, *The Sensation Novel and the Victorian Family Magazine* (New York: Palgrave, 2001) 61. This point is in the context of Wynne's argument that, for middle-class audiences, Barbara's marital triumph may have trumped Lady Isabel's laments.

characters gather to discuss Lord Mount Severn's impending death their conversation has trouble finding a steady rhythm:

> RAYMOND. *(Anxious to change the subject and devoting his attention to* ARCHIBALD) Let me see, what were we discussing before we were interrupted? *(Then, as though suddenly remembering and before anybody is able to reply)* Oh, yes, of course! We were talking about Lady Isabel's sad plight. (39)

Lady Isabel's "sad plight" becomes the over-determined answer to interruption. By allowing Isabel's character to wrest even more control of the narrative from other characters around her, these texts ensure that her melodrama pushes the other interrupted lives further towards the margins.

Where most of the major dramatized versions were quite serious in tone (more seriously melodramatic, even, than Wood's novel) film versions quickly emphasized the comic elements of the text. That move hints at a collective shift towards secreting the real social stakes of interrupted lives by overshadowing them with humor. In direct adaptations of the novel and its play versions, the lighthearted antics of talkative maids, Carlyle's spinster sister and bachelor clerk, and Afy Hallijohn were frequently put in relief against Isabel's histrionics. One apparently lost film, *East Lynne on the Western Front* (Pearson 1931), picked up on *East Lynne*'s theatrical popularity. The film depicts a group of bored World War I soldiers putting on an impromptu burlesque performance of the play. But for all its farcical (and apparently puerile) humor, the film pairs *East Lynne* with the most potent British example of painfully interrupted lives. The film may have lacked artistic appeal, but tacking *East Lynne* onto a tale about the Lost Generation suggests that the two texts tackle similar social problems.

Hollywood versions took a decidedly more American bent, with both the 1916 and 1925 versions transposed to American settings and British commentary on the aristocracy eliminated.[31] By that relocation, all of the thematic focus shifts to sentimentalizing the middle-class family.

[31] E. Ann Kaplan determines that "Emmet Flynn's 1925 film relies partly on Oxenford, partly on a version like Alpert's, Bracken's earlier 1916 film, on the other hand, must have relied almost completely on a comic play version after which Alpert fashioned his 1941 play and that was available for Bracken's scriptwriter" (94).

Both films starred women famous for playing vamps rather than tragic anti-heroines: Theda Bara and Alma Rubens. E. Ann Kaplan has explored how these film versions argue from an anti-feminist perspective: "Since Isabel has Carlyle, the films seem to say, what more can she need? In positing this as the question, the Hollywood versions of *East Lynne* recuperate even the mildly subversive aspects of Ellen Wood's novel" (106). While I agree that the films try to suppress Wood's questioning of women's roles in culture, both films visually manifest the problem Wood's novel could not bear to look at.

In the 1916 film, the Hallijohn murder does not serve as a prologue to the Carlyle marriage.[32] Taking the plot-based recuperation of Richard Hare's lost years a step further, the murder takes place well *after* Carlyle and Isabel are married. Richard Hare's status as long-lost son is done away with even when the circumstances that led to his exile are retained so that, in this version, Isabel becomes even more of a victim. But the threat of lost lives materializes in filmic tricks. Throughout the film, the bodies of lost characters tend to materialize as characters think about them. A drunken Francis Levison hallucinates an image of Hallijohn, the man he murdered. The superimposed image of Hallijohn staggers towards Levison angrily and a terrified Levison tries to avoid him. Keeping with the strains of moralizing melodrama, the film suggests that even the most heartless characters are capable of deep guilt. But Hallijohn's image also reminds the film's spectators how violently his life was interrupted. Hallijohn's materialization, and his grasping at Levison, silently indicates the residual force of his unfinished business.

Hallijohn's ghost only threatens the man who wronged him, but Isabel's memory haunts the woman who replaced her. After her marriage to Carlyle, Barbara cannot help conjuring an image of Isabel sitting among the family that Barbara should now be able to call her own. To Barbara, this is a ghost from her past. For the spectator, the image emphasizes the dramatic irony of Isabel's continued life. Barbara's imagination here actually creates the split between the life

[32] *East Lynne*, dir. Bertram Bracken, writ. Mary Murillo, perf. Ben Deeley, Stuart Holmes, and Theda Bara, Film, Museum of Modern Art (Fox Films Corporation, 1916).

Isabel interrupted and the life she must now live; the image reminds us that the life Isabel interrupted had consequences unrelated to Isabel herself. Of all of the films, this is the only one that allows those consequences to be expressed in grief. When Isabel's identity is revealed, her daughter clings to her, crying for her dead brother and her restored mother. But as she cries, arms around her dying mother's neck, the howling child is pulled away by Carlyle. This moment of their daughter's grief emphasizes, as neither Wood's novel nor the other adaptations do, the real consequences of Isabel's desertion of the home. All the Carlyle children, including the sickly Little Willie, tend to be represented as preternaturally calm (if they are portrayed at all) when reacting to their mother's disappearance. This young Isabel hysterically sheds tears and clings to her long lost mother. Neither of her parents credits her with attention; Carlyle wrenches her away and hands her to a waiting servant. Set against the immaterial specters that haunt this film, the child's very physical grief emphasizes that whatever moral we may take from paying attention to Isabel's interrupted life, there are also blank spots left in other lives – gaps that everyone concerned would rather ignore or suppress.

Guy Barefoot suggests that the persistence of *East Lynne* adaptations into new media and beyond even its appeal as a serious tale indicates that "Their resonance is rooted in the fact that they present recognizable situations, and their longevity can be attributed to the fact that while their appeal has varied over time it has not been restricted to particular historical circumstances" (103). Barefoot's argument asks us to consider what the "resonance" of the narrative's appeal might be. As I've been arguing, I believe the dreadful appeal lies in the undying problem of interrupted lives. At the same time, though, Barefoot doesn't account for the drastic decline in both popularity and recognition that *East Lynne* – Wood's original novel – has only reemerged, in literary circles, during the past ten years or so; most members of the public, and many readers of this chapter, have likely never heard of *East Lynne*. The increasing silliness of the adaptations, the failure of the texts to appeal to identifiable social problems in the midst of their melodrama,

and the over familiarity of the Isabel- driven narrative all participate in the interruption of *East Lynne*'s life in the public eye.

The more familiar, and old-fashioned, versions of *East Lynne* became and the less relevant they seemed, the closer they come to taking on the punishment of having to "live to death." Dying off themselves, these adaptations, however trifling they may be, stave off their audience's fears that they might be subject to the same fates – to either being violently interrupted or, worse, being left behind. By the time Fox Films released the 1925 version starring Alma Rubens, every character had gained comic elements, and the twenties seemed like a breaking point for the extreme moralizing sentimentalism that had come to characterize *East Lynne* adaptations.[33] Even Carlyle becomes a target for the comedy; the opening scene at the Hare home shows Carlyle ineffectually attempting to blow-up a seat cushion. Carlyle's lack of air contrasts with Richard Hare's more successful attempts. While this Carlyle may be thoughtful – he buys the cushion for Mrs. Hare and a puppy for Barbara – his thoughtfulness is not backed up by an ability to carry through his good deeds. Implicitly, his "good deed" of marrying Isabel is doomed to failure. The tone of the film suggests that if we're the lucky audience removed from events, the pat morals of the stage melodramas are not for us. By extension, the less tangible threat of interrupted lives will never reach an imminent threat level.

Yet this adaptation still manifests the specter of interruption. The Isabel plot stays very physical, delving into both broad comedy (harping spinster Cornelia rapturously plays an actual harp) and symbolic parody (Francis Levison, tempter extraordinaire, has an obsession with eating apples) that suggests how little Lady Isabel's self-flagellation should affect contemporary audiences. Like a reversal of Wood's novel, which pushes the Hare plot into comedy as a stop-gap to the problems Richard's story poses, this second Fox adaptation pushes the specters entirely into the Hare plotline. When Afy Hallijohn, whose aristocratic ambitions indirectly lead to

[33] *East Lynne,* dir. Emmet J. Flynn, writ. Emmet J. Flynn and Tom Minard, perf. Alma Rubens, Edmund Lowe, and Lou Tellegen, Film, Museum of Modern Art (Fox Films Corporation, 1925).

murder, looks at her father's chair she imagines him sitting there – her mental image shared with the film's spectators as the dead Hallijohn materializes in the chair. For all her bravado, Afy's sentimental image of her father indicates how his interrupted life has left a gap in Afy's own.

This mode of spectral interruption is further extended to Richard. When Levison arrives to continue his dalliance with Afy, Richard (who knows of Levison's guilt) traps him by pretending to be Hallijohn's ghost himself. From the roof, Richard calls down the chimney and his disembodied voice identifies Levison as the murderer. Repeating the accusation over and over with little variation, Richard terrifies both Afy and Levison. While this scene serves to expose Levison's crime in the absence of a parliamentary election, Richard's self-echoing also reestablishes the effect of lost years that this adaptation of the narrative compresses out of the plot. Richard's trick adds a comic touch to Levison's capture, but also forces Richard into a ghostly position from which this adaptation seemed to free him. In removing subversive social commentary from Wood's novel in favor of comedic melodrama, the Fox films transmute the gaps and emotional consequences of the lost years in Richard and Isabel's lives into the ghosts that haunt these texts.[34]

The "what might have been" beneath *East Lynne*'s silent film versions is visualized in their representations of lost or undervalued characters. When *East Lynne* is first adapted for

[34] The filmic trend towards ghostly representations of silently mourned lives only begins in the comically inclined films that reflected contemporary tendencies to dismiss the *East Lynne*'s particular brand of melodrama. These silent films of "Wood's famous love story" are extreme representations of Wood's more balanced novel, which was serious about its sensationalism, melodrama, and comedy (*East Lynne*, 1913). While the 1982 BBC version would be classified as "serious," it too turns to haunted representations. Guy Barefoot notes from contemporary press releases that this adaptation, "explicitly attempted to cast off the melodrama of the stage version" (97). Formal strategies of interruption, however, match those of its comic predecessors. Throughout the film, Archibald Carlyle is entirely sure that he and those around him are "safe from interruption." But moments after Carlyle makes this declaration, when Richard tells his story, the audience is subjected to flashbacks that depict the murder events as Richard narrates them in "real" time. Carlyle and the young Hares may be safe from these temporal breaks, but the audience is not. Nor is Isabel, who is haunted by the two paths of her life before she ever makes a decision of her own. On the night Levison convinces Isabel that Carlyle is unfaithful, Isabel meets her tempter on the road. Sitting in her carriage, Isabel looks through the window at Levison and sees an image of herself; we the viewers see two Isabels, side by side. The Isabel that is and the Isabel that might be (or might have been) exist briefly in the same space but never come so close again. *East Lynne*, dir. David Green, adapt. Phillip Mackie, perf. Lisa Eichorn, Bryan Marshal, Jane Asher, Tim Woodward, and Martin Shaw, British Broadcasting Corporation, VHS, British Film Institute Archives (BBC, 1982).

television, the force of interruptions plays out by overlaying a frame narrative with which Wood's plot must battle. The BBC broadcast "East Lynne" on December 21, 1976.[35] Directed by Barney Coleman and written by Patrick Bond, the program takes up the conceit that we, the at-home audience, is watching a filmed play from the late Victorian Era attended by the Queen herself. The diegetic audience is in place for a charity performance of a text they know well – as introductions to the characters (introduced through portrait holes, as if to remind us that they are locked in time) show the spectators cheering for Carlisle and booing for Levison. Within this frame, the tale is still meant to be affecting, drawing tears from the audience much as Ann Cvetkovich suggests the novel drew tears from its original readers. Lord Mount Severn, who serves as the narrator, gives the familiar warning: "If you have tears, prepare to shed them now."

The "Royal Party" ostentatiously keeps both audiences waiting to shed those tears. As the evening's entertainers perform a chorus of "After the Ball," the scene cuts to Queen Victoria herself, starting her solitary journey to the theatre. Like the character portraits that the Lord Mount Severn will soon introduce to the audience, the Queen is framed in isolation from those around her. She is a Royal party, alone. She is surrounded by servants, but always separated from them by the frames: by the railings of the stairway she descends, by the frame of the palace doorway, by the panes of the carriage windows, and by the box at the theatre. In that framing, the Queen becomes as cut off from change as the characters in the play. Deep in her mourning for Prince Albert she is also locked in time, as completely a willing victim of interrupted lives as *East Lynne*'s cast of characters.

Far from being a commentary on royalty, then, this representation of the Queen's interrupted life remains within larger social problem interrupted lives. The audio track from the theatre bleeds into the Queen's journey; as the Queen and those around her travel to the theatre in excruciating silence, the viewers of the television program are emphatically reminded that outside

[35] "East Lynne," By Ellen Wood, Adapt. Patrick Bond, Perf. Polly James, Leonard Sachs, Christopher Cazenove, and Philip Lowrie. VHS, British Film Institute Archives, British Broadcasting Corporation, 21 Dec. 1976.

of this pocket of narrative there is a whole central narrative that we are all missing and will never be able to reconstruct. When the Queen arrives at the theater and the play begins, the forced reminder of interruption continues as the scenes cut between the action on stage and the diegetic audience. For the most part, the cuts from the play to the audience serve as reaction shots – rather than character reactions to intense emotional moments, we have audience reaction. The strategy extends the dual narrative of the program; it creates the sense that we are intimately involved with both the world of the play and the world of the audience who watches it. But if most of the cuts between worlds *appear* to create a certain sense of continuity that overrides the mismatched image and audio track of the Queen's journey to the theater, that continuity soon breaks down.

In the middle of Act I, Levison makes his entrance in the Carlyle home, eager to entice Isabel away. As he enters, the scene cuts to the audience, who begins to laugh. By the time the scene cuts back to the stage, whatever gesture inspired the laughter has ended. This quick series of shots cuts the program viewers out of the continuity chain between the play and the audience; we are made aware that in each cut between them we are "missing something" that we can never get back.

The scene that develops during the interval further emphasizes the two competing narratives, neither of which is ever truly completed for the viewer. We follow a group of men and women to their interval drinks and listen in on their disjointed conversation about regional cricket rivalries. The argument (which we join only in the middle) never comes to a resolution because the end of the interval interrupts it. Alone, any of these interruptions might fade into the background, but over the course of this program, viewers are never allowed to settle into one narrative. The secondary narratives that become a threat to *East Lynne*'s continuity never achieve completion themselves. The Queen, who makes us wonder if, indeed, she has tears she's prepared to shed, is dropped in the second act. The Lord Mount Severn narrates Isabel and Levison's time abroad, and at the six-month mark we cut to the Queen. Her face its still inscrutable – no tears, no judgment, just emptiness. We never see her in the program again.

Indeed, we are conspicuously cut off from all secondary narratives, in the end. With Isabel's piteous death, the play ends, the curtain closes, and the audience applauds on the audio track. We do not cut back to them.

In what is otherwise a relatively dull production – an example of the family Christmas programming still typical to the BBC, we can nevertheless still see the unanswerable problems in *East Lynne*. The Isabel plot itself has become easy and familiar, fodder for pre-show boos and cheers, yet still capable of drawing tears from the ladies in the audience. The Richard Hare plot lingers, despite being so minor that the whole is resolved entirely offstage and to the audience through the Lord Mount Severn's narration. But all of the linguistic interruptions of the novel, the restless spirits and voices of the silent films, indeed all of the interruptions that cannot be judged in simplistic morals or remedied by legal means emerge in *East Lynne*'s formal and narrative strategies, which we are meant to ignore but that nevertheless repeatedly identify themselves. Television expectations of form keep jolting viewers out of the frame, interrupting formally in a way that gives the impression of fullness and continuity that combats the interruption of lives. But the gesture is ironic because of the interruption of the image – it is a formal action meant to deal with something for which there is no legal action. It does not merely enact the problem. By creating a narrative that plays it down, these adaptations defend against the threat while silently maintaining its emotional resonance by redirecting the emotions back at their audiences. In a very tangible way, the *East Lynne* adaptations are like Gaskell's Frederick and Margaret; they adapt to new circumstances, becoming real in their own right, but they cannot fill the gap of "what might have been." Losing popularity, they became part of the cycle of interrupted lives themselves. As they fell into obscurity, their audiences moved on with their lives.

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From this point we can reevaluate *Doctor Who*'s Weeping Angels. These stone figures, once called "The Lonely Assassins," keep their faces cradled in their hands in a gesture of

weeping through extreme pain. Only when you look away can they attack. The Doctor's warning ("Don't blink or you're dead") might be what audiences remember with fear. But The Doctor's full explanation of the Angels has a different tone. Whenever any living creature (including another Angel) looks at them, they turn to stone – in this new medium they are harmless. "They aren't weeping," he reveals, "they can't risk looking at each other." Only through distraction, by covering their eyes, can the Angels survive. This is, The Doctor suggests, "The most perfect defense system ever evolved."

CHAPTER V

"TWO ASPECTS OF THE SAME OBSESSION":[1] EMBEDDED ADAPTATIONS AND THE PROBLEM OF TRUE LOVE

"I have fallen in love," says the pale, melancholy young woman, "with being a victim of fate." A doctor, dedicated to the study of human evolution, assesses this young woman's situation. He suggests that the second half of that sentence explains how she has driven herself mad. The melancholia drives her to the dangerous tactic of keeping her history to herself so that she may remain a victim of fate. Of particular interest to him is her self-removal from respectable society. That tactic, he tells a concerned young man, is destroying her. But, "If she could speak?" asks the young man. "She would be cured," the doctor answers; "But she does not want to be cured." The furtive conversations that circulate around Sarah Woodruff, the melancholy young woman, are all about her tendency toward morbidity. Her insistence on making herself a "victim of fate" by not speaking openly is the problem destroying both her life and her health. But none of the characters in Harold Pinter's and Karl Reisz 1981 film, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (certainly not the men who discuss Sarah as a case study while smoking their cigars and drinking their brandy) can manage to suggest that the dangerous problem is perhaps not Sarah's unique temperament, but the very common state of having "fallen in love."

The failed adaptations that manage the painfully interrupted lives in *North and South* and *East Lynne* are physically or emotionally crippling; they contain the problem of one interrupted life by leaving both the characters and the texts' audiences with the challenging task of living on in the face of irreparable loss. As we have seen in Chapter II, the establishment of personal identity is an uncertain and potentially dangerous process. Tom Ripley and Edward Lionheart take the bloody option of creating their identities by adapting fiction into real life and, for good

[1] John Fowles, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1969) 19.

measure, destroying the others who questioned their rights to their identity of choice. In this chapter, I explore how defensive adaptations have managed the problem of life with another person under the romantic notion of love. Cynthia Young, among many others, has pointed out that "The traditional love story insists upon its innocent realism, relying upon discourses that promote the sovereignty of the heterosexual union."[2] Classical Hollywood narratives and the marriage plot of literature are structured under that "innocent realism" and the influence of such texts has been embedded in social imagination. Love relationships are simultaneously the lynchpin of contemporary Western culture – the primary site of reproduction – and the site of some of its most emotionally (and physically) destructive human behavior. Popular love songs suggest: "You're nobody till somebody loves you."[3] Is it only in romantic relationships that people can become, to invert Tom Ripley's fear, real somebodies? If so, why, as the case of the melancholy young woman suggests, is finding someone to love you so often a self-destructive process?

In all of the texts that I discuss in this chapter—*The Red Shoes* (Powell 1948), *In a Lonely Place* (Ray 1950), and *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (Reisz 1981)—romantic relationships are thrown into uneasy relief. As Lionheart's and Ripley's histories suggested, there may be a dark underbelly to the Self's reliance on the Other, and defensive adaptation can allow us to cope with that tension. Defensive adaptations, because they simultaneously fill in and expose the gaps between media, have also served as mediators for social anxieties. In the end, these anxieties are partly about a cultural regret that social relations are neither clear nor congenial nor transparent. In these three texts, the common theme of love and marriage, that integration of Self with the Other of fairytale proportions, forces the characters into crises. The metaphorical promise from the Judeo-Christian tradition that man and woman "shall become one

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[2] Cynthia Young, "Revision to Reproduction: Myth and Its Author in *The Red Shoes*" in *Re-viewing British Cinema, 1900-1992,* ed. Wheeler Winston Dixon (Albany, TN: State University of New York Press) 107-120. 111.

[3] Russ Morgan, Larry Stock, and James Cavanaugh, "You're Nobody 'Til Somebody Loves You," 1944.

flesh" suggests that though *most* human relationships are mediated, perhaps the right romantic relationship is not.[4] The dream of "true" love – the love that will transcend the boundaries of time and space – is revealed in these films to be a stifling fantasy. The pursuit of "true" love in these films, as in so many works of art, becomes a barrier to real love by increasing the mediation between the characters. Pursuing true love, in fact, mediates these love stories both interpersonally and narratively. In them, the particular properties of adaptation become the means by which characters negotiate the true love problem. The evidence of fragmentation in the characters' relationships becomes lodged in the scenes of adaptation their stories contain. The embedded adaptations in these romances reinforce the mediation between the characters, a mediation that they would rather ignore. These characters struggle with the consciousness that their lovers are Others, with needs of their own, and that they themselves have needs different from their partners'. Adaptation becomes the double boiler by which the characters can explore this problem through its figuration as fidelity or art. They can become willing victims of their narrative fates without having to admit that the pursuit of love itself is the problem.

Both *In a Lonely Place* and *The Red Shoes* make the process of adaptation a central element in their narratives and in both texts the adaptation comes to represent the love stories of their creators. In these films about art, adaptation becomes a viable code for the love paradox because it appears to be something over which people have control. The stable properties of a medium (medium-specificity), in these tales, become a source of comfort; despite the way the story changes the nature of the vehicles remain constant. The scenes of adaptation in these texts suggest the way that the particular relationship between a text and its source text has been used as a figure for human love, generally heterosexual, as a way of defending against the mediation that those relationships entail. In particular, the idea of medium-specificity underlies the defensive power of the adaptation. The relationship between an adaptation and its source, and the

[4] Genesis 2:24, *The Holy Bible: Containing the Old and New Testaments,* 1611, King James Version (New York: American Bible Society, 1958).

circulation of both in the social world, seem to be relationships over which humans can exercise creative and complete control. In addition, the stable properties of an independent medium, which can contain many iterations of the same story, contain promises of similarly controllable relationships for its masters. The dialectical pull between the characters relationships and their individuality is a struggle against which they are helpless. They cannot write themselves out of the identity challenge that their love match entails, so these characters adapt. The ability of a narrative to move *among* media, moreover, creates the impression that though the media are separate, they can be drawn together seamlessly in the act of adaptation. But these embedded scenes of adaptation layer the "adaptation" and the scene of writing over the existence of the "book." While the "adaptation" and the scene of writing seem to lack dialectical mediation in their relationship, the specter of the "book" always remains behind their wished-for perfect integration. The self-destructive course of these relationships, then, is an effect of the partners' attempts to fulfill the dream of an unmediated romance.

In both films, the adaptations are a success. In contrast, the characters' personal relationships end as victims of the mediated love that the adaptations, for a short time, allowed them to ignore. Each film text, however, deploys a different aspect of the adaptation process to manage their characters' destabilized identities. In *The Red Shoes,* the production of "The Red Shoes" Ballet within the film allows the text to manage the disjunction between the characters' artistic identities and their human identities. Nevertheless, because it is couched in the larger film's adaptation of Hans Christian Anderson's fairytale, the safety valve the embedded adaptation presents cannot be maintained. For Dix and Laurel, in *In a Lonely Place*, the process of adaptation – Dix's task to faithfully adapt a novel called *Althea Bruce* for the screen – is the only thing that stabilizes them enough to keep their relationship together; Dix and Laurels' relationship collapses with their completion of the script. But if art is coded as identity, as it is throughout these films, then what happens when you remove artistic temperament as a factor?

Ultimately, the embedded defensive adaptations reveal "art" and the life of the "Artist" as excuses that these texts use to explain their characters' relationship failures, or that the characters use themselves to maintain that excuse. We can argue that artists are too selfish – that art requires much of oneself to create, but rather less to enjoy, and that's why the "rest of us" can get by most of the time. Artists' relationships are over-mediated because their artistic mediation and social mediation bleed into each other. If art is so often depicted as an artist's identity, however, what happens to the "rest of us"? If you are not an artist, then is your identity the only thing you have to lose? In *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, a narrative in which the characters endlessly discuss the problem of having a romantic relationship while still remaining "free," the embedded adaptation is hidden until the film's final act. Here, the film's hidden scene of adaptation creates a clear break between the Art/life interplay and elaborates the role that adaptation can play in defending against the less ordered mediation between humans and true love.

The Task of Adaptation

The two very different reactions that greet the proposal of adaptation in *The Red Shoes* and *In a Lonely Place* suggest what the scene of adaptation tackles in these two texts. Both are adaptations themselves: Nicholas Ray's *In a Lonely Place* (1950) is an adaptation of Dorothy Hughes's (1947) novel of the same name and Michael Powell's and Emil Pressburger's *The Red Shoes* (1948) adapts Hans Christian Anderson's fairytale (1845). However, the explicit scenes of adaptation in these films cast long shadows over the plots they claim in their titles.

Nicholas Ray's film begins when screenwriter Dixon Steele's agent, Mel, tells Dix (Humphrey Bogart) about the lucrative new project he must take on. His task is to adapt a popular novel into a film. "All you've got to say is 'I like it,'" Mel encourages, "and you go on salary tomorrow."[5] Implications abound that to adapt the novel, *Althea Bruce*, into a film will be

[5] *In a Lonely Place,* dir. Nicholas Ray, writ. Andrew Solt, perf. Humphrey Bogart, Gloria Grahame, Frank Lovejoy, Carl Benton Reid, and Art Smith. Santana Productions, 1950, DVD, Columbia Classics, 2003.

a rejection of artistic integrity for a payday. Director Curtis Hanson, a frequent adapter himself, says of this subplot: "It's somewhat ironic that throughout the movie as they discuss the screenplay that Dixon Steele is supposed to write, everybody keeps saying to him: 'Just do the book, Dix, just do the book.' In other words, 'just give them what they want.' Don't bother being creative."[6] Hanson's point is that since Ray, the writer, Andrew Solt, and the credited adapter, Edmund North, had already taken great narrative liberties with Hughes' novel, they "model" their own processes of adaptation in the film by having Dix resist writing a faithful adaptation himself: "They found something in the source material that inspired them. They used it to create a work of art that stands alone in its own right; that in fact feels individual and highly personal." Hanson makes an interesting move in that he goes on to focus exclusively on the adaptation of *In a Lonely Place* from Hughes' novel, and all but ignores the adaptation that takes place within the film. Hanson's and the film's own distancing here also become part of *In a Lonely Place*'s scene of adaptation – they use the mechanics of adaptation as a screen for "something" that is never resolved. Dix accepting this job begins the plot: the unwelcome burden of writing a faithful adaptation, one that can circulate in the Hollywood economy and effectively marries the film to the novel, becomes the plot element that unexpectedly leads to murder.

The sense that this is also a film about identity fragmentation, however, begins in the opening credits. Our first image is of a pair of intense, inscrutable eyes reflected in a car's rearview mirror. The eyes belong to Dixon Steel: Hollywood screenwriter and all-around volatile guy. That image sets the tone of fear, expressed in uncertainty, suspicion, and paranoia that will dominate much of the film. Who is this man we cannot fully see? The question of "Who is Dixon Steele?" is the true mystery of the film – far more compelling than the murder-mystery of poor Mildred Atkinson. Nevertheless, the events leading up to the murder set out the terms we need to begin answering those open questions. Mildred Atkinson has read *Althea Bruce*. Rather

[6] Hanson's most well-known films, *L.A. Confidential* (1997) and *Wonder Boys* (2000) are both adapted from novels. Curtis Hanson, "*In a Lonely Place: Revisited,*" *In a Lonely Place*, DVD, Columbia Classics, 2003.

than read it himself, Dix wants her to tell him the story: "I've got to read this book tonight and I'm tired. I thought maybe you could tell it to me." She does, with gusto. Her pleasure in sharing and shaping the story for a new audience is evident in her breathless delivery and near pantomime of story events. The camera, sometimes from Dix's purview and sometimes from one that seems to be its own, follows her with interest. Like a good Hollywood reader, Mildred focuses on A-plot and not the "lots of other little plots and things" – for which Dix thanks her. If Mildred is the picture of bubbly, brainless life and good cheer, Dix is the picture of detachment and ironic distance. Humoring Mildred to a point, he is resigned when she does not catch his hints of derision. Comic as it is, however, Mildred's performance builds up the shadow plot behind *In a Lonely Place*. If we are to trust Mildred, the basic plot of the novel is this: *Althea Bruce becomes a wealthy widow after the drowning death of her husband (she is the prime suspect). She falls in love with a younger man, only for the two of* them *to drown in a melodramatic replaying of her husband's death.* This is the plot to which Dix, as adapter, would need to be faithful. It is the story of a love that literally drowns because the specter of an uncertain past stands between the two lovers. Dix balks at the prospect. He resents both the structure and the audience he would be writing for (Mildred, Mel reminds him, *is* his audience). *In a Lonely Place* thinks itself very different from the plot-heavy mess Mildred describes – a story of love gone wrong – love that leads to death of a character whose place in the text had seem fixed. But *In a Lonely Place* is also a love story; it is, in James Harvey's words a "kind of glamorous, grown-up romantic scene" to which the melodrama of *Althea Bruce* cannot compare.[7] This distancing from *types* of love stories very much echoes the distancing from the *type* of film Dix believes he's being asked to write.

After Mildred finishes her performance, the girl finally leaves Dix's apartment and she's murdered offscreen. Dix becomes the prime suspect. That shift from the pleasure we see in

[7] James Harvey, *Movie Love in the Fifties* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001) 148.

Mildred's exuberant performance of the *Althea Bruce* to the brutal representations of guilt and fear that follow Dix throughout the rest of the film characterizes the way this defensive adaptation works. The telling of a love story and the process of its adaptation is the impetus behind this story, whose tone may be very different, but whose matter is nearly the same. Alongside the increasingly dark main plot of *In a Lonely Place*, we watch as Dix works intermittently on the script of *Althea Bruce*. The screenplay is an adaptation, but it is pointedly never referred to as such. That silence, the acceptance of the relationship between the texts without speaking the nature of the terms, mimics the way these characters silently strive against the mediation in their love story.

On the surface, the target in having Dix script an adaptation has less to do with adaptation itself than with the film's critique of the Hollywood system. Few major films that came out of the studio system were *not* adaptations (and, the filmmakers imply, were therefore neither original nor artistic). Hanson, James Palmer, and Dana Polan all comment on the self-reflexivity of the film, each putting a slightly different spin on what the film has to say about Hollywood: it's an indictment of the money machine, a "study of the violence and paranoia" under the shadow of HUAC, and a film that uses its portrayal of the disintegrating studio system as a figure for its examination of the relationship between love and violence in the real world.[8] Historically, then, there has been a reluctance to draw out the meaning of the adaptation for the love plot at the center of the film. The film is recognized as an adaptation, and boasts a central character who writes an adaptation, but the focus remains on fidelity and infidelity – both when discussing the way adaptation works in the film and in examining the relationships in the film.[9]

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[8] James W. Palmer, "*In a Lonely Place*: Paranoia in the Dream Factory," *Literature/Film Quarterly* (Salisbury: 1985. Vol. 13.3): 200-208. 200; Dana Polan, *In a Lonely Place,* BFI Film Classics, ed. Edward Buscombe (London: British Film Institute, 1993) 9-10.

[9] Critics mention that Dix must write an adaptation but pass over the point as perfunctory plot summary. In doing so, these critics echo the language of early reviewers, who were ready and willing to talk about the film as an adaptation, but reluctant to apply that term to Dix's screenwriting in the film. Mae Tince of *The Chicago Tribune* only implies that the script Dix writes is even connected to the book that Mildred (the ill-fated hatcheck girl) narrates: "he merely wants a quick rundown on one of those lengthy bestsellers. The

The love problem, instead of being played out as a problem of human existence, is played out as a problem specific to *these kinds of people.* Whether one possesses the ability to "speak Hollywood" (formula and money) or "speak artist" (creativity and integrity) becomes a question of identity and trust in the film. Telling stories is always an important part of a murder mystery but Dix (and through him Solt and Ray) claims independence. While the police and the producers in the film speak Hollywood, Dix and Laurel speak artist: "It was his story against mine," Dix confirms to Mel, but "of course I told my story better." While Dana Polan argues that these verbal acts of "artistic" storytelling triumph over Hollywood, J.P Telotte sees the film as the story of Dix losing control of his independent narrative voice and surrendering to classical Hollywood narrative: "In effect, the 'plot' of his life has been reduced to that of a melodramatic potboiler. As the voice of popular film comes to speak for him, Dix increasingly becomes a function of its discourse, his dangerous aspect an uncontrollable reflection of the murder formulas he has 'mastered' so well."[10] Telotte ultimately argues that the "film's 'lonely place' is also the self, but it is a self already nearly overcome by otherness, by the movies and their discourse" (10). The role of adaptation, however, remains distinct from these other forms of storytelling. Making the Other a de-individualized form of discourse is precisely where the film defends Dix and Laurel's fragile hold on their relationship.

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wide-eyed blond thinks the book is wonderful, he's sure it's awful, but maybe if he can get her point of view he can get to work again." While Tince does not mention Dix's adaptation, what she does suggest is that Dix wants to co-opt Mildred's emotion towards the text, as well as the plot she provides; he wants her pleasure to override his pronounced unpleasure – and he uses the adaptation as a mediating tool. Contemporary critics reproduce the distance reviewers placed between themselves and the issue of adaptation. When Mel presents Dix with *Althea Bruce* the task of adaptation is assumed. Mel tells Dix he has a book for him and, "All you've got to say is 'I like it,' and you go on salary tomorrow." The logical connection between the book and the script – that the script is an adaptation, is left as a gap. When Dix does, as Tince puts it, "get to work again" after Mildred's murder and the beginning of his relationship with Laurel, it's only ever implied that the script he's working in is his adaptation of *Althea Bruce*. That implied adaptation, because it cannot be Dix simply "doing the book" – he never reads it – is primarily Dix's artistic creation – a separate piece from the Hollywood bestseller adaptations. Mae Tince, "Bogart Movie Holds Interest at a High Pitch: "In A Lonely Place," Rev. of *In a Lonely Place,* dir. Nicholas Ray, *Chicago Daily Tribune* 5 Jun 1950: a3. Par. 2.

[10] J. P. Telotte. "The Displaced Voice of "In a Lonely Place"," *South Atlantic Review* 54.1 (1989): 1-12. 10.

The dangerous problem posed by the pursuit of true love is balanced throughout the film with the task of adaptation. One of the first things Dix freely admits in the film, when responding to a young autograph seeker who tells her friends, "Don't bother; he's nobody," is that "She's right." Dix, after Mildred's murder, will meet his romantic match. Dix's comfort with himself as "nobody" on his own will be compromised by his relationship with Laurel. Geoff Andrew argues that as the film progresses, Dix "*needs* Laurel's love and *needs* to be seen as a 'somebody' just to feel that he exists."[11] Mildred's retelling of the *Althea Bruce* plot in Dix's home is, plot wise, the catalyst for Dix and Laurel's relationship. More than being the catalyst, however, the supposedly faithful telling of the central plot discards the "lots of other things" that make the text whole. Even naïve Mildred has started to understand that all stories are more mediated than we would like to imagine. "I used to think," she confides to Dix, "that actors make up their own lines." Now she knows better. The act of discarding even the potential of imagining a "whole self" for the text in favor of a "faithful" romance plot is the basis on which Dix and Laurel's relationship begins. There will never be a love story that is *not* mediated by those "lots of other things," and it is only through those other things that such a story can function. Dix will be unable to maintain the balance between his relationship and his demons. Maintaining the balance is something he only seems to be able to do while writing his adaptation.

It becomes clear to the police, Dix's girlfriend, Laurel (Gloria Grahame), and the film's audience, that whether or not Dix actually killed Mildred, he is, as reviewer Bosley Crowther sums it, "an enigma, an explosive, contradictory force."[12] Like the problems that drive defensive adaptations, Dix's explosive and contradictory nature is never resolved. Mildred's telling of the story Dix will adapt starts the plot; the interrogation of Dix that follows leads to the twisted "meet

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[11] Geoff Andrew, *The Films of Nicholas Ray: The Poet of Nightfall,* 1991, New ed. (London: BFI, 2004) 49.

[12] Bosley Crowther, "The Screen: Three Films Make Their Bows: Humphrey Bogart Movie, 'In a Lonely Place,' at Paramount --Import at Trans-Lux 'Annie Get Your Gun,' Starring Betty Hutton, Is Presented at Loew's State Theatre," Rev. of *In a Lonely Place*, dir. Nicholas Ray, *The New York Times* 18 May 1950: 46. col. 2.

cute" for Dix and Laurel, who were previously strangers. The police interrogate Dix and Laurel, both together and individually, several times. The couple's repeated appearances in front of these monitors of social justice comes to look like a social test of how true their love is rather than a search for a killer. "Are you going to get married?" Captain Lochner asks Laurel in her second interview. "If we do," Laurel gibes, "I'll send you an invitation. After all, it was you who introduced us to each other." Until the police arrive at Dix's door, this film might have been a pure backlot movie – a picture about the workings of the Hollywood machine. But with Mildred's murder the film becomes about the problem matching the Self with both the social and the individual Other. How well Dix and Laurel can accomplish that dubious task comes to depend on whether or not they need to follow the book. "All you have to do is just follow the book," Dix had repeated to himself, incredulously, as he listened to Mildred telling the love story in the other room. While going through the motions of *Althea Bruce's* romance plot she supplied the end of that thought: "—and that does the trick." Narratively, as well as thematically, the adaptation process seems to present a way out of romantic mediation.

Dixon Steele tries very hard to avoid the task of adaptation, knowing that for everyone else the question is of fidelity to some arbitrary source. To everyone else besides Laurel, the problem is not whether two people can become "one flesh" but whether having killed either Mildred or "the book" will stand in their way. Julian Craster (Marius Goring), in *The Red Shoes,* pounces on the opportunity to adapt. Craster is so confident in the inviolability of his music—in his intrinsic value as a composer—that he cannot see how a "book" could reveal anything about his relationships. Later, talking of a scene that has been cut from "The Red Shoes" ballet, Craster confidently asserts: "It may be cut as a scene but it's still there in my score."[13] Mediation of any sort, in other words, does not threaten his control of the textual relationship.

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[13] *The Red Shoes,* dir. Michael Powell, writ. Emil Pressburger, perf. Moira Shearer, Anton Walbrook, and Marius Goring, 1948, DVD, Criterion, 1999.

When this young, ambitious composer, currently serving as a rehearsal coach for the world-famous Lermontov Ballet, is called to meet with the man himself (Anton Walbrook), he does not expect a promotion. He thinks that ballet is a "rather second rate means of expression" in the world of art. But as Lermontov begins discussing their imminent work on *The Red Shoes*, the world fades away. With a characteristic flourish Lermontov flips closed the pages of a nearby score to reveal its title: "The Red Shoes" is splashed across the cover in scarlet letters. This moment, forty-minutes into the film, is the first time we meet the text that was promised to us by the striking opening credits that had set the stage for the story. The first shot of the credits is of nearly this same lettering (THE RED SHOES) as the backdrop of a filmed still life. Composed in the center of the screen is a finely bound book. The name "Hans Christian Anderson" is emblazoned on the spine. In the foreground are two red ballet shoes. And, on top of the book, a single candle burns. That opening credits shot suggests that Anderson's original written tale will be overwhelmed by the film we are about to see – sitting on top of the book, the candle illuminates the *title* and not the book itself. The shoes, which are the only indication of human presence, undergird the composition. They are the symbol of the art form that will dominate the film, but compositionally they seem to stand in for the other object that might often have been found in the vanitas still life paintings of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: the skull of mortality. The image combines Anderson's story about the dangers of personal vanity with a reminder of the vanity of human life. That nearly imperceptible move matches the art world we explore with the wider human world. That warning of the opening image, however, is lost on both the enthusiastic Craster and the relentless Lermontov, who, bound within the text of their own lives, fail to see how they relate to their antecedents or fellow men.

Lermontov seduces Craster into composing the adaptation. Later, he will disavow the romance between Craster and his prima ballerina, Vicky. But it is he who, in this scene, makes adaptation the axis of the art, romantic love, and obsession that haunt everyone he encounters. After the camera lingers on the title of the score Lermontov sets before Craster, the impresario

begins to explain the project to Craster. The camera cuts to a close-up of Craster, looking both euphoric and lost. Strains of the music that the audience will later recognize in the ballet itself overwhelm Lermontov's description of the plot. When the camera cuts back to Lermontov he has knowingly paused – the plot and its associations have already begun his work. Smirking slightly he begins the story again, speaking slowly, as if relating the tale to a child: *A young woman has the "ambition" to wear red shoes to a dance. She does, and is happy, but when she's tired and ready to go home "the red shoes are not tired."* The scene cuts back and forth between close-ups of Craster and Lermontov as the latter narrates. The men seem inches from each other, both lit from the side with a light of inspiration. But then the tone changes. As we learn, "the red shoes are not tired" we finally cut back to an establishing shot and the wide distance between the two men – the length of a piano rests between them – is almost shocking. The progress of the shots, which reveals perceived intimacy as a mask for distance, creates a template for the rest of the film. As Vicky and Craster seem to be drawing together – particularly their collaboration on *The Red Shoes* – their progressive self-definition continually ensures that their love relationship cannot last. But since the ballet and the memories of the performance can exist independent of their creators that distance is made difficult to see.

This story that claims to be about the all-consuming nature of art is also about the patriarchal oppression that Lermontov and Craster impose on Vicky and which she rather colorlessly accepts. But it is *also* about the desire to dissipate the boundaries between the Self and the Other. Whether that Other is a person or a public iteration of oneself, the desire to experience both without mediation can become a blinding obsession. "What happens in the end?" Craster whispers hoarsely. "Oh, in the end she dies," Lemontov answers casually. "Yes," returns Craster, "I remember." The true note of inquiry in Craster's voice when he asks the question, though, suggests he hoped for a new ending in this ballet adaptation of the tale – that the ballet would somehow be able to save the girl from her ambition, the red shoes, and a horrible fate wherein when "love rushes by; *life* rushes by." But like Mildred's exuberant last act of

telling *Althea Bruce* to Dixon Steele, the scene serves as a link to the problem of the narrative. For the characters of *In a Lonely Place*, Mildred's jaunty walk to her murder and Dix's detached interrogation with the police, match the storytelling to the human problems the film explores. In *The Red Shoes*, the introductory scene of adaptation cuts to a scene of Lermontov waiting in the wings with his choreographer and dancers.

Angry with his prima ballerina for having the audacity to fall in love and get engaged, Lermontov petulantly announces, "I'm not interested in Boronkaja's form anymore; nor in the form of any other prima ballerina who is imbecile enough to get married." In a close-up of Lermontov pensively looking further offstage, he continues with conviction (far too loud for any real backstage): "You cannot have it both ways. The dancer who relies on the doubtful comforts of human love will never be a great dancer; never." As Lermontov proposes their incompatibility, the scene cuts to Vicky – Lermontov's star-in-training – looking up from beneath her costume veil and clearly absorbing Lermontov's every word. The sentiment sets up the dichotomy that long dominated critical discussion of this film: Love and art do not mix. As more recent critics have pointed out, that thesis doesn't hold. Adrienne McLean explains:

> The legend of *The Red Shoes*, however, remains strong: that it portrays a basic incompatibility between art and life. […] But the sense not of this logic but of context by which we understand the film's gender politics has changed over the years. […Vicky…] seems pushed by those characters who would rather possess her than support her.[14]

What Victoria Page does not hear, as she enters stage right, is the rest of the conversation. Ljubov, the choreographer, protests Lermontov's position: "That is all very fine, Boris, very pure and fine, but you can't alter human nature." "No?" Lermontov questions, "I think you can do even better than that. You can ignore it." Before Ljubov has a chance to fully express his shock, the scene quickly cuts away. Vicky's forced mistake, her mistake of leaving the conversation too soon, models the incompleteness of both the trains of logic that McLean's argument corrects and

[14]Adrienne L. McLean, *Dying Swans and Madmen: Ballet, the Body, and Narrative Cinema* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2008) 163-164.

the revised argument with which contemporary viewers may replace it. Vicky may eventually believe that she has to choose between art and love. She may be forced to believe that by two men who care more for themselves than they ever do for her well-being. From a feminist perspective, the film supports the now popular critical assertion that "it evokes the text that theorists believe supports the essential structure of Western Civilization—the text that encourages heterosexual relations as a form of exchange that punishes women who refuse to participate as a source of exchange" (Young 114). I, however, refuse to accept that Vicky's "punishment" by death is the moral of the story; everyone else is portrayed as a monster. Craster and Lermontov are allowed to live and Vicky does die (by throwing herself—or being pulled—off of a balcony before her return performance in *The Red Shoes*) but that doesn't mean that the men win and Vicky loses. In the end, their focus on the demands of art, specifically the art of *The Red Shoes* adaptation, allows all of the characters to ignore "human nature."

Producing and composing the adaptation of *The Red Shoes* defends the men against considering the consequences of developing dependent human relationships. For Vicky, being the body that makes the adaptation of the *Red Shoes* possible means that she is never allowed to displace her anxieties onto another text. Misogynistic the men may be. Misleading the pat art/life dichotomy may also be. I will suggest that, in fact, Vicky's death is the one move she can make to step outside the mediated relationships of real life; death is the one state in which she is no longer responsible for negotiating either her public role as "great dancer" or her private role as "Mrs. Craster." Since there is only the text *she is in,* Vicky must confront the true love paradox that none of the other characters, or the film's audience, ever need to and thus must take more drastic steps to deal with it.

What *The Red Shoes* and *In a Lonely Place* both encourage is for us – their viewers and their characters – to ignore the "explosive contradictory force" that is being an individual in a social world. Lermontov's disturbing assertion that ignoring human nature is "even better" than altering it may indicate that he wants *other* people to ignore their natures or because he wants

Vicky to believe she has to, as either the "legendary" reading or the feminist reading of this film would suggest. The shot of Lermontov and Ljubov, however, implicates them in the bind as well: As they speak, they think they are safe in the wings, but the lights from the stage reflect a shadow onto their faces and bodies. The shadow is a net. Visually trapped in the very double bind they believe they merely comment on, the two men stand in for the rest of us who may never have to make the choice between life and art, but who still have to wrestle with human nature – in whatever form it may take.

The Faithful Adapter and the Body of Work

As these films continue, the adaptations that the artists undertake allow them to channel the anxieties they have about their relationships with themselves and with those they love. The alternative focus on art – on the process of making the transition from one medium to another – becomes a positive expression of the relationships they cannot so easily manage. In this scheme, however, the tactic of making relationships tangible through art has the effect of making the bodies that participate in the interpersonal relationships more vulnerable to the maelstrom of emotions and conflicting desires that those relationships entail: Laurel as a failed actress and Vicky as the great dancer become the easy outlets for this physical danger as they are already at a gender disadvantage in their social structure.

Mildred Atkinsons's adaptive storytelling gets her killed. She can "speak Hollywood," in that she is, as Mel reminds Dix, Hollywood's target audience. She's thrilled that she can tell her aunt that she "told the story to the screenwriter" and Dix clearly finds both Mildred and the novel to be ridiculous. But in telling Dix the story – or at least its Hollywood A-plot – Mildred become an embodiment of the text – she is the audience's only access to knowledge of what everyone means when they tell Dix to "do the book." For the purposes of *In a Lonely Place*, Mildred is Althea Bruce. After her dramatization of the text, on her way out the door to her death, Mildred hands the book to Dix and he casually casts it aside; it's an act he repeats when the police bring

him down to the station for questioning. Sitting down to tie his shoes, Dix tosses the book to Sergeant Nicolai (an old war buddy) and asks: "Read any good books lately?" Dix's dispassionate tone is the same he adopts in the police station when Lochner shows him pictures of Mildred's broken body; the body of Althea Bruce is linked linguistically to Mildred's own. In Dix's careless handling of both, we can see the process of adaptation becoming another screen behind which Dix hides his potential for murder. The book is what Dix continually distances himself from.

Dix's response is an effect of his participation in a larger problem. In taking on the original text as a performance, Mildred's body becomes the text. When she's murdered, so is the story source. Eventually, it's revealed that Mildred's boyfriend murdered her because he believed her evening with Dix was an infidelity. In that revelation, the film audience realizes that the adaptation was linked to the beginning of a cycle wherein people try to transcend the boundaries of simplistic fidelity and infidelity, and fail. Dix and Laurel do not end as tragically as Mildred and her boyfriend. Dix merely *almost* strangles Laurel in her bedroom when he discovers her plans to leave him. They climb out of the cycle, it's implied, only because Dix has finished his script: there is another object on which the pain of their mediated relationship has already been displaced. So while adaptation instigates the cycle it can also defend against its most destructive ending. Dix's script as adaptation becomes similarly linked to the film's problematic central relationship. That is, mentions of the script and its composition become a channel for the love, violence, suspicion, and fear that develop between Dix and Laurel – the mechanism through which they can be discussed, diffused, or depicted from a safe distance.

All of the fear, paranoia and suspicion presaged in the opening shot of *In a Lonely Place* intensify after Mildred's death. Dix throws himself wholeheartedly into a relationship with Laurel and into the writing of his script, but detaches entirely from the murder he is accused of. The imprecision of identifying, expressing, and managing emotions also accounts for the generic jumble that Dana Polan identifies *In a Lonely Place*. Polan sees the film as part noir crime film,

part screwball comedy, and part female Gothic. These genres intersect and struggle for narrative dominance (18-27). But, in the end, it is fear – the fear that this dangerous outsider you are meant to love will overwhelm you mentally and physically – that wins: "I love you," Laurel wants to tell Dix, "but I'm afraid of you." She is afraid, in fact, that Dix's love will destroy her completely.

Dix embarks on his script as soon as he and Laurel join as a couple – the scene of adaptation is presented as stemming directly from their relationship. And its effect, moreover, is magical. For a film that is always classed as a film noir, the tone of *In a Lonely Place* is deceptively light in its second act.[15] In the aftermath of Dix's initial police interrogation, he and Laurel leap, with banter and passion, into a committed relationship. We are reminded that Dix is writing a script while he and Laurel are in the first blush of love. Laurel doubles as a secretary and nursemaid for Dix as he works on a script. Initially, we can only assume that the script is Dix's adaptation of *Althea Bruce*. Discussion about the work *as work* is exuberant. Indeed, until mention of the adaptation as such, even otherwise dark actions are converted to light banter. Laurel is delighted to find Mel: "Snooping through windows; in broad daylight, too!" Dix hasn't worked steadily since the war, and as Mel peers at Laurel through the apartment's barred windows he snarks: "What do you use? Witchcraft?" The reference to the war, at this moment, signals that its violent specter still haunts the scene, but Laurel, Mel, and Dix distance the exterior social world with other arts. Their relationship, in other words, may not be subject to the same laws of interaction. In a separate and magical state, they may be able to protect themselves from the mediation that plagues other romances. Regarding her witchcraft, Laurel assures Mel, smilingly: She uses it "Only as a last resort."

As soon as the topic turns to adaptation, the tone changes. Dix works through the night on the script and Mel is confident that Brody, the producer, would be "delighted." Dix is only sure that he'd be pleased with the quantity: "I wonder. Anyway, we've got lots of pages." When

[15] See David Cochran, *American Noir: Underground Writers and Filmmakers of the Postwar Era* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000). Film noir is an aesthetic classification that traditionally has been attached to the Cold War anxiety of post-World War II America.

discussing Dix's output with Mel, the tone still syncs with its earlier lightness – but Laurel shifts into imprecision. "How many pages have you typed?" Mel presses. "Many," Laurel insists as she shuffles the sheets of paper. But the book intercedes: "Is he sticking close to the book?" Suddenly, Laurel becomes evasive as she shifts her chin away from Mel. Hesitantly, but still firmly, she admits: "I don't know...I didn't read the book." Laurel, in fact never reads the book, and her willful unknowing in the early stages of her relationship with Dix – the signs of his instability that she ignores – is figured by her reliance on the adaptation in place of the book. It's Mel's introduction of "the book" into the conversation, and not any of the earlier dialogue – even Dix threatening to "kick" Laurel "out of here" is said with tenderness – that first introduces the potential for fear in Laurel and Dix's relationship.

The book comes to represent everything that stands between Dix and Laurel's true love. It is an entirely unknown factor for Laurel. The book is a factor that Dix only knows as mediated through Mildred Atkinson's performance. Mildred's performance and death, which matches her body with the book, is also the "real world" factor mediating Dix and Laurel's relationship. Whether Dix killed, or had the capacity to kill, Mildred is the question that makes the mediation between Dix and Laurel increasingly difficult to surmount. When Laurel and Mel come upon Dix in this scene he is wrapped up in his work. A true artist, he ignores worldly things until Laurel's question ("What's my first name?") brings him out of his writing reverie. Knowing how to relate to this side of Dix is a bit of the witchcraft she claims earlier. The fidelity of the adaptation Dix is working on is something separate from his artistry, and by distancing herself from the fidelity question, Laurel simultaneously protects herself from any distress about the relationship and leaves herself vulnerable to distressing effects.

Fidelity – or the desire for fidelity – is certainly connected to the commercial value that Dix's script might have and the appeal it might hold for audience members like Mildred. But in terms of the development, or rather, devolution, of the relationship between Dix and Laurel, it is through "the book" that we come to see how the fear for physical and psychic safety that will

come to dominate the relationship was latent in it before it even began. Laurel can serve as the transcriber of Dix's pages – she can comment on their existence. But, Laurel does not have authority on the meaning of the pages, on whether they are traceable to the legible source that Mel references. For Mel, *Althea Bruce* is simply a job. For Laurel, that unknown source text aligns with what she knows about Dix. She'll come to realize, as her suspicion and fear of Dix grows, that she does not necessarily understand what lies beneath the lines Dix feeds her. Laurel's exasperated and regretful admission that she has not read the book becomes a code for Laurel's apprehension about the possibility that a relationship with Dix will not be the magically boundary-free haven she imagined. Her refusal to read the book at any point – to rely on Dix's adaptation – is how she manages that tension. Her love for Dix will be increasingly mediated by what she refuses to know and cannot change.

The book as code for love resurfaces with Dix's rage. Already furious that Laurel has spoken to the police without telling him, Dix savagely attacks the young driver of a car he sideswipes – Laurel's desperate plea, "Stop. You'll kill him," halts him just short of bashing the boy's head with a rock. Ray constructs Laurel's fear, here, her deeper helplessness, by having her as the passenger for Dix's reckless driving. Shaky point of view shots show Dix gunning through intersections and swinging around mountain curves; close-ups of Laurel's feet show her pressing down on phantom brake pedals. And yet returning to the car after the attack, Laurel lets Dix take the wheel again. They are silent until Laurel's admonishment that Dix's anger at her didn't "justify acting like a madman." At that, Dix finally relinquishes control of the car to Laurel. Without transition or introduction, Dix recites: "I was born when she kissed me. I died when she left me. I lived a few weeks while she loved me." Dix must explain to a perplexed Laurel: "I want to put it in the script, but I don't know where." Dix, rather than accessing the source of his anger or fears, turns to his script for mediation. His move displaces the emotional discomfort of the moment with a structural question. Dix both forces Laurel to focus on the construction of the script (she suggests "the farewell note?") and blunts the effects of his own unfocused rage. From

one perspective, this displacement of the emotion onto Dix's process of adaptation is merely the effect of his profession as writer. The film, however, refuses to make his behavior an example of artistic temperament: "I'm afraid he'd act just the same no matter what kind of work he did," Laurel confides in a friend. What neither Dix nor Laurel mention here is "the book." They do not discuss how "the farewell note" fits into the story arc. They do not discuss why or if the character might write such a note. Implicitly, it fits because Dix the screenwriter imagines that it will fit. They treat the adaptation, in effect, as any other "original" script that Dix might write. They act as if there is no book standing between Dix and his artistry, just as they hope there is no mediation in their relationship.

At the same time, that mediation is absolutely necessary for Dix and Laurel's to function in their world. Dix can reference the script in the car scene by talking about medium-specific details: the placement of the speech he has written outside of the central plot of his text. Laurel's suggestion that he place it in "the farewell note" indicates that this emotional lament will only seen as printed in the film, but Laurel and Dix focus on the words as spoken. Dix asks Laurel to "say it back to me so I can hear how it sounds." Even the language from Dix's script displaces the emotional impact of the moment: who would write a farewell note to "she" rather than "you"? This is a pointedly depersonalized farewell. This recourse to discussing the terms of his adaptation *as if it were not an adaptation*, then, is a channel for their anxiety over their pursuit of "true" love. It is the method by which it can be redirected.

Further, talking about the script as script also becomes a strategy Dix and Laurel use to discuss everything but the distress they are feeling about their relationship. A good love scene, Dix exposits, "should be about something else besides love." This breakfast scene, where Dix and Laurel discuss the nature of a true love scene, with Laurel all the while fearing for her safety, uses the script as a tool to introduce the tension of the scene without actually speaking the words:

> Laurel: I finished the pages.
> Dix: Yeah. I noticed you also covered the script. What are you trying to prove? You won't get a raise, you know.

Laurel: I love the love scene. It's very good.

The close-up of Laurel as she speaks the last line shows the tired resignation on her face and in her voice. The love scene they discuss has nothing to do with the fear she's now feeling. She covered the script. Despite the sincerity of Dix's comparison between the true love scene (wherein characters are not constantly talking about how in love they are) and their situation, Laurel's emotional state colors the exchange. She subsequently agrees to marry him not for love but because she "was scared." In both the car and the breakfast scenes, Dix and Laurel play out the love/fear dichotomy by first introducing physical or logistical properties of *Althea Bruce*. And it is the script itself that Mel and Laurel try to use as a distraction to dull Dix's anger and personal fear of "defeat": "If Brody only liked the script" Mel conjectures, "that would help a lot. If Dix has success, he doesn't need anything else." "Take the script," Laurel immediately tells Mel, "it's finished." It had been an unpaid project; she had been "doing it for love," but now both are finished. "I was hoping for a miracle," Mel tells Laurel sadly, "but it didn't happen."

Efforts to use the script as justification for their "true love" story fail because the script is both a script and an adaptation. At Laurel's and Dix's engagement party, Dix's former flame enthuses: "Brody wants me for the part of Althea." This is the first, since Mildred's death, that the name "Althea" has been mentioned and the reassertion of the script's adaptation status –this invocation of the book – sparks Dix's anger:

> Dix**:** What's wrong with my script?
> Mel**:** Nothing. But it's not the book; that's what Brody asked for: a faithful adaptation.
> Dix**:** The book was trash and you're a thief.

Dix tries to defend the sanctity of his originality and rejects the value of the "faithful" adaptation that Brody asked for. By ensuring that his script can stand on its own, Dix might also be able to prove that he can adapt himself to a future with Laurel. But as Dix's rage increases they are interrupted by a call Laurel doesn't want to take ("You mean you don't want to talk to anybody in front of me!") – and Dix's anger at Laurel, and Mel, and himself, becomes intertwined and expressed through his adaptation frustration: "Why was it so important that Brody read the script

today?!" We learn that despite the script's infidelity to the novel, "Brody's delighted with the script; he's raving about it." All along, the pushes towards fidelity ("just do the book") were always just a feint for Brody and Mel to protect themselves from a bad script, just as for Laurel and Dix the script became a screen to shield themselves from the insurmountable prospect of finding "true" love.

The Artist and the Body of Adaptation

The Red Shoes' scene of adaptation is buried further in the text than that of *In a Lonely Place*. The film submerges its adaptation under the "individual" arts of music and dancing. Michael Powell and Emil Pressburger had been working on *The Red Shoes* script intermittently since the 1930s. Alexander Korda, the powerhouse British producer, wanted a ballet vehicle for his then-wife Merle Oberon; he and Pressburger agreed that Anderson's "The Red Shoes," a popular story in Korda and Pressburger's native Hungary, would be a good fit for the narrative.[16] Oberon, unfortunately, was not a dancer and her relationship with Korda did not last, and so the script was buried for several years. The project did not come together until 1946, under the auspices of producer J. Arthur Rank.[17] By this point, Powell and Pressburger had worked together on several films and were calling their artistic collaboration, The Archers. The production ran over schedule and over budget and initially foundered at the UK box office; Rank considered *The Red Shoes* an unqualified failure until American art-house critics began to champion the film (Connolly 6-7). It eventually became the producers' "biggest box office success in Britain and America."[18] The film's precarious balance between fairytale and backstage melodrama, along with the Archer's signature style, is still off-putting for some viewers. Regardless of taste, however, the life and death of Vicky Page, the great dancer, inspired many

[16] Ian Christie, "Commentary," *The Red Shoes,* DVD, Criterion, 1999.
[17] Mark Connolly, *The Red Shoes* (London: IB Taurus, 2005) 4.
[18] Sarah Street, *British National Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 1997) 161.

young artists (Christie). Michael Powell felt the film confirmed, "that art is worth dying for."[19] The irony of artists being inspired by the story of a dancer who dies so tragically should not be lost. The hope of breaking out of the dilemma—the incompatibility of great art and life—that *The Red Shoes* presents on its surface performs the same striving for unmediated relationships that we see *In a Lonely Place.* It demonstrates a deep-seated sense that if a person loves someone or something "truly," then boundaries between them should dissipate completely.

Key for both the Archers was including a ballet in their film about ballet that was "a complete work in its own right" (Christie). But before we see or hear anything that Vicky and Craster contribute to *The Red Shoes* ballet, we see the red shoes themselves. Lined up by the prop master on a white strip, the multiple iterations of the shoes all seem to be the same. As Lermontov's easily recognizable cane (standing-in for the man himself) glides over them (led by the property master's decidedly less dapper version), he finds only one that suits his taste. While the prop master wavers, Lermontov is certain. The prop master concedes. We know, then, that the red shoes and *The Red Shoes* we see are only one of many potential versions. This idea that we are only seeing one of many potential versions is emphasized in other aspects of the film. The unseen other composer who wrote the "bad" first version of the score and the lack of faith that Lermontov's staff initially has in Vicky as the star suggest that there are other directions the narrative could produce. There are other artistic combinations that could be produced and thus no version of "The Red Shoes" that could be, truly, "a complete work in its own right." Contained in the many potential adapted versions of "The Red Shoes" is the promise that each can exist independently, can share the same public identity, even if only one of them is recognized. At the same time, this moment with the shoes themselves elaborates the film's defense against the impossibility of true love. *The Red Shoes* displaces the anxiety in human relationships onto the problem of the artist's relationships to art and life. Here, the dehumanized potential iterations of

[19] Michael Powell, *A Life in Movies: An Autobiography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987) 660.

the red shoes, and the "right" shoe chosen not by Lermontov but by his cane (a signifier of the man) bury the narrative's relevance to *human* rather than *artistic* experience.

The embedded adaptation haunts the film's beginning but remains unspoken until well into the story. The opening credits cast Hans Christian Anderson's story as the base to the current narrative; they grasps at the literary memories of *The Red Shoes* viewer who may remember Anderson's story clearly or who, like Craster, may have a vague recollection that in the end "she dies." The connection between the story and the film from those opening credits, however, is dangerously unstable. The order of the still-life presented in the opening credits is followed by the first shot of the film proper; it too is devoid of people. Powell's camera pauses on a low angle shot of an empty stairwell – muted earth tones are accented by light streaming in from the windows and candlelight from the walls. On the audio, we can hear a rowdy crowd, but visible signs of life are absent. For a brief moment, the field of vision is filled with an image that recalls Dutch genre paintings about the transcendental potential of everyday life, those "realistic scenes which, paradoxically, usually have a symbolic content."[20] In those paintings the scenes are just settings – the order they suggest only holds back the messiness of human life. In this case, after a short conversation between two theater workers, the music and ballet lovers burst into the space of the theater. They fill the screen in a mad rush of bodies pushing for space – trying to get the best spot for the performance. The Archers' opening shot implies that under the order and controllability of art, humanity anxiously waits in the wings. The narrative repeatedly represses the human implication of that starting point.

Powell and Pressburger strategically overwrite any hints of the characters' existence outside of the art world (in the manner of *Tristram Shandy: A Cock and Bull Story*) by refusing to name "The Red Shoes" as a source until forty minutes into the film. In this way, their film constructs life within the Lermontov Ballet Company *as life*. Powell has written that his goal was to exhibit "The way these artists, including Lermontov, thought and worked and invented in this

[20] Alejandro Vergara, curator, *Vermeer and Dutch Interior,* Prado Museum (Madrid, 2003): 257.

closed world of music and dancing" (Powell 616). Although we meet Vicky's aunt at the start of the film, she is a patron of the arts. The students and art attendees are satellites of the company. And so, relationships to art define everyone in the film. Throughout that conditioning, the company's production of new ballets, like *Heart of Fire* – the score purloined from Craster by his professor – and canonical ballets, like *Giselle*, suggests that there is an attempt, in this world, to create openings in that life for both the old and the new, the future and the past, as in any other family. Nevertheless, without a stable counterpoint against which to compare this supposedly special collective, their work becomes merely one perspective on human collectivity. Representations of artists, I would suggest, are perhaps the best way to express problems of being-in-the-world. Language, art, and other forms of expression, as Regenia Gagnier explores in her work on philosophical anthropology, "are the self-defining activities of human collectivity."[21] But, because artists seem so separate from the world, constructing this art world as the *only* world effectively departicularizes Vicky's and Craster's existential dilemmas while maintaining the palliating distinction of their roles as public artists.

The representation of the Lermontov ballet could give one the idea that ballet companies, in "real" life notoriously competitive and physically draining, are really little different than other homogenously happy families. The offstage interactions among the dancers and the staff are loud, teasing, and affectionate. When the ballet's star, Irina Boronskaja, announces her engagement, she does so in the middle of rehearsal. Although the announcement interrupts her dancing, it does not interrupt her fellowship with anyone but Lermontov. "He has no heart, that man," the soon-to-be-ousted prima ballerina grieves. Of course, in a movie that critics identify as undermining its own "art and life do not mix" thesis, Boronskaja's ouster supports the feminist reading of this film. That Lermontov later brings her back to replace Vicky when she chooses her relationship with Craster over the ballet also indicates that the only value Lermontov holds dear is

[21] Regenia Gagnier, "A Literary Anthropology of Freedom and Choice: The Novel as Philisophical Anthropology," Public Lecture. Vanderbilt University. 26 March 2009.

getting his own way. For Alexander Doty the "human love" that Lermontov rejects "seems to be equated here with heterosexual relationships/marriage, the implication being that women dancers should turn to the 'inhuman' or 'non-human' love of Lermontov and his ballet company in order to become great."[22] This position serves Doty's argument that Lermontov and his ballet are queered. But it also points out how "inhuman" love is preferable to human love to become a "great dancer" – in the grammar of this film, to be *publicly* recognized as an individual – because the ballet company, for all its happiness, neither gives anything nor requires anything back.

Boronkaja's offscreen marriage serves as a significant counterpoint to Vicky's and Craster's very tangible relationship. As far as film viewers are concerned, Boronskaja's husband does not exist; her lover is never seen on screen. Existing outside of the "real" world, this unseen partner does not threaten any heady conceptions of true love because, not existing, his identity is very easy to meld with hers. While away in this phantom marriage, Ljubov reminds her, gives her the opportunity to do and be whoever she wants: "You can sleep as long as you like." The sacrifice for the world of the company is, he sadly admits, that there will be "no more Irina." But that loss is only momentary; as soon as Lermontov needs her, Irina is summoned up as a complete individual. In contrast, Vicky and Craster both develop as individuals within *this* world – so their relationship truly poses a challenge to their established identities and their independent selves. True love without sacrifice may be a fairytale; Vicky and Craster try to bring that fairytale into their real world.

Michael Powell has identified the scene leading up to Vicky's assignment to *The Red Shoes* as a shift of the whole narrative into fairytale where, ostensibly, we learn that life and art do not mix. Mistakenly believing that Lermontov has invited her to a dinner date, Vicky adorns herself in a gown and jewels, and as she slowly ascends to Lermontov's romantically dilapidated villa in Monte Carlo the images recall Cocteau's *Beauty and the Beast* (1946). "I showed how,"

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[22] Alexander Doty, "The Queer Aesthete, the Diva, and *The Red Shoes*," in *Out Takes: Essays on Queer Theory and Film*, ed. Ellis Hanson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999) 46-75. 59.

Powell writes, "to use a fairytale landscape in a fairytale way" (159). When she arrives, Vicky quickly realizes that the meeting was not an assignation but a casting session: she is finally pulled from the ensemble and cast as the lead in *The Red Shoes*. Cynthia Young argues that, for the passion Lermontov sees in her and the dues she pays as a background dancer, "Vicky's 'reward' […] would both affirm her individual selfhood and confirm her triumphant passage of initiation. However, at this level of narrative reproduction, the special action of the film apparatus joins with the structure of the fairy tale form to privilege the love and romance plot *instead*" (Young 110). While we should be concentrating on Vicky, in other words, the film makes its viewers pay attention to the burgeoning romance between Vicky and Craster, thus deemphasizing Vicky's full selfhood in favor of a typical romantic narrative structure. But that shift into romantic partnerships is itself allegorical. For a cultural history that has increasingly promoted individual fulfillment – the promise of having one's self be a publicly recognized self even if it means being a "great dancer" instead of a human being – the specter of true love has nonetheless seemed the paradoxical fulfillment of human existence.

That shift in narrative possession from Vicky to Vicky and Craster's love story is filtered through Craster's adaptation of "The Red Shoes" and Vicky's performance in it. The future lovers are ordered, childlike, to bed by Lermontov after Vicky gets her lead and Craster gets leave to compose the whole score rather than just accomplish rewrites. Both Vicky and Craster feeling in possession of themselves, refuse the order and accidentally meet on an empty balcony:

> Craster**:** I'm just working on the score of my new ballet, "The Red Shoes."
> Vicky**:** Is that my ballet, too?
> Craster**:** Yes. I suppose it its.
> (*Train whistle. Both turn and look over the parapet to watch it go by.*)

They realize in tandem that the text they had relied upon to define themselves as individuals will be shared between them – and it also stands between them; the train whistle punctuates their revelation. The writing and performance of the adapted ballet—the expected reward in a narrative about a portrait of the artist—plays second fiddle to the romance plot in the last two-thirds of the

film. If the filmic attention here turns to the romance plot, that because the problems of the romance plot that are usually sublimated —its failure to overcome mediation between individuals — emerge in *The Red Shoes*' scene of adaptation.[23] Everything about Vicky and Craster's social identities reminds them and the audience that they will always be in a mediated relationship with each other: male/female, man/woman, dancer/composer. The adaptation just blows the whistle on that divide. We can see embedded adaptation developing as the film shifts into the "rehearsal" section of this backstage melodrama.

Throughout the rest of the film, Hans Christian Anderson's tale, Lermontov's narration of the tale, Craster's score, and Vicky's dancing both work together and compete against each other to define the text. Craster has the responsibility of adapting "The Red Shoes," of providing the narrative with a new medial identity. Vicky has the dubious responsibility to *be* the adaptation. The twelve-minute version of the ballet that appears in the film plays out the unsustainable nature of a true love, even if that "truth" is only glanced at. As Vicky dances, the performance increasingly becomes a representation of what she experiences in her mind, but in the end she has to return to the stage. In this scene of adaptation, as in the work of the murderer-adapter, the act of conceiving one's self by necessity compromises other identities. Indeed, the music stolen from Craster for *Heart of Fire* acts as the allegorical counterpoint to the management of the self/love split in *The Red Shoes*. *Heart of Fire* – an original ballet – was stolen from Craster by his professor. Lermontov asks Craster to give it up, because he can still define himself as a person and an artist; the tragedy of the musical thief is that he doesn't have that capacity. *The Red Shoes* as an adaptation reveals how trying to maintain that balance equally between *who you are* and *who or what you love* can become an obsessive-compulsion; something must be sacrificed. The

[23] The romance and marriage plot has been paid special attention by Victorian and feminist scholars. For more on the marriage plot see: Rachael Ablow, *The Marriage Of Minds: Reading Sympathy In The Victorian Marriage Plot* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2007) and Rachel M. Brownstein, *Becoming A Heroine: Reading About Women In Novels,* 1982, Reprint ed. (New York: Columbia UP, 1994).

curse of believing that assimilation can be achieved allows everything in life, "time" and even real "love," to rush by.

Even within the embedded adaptation, Vicky the dancer cannot manage the others intruding into her world and into the self she chooses by pursuing the red shoes. Early in her possession by the red shoes, there are a host of other dancers around her, but as she sinks deeper and deeper into the shoes' isolation, these people become mostly images; Vicky dances through a hallway filled with images of the people and objects that once surrounded her. But, one by one, they fall to the floor and she dances over them. Later, the bodies return, but they are not so benign: As she cowers in front of the devilish shoemaker, his image is superimposed over those of Lermontov and Craster in succession. The rest of the cast can truly become the characters they portray in the image of the ballet that Vicky possesses in her mind. The individuals whose roles in life are too different from hers to disembody, yet to whom she had sacrificed pieces of herself, invade the space of Vicky's consciousness.

Looking for a more pliable partner, Vicky eventually finds a piece of newspaper that becomes first a paper figure and then a real man with words of text haphazardly placed all over his body; she adapts the text into a partner she can control. As the two dance, Vicky's own body takes on the newspaper text; she wills into existence a partner whose body can stand a free exchange of properties. Her body and the medium bond together, truly beginning to serve one function. They dance together, twirling until Vicky pulls herself away and her body returns to a pristine whiteness. The life of her partner is gone. He is again just a bit of paper. In this snippet of dancing, the aims of the embedded adaptations and the pursuit of true love meet and cross each other. These two bodies can merge together for a moment and can take on aspects of the other. But full absorption is rejected and the text and body must separate. Vicky mourns the loss, but the shoemaker forces her to dance on.

From the perspective of "The Red Shoes" ballet, the confidence that Craster had expressed earlier, about the inviolability of his score despite how it is perceived by others,

presages Vicky and Craster's failure at the same project that Vicky and the newspaper man attempt. In Vicky's imaginary iteration of ballet, the ballroom scene (which the audience knows has been cut) is one she performs. This is when Craster's sense of self again infiltrates Vicky's space: at the end of the long ballroom, she can see Craster, conducting, and for a moment he seems to walk up and join her on the stage, breaking the sanctity of her independence. Craster's violently strong self-perception reminds Vicky of the certainty she has always lacked. From there on, Vicky's internal rendering of the performance ceases to have control of our visual field; "The Red Shoes" is again a stage performance, populated by other dancers and watched by a real audience. Torn between the two selves of her waiting lover and the public dancer, Vicky's independent self can neither be fully realized nor fully incorporated with the others about her.

The stronger structure of "The Red Shoes" plot returns and the stability of that plot counters Vicky's destabilized self. Within her imagination, Vicky recognizes the problem in the red shoes: the two men, and art, are pulling her apart. Both leaving the company to marry Craster and leaving *him* to return to dancing allow her to realize that under the conditions of living existence, there may be no end to this cycle. She cannot split herself like the text or the red shoes can be split; in the end she chooses her self (and whoever that is not even Powell and Pressburger's film can access) over the split loyalties that life and love would require. Vicky returns specifically to dance in the adaptation that defined her public identity but rejects the compromises of life and love by killing herself before Lermontov and Craster can pull her back in. Craster and Lermontov are left behind. Like *The Red Shoes* audiences, they have to go on ignoring human nature. Vicky protects herself by removing her self from the sources of her fragmentation. That her choice is tragic for everyone who encounters, moreover, emphasizes her death as a symptom of the continuous problem of managing one's self in relation to what you love. It does not present self-extermination as a solution to the existential crisis but as an effect of being too pliable a subject of adaptation. Vicky's death is the fulfillment, in fact, of Lacan's reservations about existential philosophies. Existentialism, he argues in his essay on the mirror

stage, may provide a "justification" for "a personality that achieves self-realization only in suicide."[24] Figuring Vicky as the embodiment of both "The Red Shoes" curse and a puzzle piece in the successful end to *The Red Shoes,* her role as a figure of adaptation positions her course as infinitely already defined. More important for its audiences, however, Vicky's place as artist in adaptation falsely confines her psychic dilemma to this narrative *mise-en-abyme*.

At the end of the film, the company has just performed "The Red Shoes" with a spotlight filling the space where Vicky's body should be. Craster, removed from the scene, is left with her physical body. Since this is the end that the terms of adaptation taught us to expect, the outcome is affecting but unsurprising. Adaptation, after all, aims to make a new whole out of stories and media that are otherwise separate, and it succeeds more or less depending on how well the text manages to make its audience forget that the disjunction ever existed. Forgetting or ignoring something, however, does not make it disappear. We are left with the Shoemaker holding the red shoes – handing them to the audience. The curtain closes. The red shoes, never as bound to the artist's life as the filmmakers would like to believe, are handed to *us*.

The opening credits of *The Red Shoes* create a sense of magic, of witchcraft and sorcery, promising some sort of transfiguration. But, by the end credits, the wax from the candle has melted down and encased the book. By telling this narrative of adaptation, Powell and Pressburger have contained the identity of Hans Christian Anderson's text. In Anderson's "The Red Shoes," the young girl who so desired the red shoes must cut off her feet – must be castrated – for her vanity before she can atone to God and reenter the Christian community.[25] Anderson's story, we might recall, is also a love story. His surface narrative teaches his young readers to resist vanity for the love of God. But, ultimately, Anderson's story and Powell and Pressburger's film tell the same story: You may not be able to love yourself and love someone else, even God,

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[24] Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function," *Ecrits,* Bruce Fink, trans. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002) 1-9. 8.
[25] See Erin Mackie, "Red Shoes and Bloody Stumps," in *Footnotes: On Shoes,* eds. Shari Benstock and Suzanne Ferriss (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgets UP, 2001) 233-247.

and still be a whole person. The shoes, symbols of vanity and art, are just the vehicles, the objects containing the obsession that is always a potential product of trying to possess "two lives" as one.

The End of the Affair

It was never a secret that Harold Pinter and Karl Reisz's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1981) is an adaptation of John Fowles well-known 1969 novel of the same name. It is the kind of adaptation that professional reviewers revel in: based on a novel they are likely to be familiar with and written by a screenwriter and playwright (Pinter) whose style and interests they could comment on, they can easily assume the typical stance of immediate comfort with "new" material. It was natural for a slew of critics to prepare their readers for a film that took as its conceit the notion that this was a film about artists filming an adaptation of John Fowles' novel. As *New York Times* critic Vincent Canby writes when making the comparison of the film to the novel: "It was, *of course*, in the sixties that Mr. Fowles wrote his long, chatty tale" (my emphasis).[26] Canby had begun his review by describing the opening scene of the film, which establishes both the windswept atmosphere of the film's setting in Lyme Regis and the fact that this is a film about a film. Roger Ebert, writing for *The Chicago Sun Times*, actually begins with Fowles' novel rather than this film: "Reading the last one hundred pages of John Fowles's THE FRENCH LIEUTENANT'S WOMAN," he reminds or informs his readers, "is like being caught in a fictional labyrinth."[27] The "chatty" narrator of John Fowles' hugely successful and critically adored novel is possibly the most memorable aspect of that text; a modern and forward-thinking

[26] Vincent Canby, Rev. of *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. Karl Reisz, dir. 18 September 1981. *The New York Times* Online. <www.nytimes.com.>: par. 6.
[27] Roger Ebert, Review of *The French Lieutenant's Woman.* Karl Reisz, dir. 1 January 1981. Professional Website. <www.rogerebert.suntimes.com.>: par. 1.

man of the 1960s, he ponders the meaning and implications of the Victorian era in which he sets his tale.[28]

The novel is a postmodern fractured narrative that, as Vincent Canby puts it, "has the form and style of a mid-Victorian novel if ever a mid-Victorian novel had been written by a novelist with the benefit of the hindsight available to an author writing in the 1960's" (par. 5). In many ways, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is about the historical period whose scientific advances began to make possible the existential philosophies, the crisis of personal identity, that had come to characterize the postmodern age from which Fowles and his narrator write.[29] These texts' complacency about their temporal and textual control of the relationships they portray, the supposed "benefit of hindsight," is precisely what mediates the fraught human relationships in both Fowles's novel and its film adaptation. The embedded adaptation in the film, however, defends against the implications of that complacency by creating a texture of anxiety.

Charles Smithson is a gentleman and Darwin enthusiast who has recently engaged himself to a manufacturer's daughter. While staying in Lyme Regis, Smithson meets, and develops an obsessive interest in and attraction to, Sarah Woodruff. Woodruff is a melancholy ex-governess given to staring at the sea for long periods of time. Locals know her better as The French Lieutenant's Woman (to the *real* locals she is The French Lieutenant's Whore). Sarah remains enigmatic throughout the text but her efforts to entrance Charles through her very status as social outcast suggest that she is more in control of her "illness" than she at first appears to be.

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[28] See Jerome Bump, "The Narrator as Protoreader in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*," *Victorian Newsletter* 74 (1988): 16-18; David W Landrum, "Sarah and Sappho: Lesbian reference in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*," *Mosaic: a Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 33.1 (2000): 59-77.

[29] Ruth Christiani Brown, "*The French Lieutenant's Woman* and *Pierre:* Echo and Answer," *Modern Fiction Studies* 31.1 (1985): 115-132; Tony E. Jackson, "Charles and the Hopeful Monster: Postmodern Evolutionary Theory in *The French Lieutenant's Woman,*" *Twentieth Century Literature* 43.2 (1997): 221-242; Mary Lynn Dodson, "*The French Lieutenant's Woman*: Pinter and Reisz's adaptation of John Fowles's adaptation," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 26.4 (1998): 296-304; Eva Mokry Pohler, "Genetic and cultural selection in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*," *Mosaic: a Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 35.2 (2002): 57-73; Richard P. Lynch, "Freedoms in *The French Lieutenant's Woman,*" *Twentieth Century Literature* 48.1 (2002): 50-76.

I would argue, with critics like Ellen Shields, that Fowles' representation of Sarah is potentially as misogynistic as many critics seem to find *The Red Shoes*. But, the fact that Sarah disappears as soon as she's sure of Charles's love has led to the general consensus that she manages to develop a full and independent personality despite the restrictions placed on her by class, gender, and period.[30] Charles, through his fraught and unexpected relationship with Sarah, goes through an existential crisis where he must chose between a Victorian moral "happy" ending where he can be with Sarah on her own terms and a more existentially independent future of isolation; in the process he opens the potential for modern manhood but also exposes the danger that existential freedom, as Mary Lynn Dodson concludes, is "mere selfishness" (301).

But it is the character of the narrator, his double vision on the moment of writing and the moment of the plot, which influenced the most salient formal aspect of the film adaptation of the novel. In place of Fowles' self-reflexive character narrator, Harold Pinter constructs parallel narratives about the filming of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* plot and the simultaneous affair of the two actors playing the leads (Meryl Streep and Jeremy Irons). This frame narrative emphasizes that way this film eschews much of the ambiguity that characterizes Fowles' novel. While some critics may argue that the novel bemoans the essential loneliness of an existential perspective on life, virtually all critics agree that the film posits the essential meaninglessness of life and love, even if (like Joseph Martin) they conclude that meaninglessness is tempered by the freedom of choice figured for the viewer in the metafictional interplay between the Victorian and

[30] Sarah's mystery and desire to maintain that mysteriousness is portrayed as somehow essential to the ideal feminine woman. As Shields argues: "Fowles presents an equally problematic identification of hysteria with mysteriousness and an association of mystery with the essence of femininity" (85). Ellen F. Shields, "Hysteria, sexual assault, and the military: The trial of Emile de La Ronciere and *The French Lieutenant's Woman*," *Mosaic: a Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 28.3 (1995): 83-108. For more positive takes on Sarah see also: Dianne Osland, "Loose ends in 'Roxana' and 'The French Lieutenant's Woman'," *Studies in the Novel* 25.4 (Winter 1993): 381-397; Eileen Warburton, "Ashes, ashes, we all fall down: Ourika, Cinderella, and *The French Lieutenant's Woman*," *Twentieth Century Literature* 42.1 (1996): 165-187.

modern plots.[31] The film thus speaks openly about the human love paradox that *In a Lonely Place* and *The Red Shoes* mask with artistic pathology. Although Mike, Anna, and Sarah are all artists (Sarah draws and paints throughout the film and finds her "own life" in that work), their artist status at no point overshadows the fact that the film as a whole openly does precisely what Charles excoriates Sarah for when he finds her after a long search; Charles claims that in leaving their love story for "freedom," she managed "To make a mockery of love – of all *human* feeling." The splitting between characters played by the same actors models the division of self that happens in the pursuit of true love. Yet the hidden adaptation narrative, the fact that the Victorian film is never spoken about as an adaptation, suggests that if the postmodern age has not liberated humans from the problems posed by social life, then perhaps it has allowed increasing sensitivity to the way the formal properties of art model conceptions of self. The adaptation is a code, in *In a Lonely Place* and *The Red Shoes*, for the mediation between Self and Other that notions of true love cannot conquer. In *The French Lieutenant's Woman* scene of adaptation, the right story told right in its new body, becomes the means of managing that contingency.

The concept that we are watching a film *being* filmed is clear from the opening shots as a clapboard falls in front of the camera's seaside image announcing that "this" is a production of *The French Lieutenant's Woman;* as the opening credits tell us, the film we are watching is also *The French Lieutenant's Woman.* The metafictional conceit of the film is announced by these images, but the notion of "adaptation" is hidden in the diegesis until the last quarter of the film. Speaking one aspect of the terms of its relationship with fiction and reality, Pinter's script does not mention this aspect of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* until a minor character forces the protagonist's hand. The adaptation remains a secret, though it is a secret that anyone watching the film knows, whether from the credits that announce the film is based on John Fowles' novel

[31] Joseph Martin, "Postmodernist Play in Karel Reisz's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. " *Literature/Film Quarterly* 22.3 (1994): 151-159. For the first perspective, see Seymour Chatman, who argues that the film pursues that perspective almost single-mindedly and it is by those terms that he concludes that that the film provides "one of the better accounts of modern love that the cinema has given us" (180-181). Seymour Chatman, *Coming to Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1990).

or from knowledge of the book itself. That secreting of the adaptation, I suggest, allows the protagonists, Mike and Anna, to defend against their imperfectly permeable selves; they cannot ignore the fragmentation of identity that happens in the relationships they seem compelled to conduct, but by hiding the terms of adaptation in plain sight, the film can manage the extent of that fragmentation.

The French Lieutenant's Woman is an example of a novel that deals directly with the terms one of the human social problems that many of the other texts I've discussed in this project cannot bring themselves to openly consider. Within Fowles' novel the double vision and ambiguity of the text (there are three endings proposed for the plot) control the problem by formal means. Pinter's and Reisz film, in disrupting the formal workings of the text could have ignored the danger that falling in love poses to self-maintenance by simply focusing on the Victorian plot and choosing an uncontested ending. Or, the disruption might have thrown the delicate identity balance into a tailspin. Instead, by diegetically silencing adaptation, the formal expression of identity fragmentation (like the prop red shoes there could be any number of iterations of *The French Lieutenant's Woman*), Pinter and Reisz allow Mike and Anna to briefly believe that their selves are stable and portable rather than contingent expressions of their time, place, and relationships with those around them.

The subject of the script they are performing and the historical Victorian era they are recreating are topics of conversation for Mike and Anna throughout the film (and in the modern plot they are, for the most part, the only real characters – the other actors are ciphers of the characters they play in the interior film). The book, however, is mentioned only once in a loaded conversation the Mike has with Anna's French boyfriend, David. The cordoning off of the adaptation process by characters within the film means that there are only two stable narratives for Mike and Anna to deal with – the meaning of historical realities for the meaning of their characters and the meaning of their own lives. In a direct parallel of their Victorian counterparts, Mike becomes increasingly attached to Anna while she remains inscrutable. Their sexual

relationship builds over the course of filming and as their commitments to other people become clearer (both actors are in apparently binding relationships) the problem of further splitting their identities with each other becomes pressing.

Mike and Anna's conflicting commitments to themselves and to their lovers are showcased at the garden party Mike insists that his wife throw "for the cast." David, Anna's boyfriend, comes upon Mike opening a bottle of wine and innocently shatters the distancing from the book that his character has maintained throughout the film:

> David: Have they decided how they are going to end the movie?
> Mike: End it?
> David: I hear they keep changing the script.
> Mike: No. Where'd you hear that?
> David: Well, there are two endings in the book, a happy ending and an unhappy ending, no?
> Mike: We're going for the first ending. I mean the second ending.
> David: Which one is that?
> Mike: Hasn't Anna told you?

The adaptation becomes the code by which each man voices his claim to Anna/Sarah. Mike's increasing anxiety in the scene, his struggle with the wine bottle and inability to look David in the eye come to a head when David finally, and for the first time in the film, mentions "the book." David's confirmation that there are "two endings," that "they keep changing the script," emphasizes how little control Mike really has in his relationship with Anna, for all his garden party planning. His plans are contingent on "scripts" that he has no way of changing, based on "the book" that came before them. David's decision to engage Mike in conversation by focusing on the adaptation both deparicularizes Mike's affair with Anna (this is not an original dilemma) and identifies unspoken formal rules for this existential tale.

In Mike's floundering for an answer, he inadvertently reveals what plagues both this adaptation and the story it tells: There is no happy or unhappy ending in a love story where both characters want to be "free" and to find something that they can call "my own life" – as Charles and Sarah assert that they do. There is only a first ending or a second ending. Mike may recover in the face-off conversation with the trump card: "Hasn't Anna told you?" Nevertheless, his

triumph in this moment does not lessen the implications of his inability to distinguish between a happy and an unhappy ending. With the acknowledgement of the authoritative book behind them, Mike and David's conversation means that Mike and Anna's frequent references to "you" or "I" in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* are not simply split between their individual grasp on fiction and reality. Rather, they are split among several potential narratives (the book but also the changing scripts), the presence of which breaks down their sense of who "you" or "I" might be just a little bit more.[32]

When we finally do see the end of the Victorian plot (and the internal film), it is conventionally "happy." Charles finds Sarah, who had disappeared to "find [her] freedom," and they seem to decide that together is a better state than apart. The final shot, however, belies the happiness of the ending. As other critics have also noticed, the image is faintly ominous: The medium shot is on Charles and Sarah in a rowboat under a dark tunnel gate; behind them is the whole wide world and they row out into it. But when the film cuts back to them (after the scene I will discuss below) the sky has become cloudy and the fairly intimate shot of the lovers in the boat has become an aerial shot. They look like nothing more than two figures, alone, in a tiny boat. Despite the narrative happiness of this outcome (the plots and images are closed off nicely) it succinctly minimizes "all *human* feeling." This ending image creates the very effect Charles most feared.

The contemporary ending is narratively "unhappy" in its outcome. Anna, after an inscrutable gaze into the mirror, decides to leave the wrap party without speaking to Mike. Mike searches for her frantically, and when we sees her car through a window in the same room where their Victorian counterparts had their reconciliation, he yells out of it in hope of drawing her back. The name he calls is "Sarah." Shouting "Sarah" from the rooftops is the only way that he can speak the terms of their relationships. The desperate plea, on one hand, does indicate that he

[32] So, when Anna and Sonia, Mike's wife, have the conversation that mirrors Mike and David's, it doesn't need to be about *The French Lieutenant's Woman*; their code conversation is about the tending of their respective gardens.

has fallen in love with the fictional character Anna portrayed rather than with Anna herself. But Mike's cry of anguish also acknowledges that, as with Laurel and Dix, it is only in the continuation of the adaptation (the way the novel becomes the film and the way that Anna becomes Sarah) that they could maintain their dual roles – that they could stay together. Throughout the filming both the Victorian and modern romances could be pursued, and the boundaries between Mike and Anna and Charles and Sarah could be as porous as they liked. Mike only speaks what the whole film takes for granted: Anna/Sarah, and Mike/Charles, for that matter, cannot be distinct or whole once linked to this muddy sexual (and textual) relationship but they cannot be free from mediation either.

Mike's final line bookends the film's first and it is only in Mike's final line one can understand its implication. The opening shot is of a woman in a black hooded cloak standing on a windswept dock; she is the woman the audience will come to know as Sarah. We see the back of her head as she looks into a mirror held by a production assistant. A voice belonging to an unseen director shouts: Are you ready, Anna?" The woman turns and silently nods. The adaptation – the book that lies behind the two texts is the silent partner in this love relationship; its existence guarantees that there are alternative expressions of both Charles and Sarah's identities that have nothing to do with Mike's and Sarah's embodiments of them. The fact of the adaptation becomes the stabilizer between them; by falling in love with Anna's fictional identity, Mike ensures that he doesn't have to give up any part of himself but Anna had protected herself by being simultaneously recognizable as Sarah and Anna. Mike is momentarily alone in the darkened set, but in the background there sits the family and the life he has already established, which, if the loneliness is too much, he can choose to return to. Whatever sacrifice of self he made in committing to his wife and children, it remains a loss already taken.

The silence of the adaptation in the diegesis of the film might, I have suggested, be part of what allows the social problem of successful love in a time of existentialism – love as the melding of two people or texts who perceive themselves or are perceived to be free and whole

individuals – to remain on the narrative surface. Marginalizing "adaptation" as a process, however, allows for the social love problem stand out without compromising its defensive potential. Adaptation as a problem of fidelity (there are rumors of "trouble" with the script) still lingers despite a framing narrative that could allow references to adaptations to be dropped completely. The Victorian film being made is what *every* critic and artist involved with *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (from Roger Ebert to Fowles himself) would identify as a bad adaptation of the novel because it focuses on the love plot rather than how the story is told – a fact that no one in either frame of the film seems to care about. The "how" of the metanarration made the book a success because it distances its readers from the silly love story without having to reject it; the internal Victorian film evades the social commentary that the novel contains in its form and so the burden of commentary is placed on the modern frame. David speaking the adaptation into reality reveals that despite the seeming separateness (individual wholeness) that the time-bound characters strive for, the story of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* – the silly love story – is still a problem. With the adaptation unspoken, the love problem is temporally bound – comparative but still contained. When David speaks about the book he releases the iterative nature of the crisis. In that sense, the existential loneliness of the film and its argument that the pursuit of true love is at once sacrificial, and selfish, obsessive and isolating, is perhaps not so bleak. If the problem is iterative then the feedback loop is one that everyone – contemporary, Victorian, British, America, artist, or other – experiences together.

In a Lonely Place

The title of Dorothy Hughes's novel, *In a Lonely Place*, refers to the locations where the serial-killer protagonist murders his female victims and a place where he hides away from the world periodically.[33] Looking at the film, where Dix does not actually murder a person, Curtis Hanson's suggestion that the "lonely place" is more psychic – the lonely place is the place of the

[33] Dorothy B. Hughes, *In a Lonely Place,* 1947, Reissue, (New York: Feminist Press) 2003.

artist who cannot communicate in life as well as he can through his art, seems plausible. J.P Telotte suggests that the lonely place is the place of the self that has been appropriated by mass culture. But I think the character of Mildred and *The Red Shoes* "world as artist collective" demonstrate that the idea of the artist as distinct from the rest of the social world is not quite as accurate as seeing the figure of the artist *in art* as an embodiment of interpersonal concerns that are far more widespread. The narrator in Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* touches specifically then, on how art itself serves the negotiation of social realities. His Sarah: "had read far more fiction, and far more poetry, those two sanctuaries of the lonely, than most of her kind. They served as a substitute for experience" (Fowles 53). Through Sarah's reading habits, Fowles argues that all art just contains – or helps contain – existential loneliness. Adaptation mediates the universality of the love/individual identity crisis by making the romantic problems the problems of *these people* rather than people. Through these scenes of adaptation, however, we can see how the obsessive ways these characters try to escape their loneliness through true love relationships only reinscribes that isolation by fragmenting their already fragile senses of self.

CONCLUSION

WHAT ADAPTATION DEFENDS AGAINST IN ITSELF

As I was drafting this project, I was reminded again and again (rightly I think) that no one looking for a book about "how to analyze adaptations of texts into film or theater" would be satisfied with my arguments. Those books have been written by Linda Hutcheon, Robert Stam, Thomas Leitch, Kamilla Elliot and, most recently, Christine Geraghty. All of these critics develop valuable methodologies that take adaptation studies away from the simple comparative impulse and towards the complex intertextual, genre, narrative and cultural studies realms in which adaptation studies belong. Instead, I set out to determine what textual adaptation does in Western culture – why it has simultaneously spurred so much popular discussion and so much critical production, and yet still garners so little respect as an artistic phenomenon in itself. The question was too big for any one project. The vast number of potential purposes for adaptation in culture is something that adaptation theory in general has underappreciated. As a "secondary" mode of artistic production, critics imply, it certainly must have discrete, enumerable causes and effects. By examining adaptation through *scenes of adaptation* that actively resist the often reductive one-to-one comparisons and potentially uncontrollable intertextual relations that have threatened adaptation studies, I hope that this project participates in the critical trend toward *opening up* adaptation to new perspectives. But I also hope that by examining one particular *type* of adaptation, the defensive adaptation, this project demonstrates that a theory of adaptation does not need to be, nor can be, a study that explains adaptation *en totum*, no more than a film theory book can encapsulate the meaning of film or a poetry book the meaning of poetry. And yet, theories of adaptation have consistently, if often interestingly, attempted to do just that.

Throughout this project, I have argued that defensive adaptations serve to diffuse, displace, and defend against persistent social anxieties. These anxieties remain persistent, I've suggested, because they are about the very business of being human in the Western world; they are our anxieties about our mediated relationships with ourselves and with others. Some are transhistorically persistent (social skills, social responsibility, interrupted lives), and some have become particularly colored by modern concepts of the individual (the whole idea of a contingent self and whether that self can love "truly"). Further, the popular quality of adaptation, so often taken for granted, is also important. Adaptation's popularity shares and increases the circulation of texts that contain socially necessary considerations of some devastating human problems. Defensive adaptations enact the mediation that humans both require and fear in their dealings with the social world. But, these texts are highly consumable ways of approaching those problems because in defensive adaptation those problems remain – or are pushed – beneath the surface of the text. As I have argued, particularly for *The Iron Chest* and the *East Lynne* adaptations, adaptations are no less socially valuable because more easily digestible.

The few social anxieties I've explored here are clearly problems that all forms of art can address. Jenefer Robinson, for one, argues that all art contains in its formal properties coping strategies for real life problems and emotions:

> Reading literature always has the potential for creating anxiety or uncertainty, but literature, unlike life, often provides us with the coping strategies that we need to deal with its deep and possibly troubling content. The formal or structural devices in a novel allow us to cope with its themes and ultimately to derive pleasure from the very fact that we have successfully coped with a piece of reality.[1]

Defensive adaptation, however, deals with these social anxieties in a particular way: the formal processes of adaptation itself – the movement from one medium to another, the relative and possibly conflicting prestige of those media, and the relieving possibility of making those comparisons – work to keep the anxieties at bay. They work to mediate anxieties. The

[1] Jenefer Robinson, *Deeper than reason: emotion and its role in literature, music, and art* (New York: Clarendon Press, 2005) 219.

movement among media makes *that* formal process, and not the three-fold mediating work of conciliation, separation from reality, and expressing relations that would otherwise remain unexpressed, the focus of our attention. There can be real consequences when defensive adaptation is not possible. Remember, for example, poor Mrs. Hale's breakdown when she cannot hide her selfish reaction to her son's interrupted life from herself and does not have Margaret's strength to look to the future. As we see in Margaret's ability to turn bad words into good words, Mrs. Hale's fate might have been different if she'd been able to do more than hysterically tear to bits the wicked newspaper that destroyed her family.

When William Shakespeare's Imogen was confronted with the same problem, she found a different mode of adapting to her interrupted life. In *Cymbeline* (1611), Imogen's husband, Posthumous Leonatus, takes a bet with a rogue who disbelieves his claims about his wife's impenetrable virtue. The rogue, finding himself unable to carry through with his seduction of the innocent Imogen nevertheless claims his triumph. A furious Posthumous writes a letter that orders his servant, Pisanio, to kill Imogen. Pisanio virtuously refuses to commit the unjust murder, and gives the letter to Imogen, who is immediately wary of its contents. So, she asks Pisanio to read it to her: "—Speak, man: thy tongue/ May take off some extremity, which to read/ Would be even mortal to me."[2] Imogen hopes that Pisanio can turn words she knows are bad into good ones; she hopes that his performance will adapt the text so that its contents might be more palatable. Pisanio refuses for fear of his own safety. When Imogen is finally forced to read the death-sentence letter herself, she desperately questions what might have led Posthumous to accuse her. What besides betrayal with another woman? She, Imogen, is just an old garment: "I must be ripp'd: to pieces with me" (III.iv.52). "Men's vows," she concludes, "are women's traitors" (III.vi.53)! Imogen does what Mrs. Hale could not imagine; she knows that changing the words of the text "May take off some of the extremity." Rather than merely ripping the text to

[2] William Shakespeare, *Cymbeline,* ed. J.M. Nosworthy (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2002) III.iv.15-17.

pieces, however, she realizes that she herself "must be ripp'd." She wants Pisanio to kill her. He has an alternate suggestion: "You must forget to be a woman" (III.iv.154). She must, in other words, adapt her gender – only in that bodily adaptation may she both be safe from discovery and from the appellation of "strumpet." "I see into thy end, and am almost/ A man already," Imogen gratefully rejoins (III.iv.165-166). This is how Imogen successfully defends herself from her own interrupted life. In this scene, as well as in the Hale family's varying successes and failures and in the work of the murderer-adapters, we can see how defensive adaptation of texts and bodies can exist on the same spectrum of human experience.

Adaptation, like evolution, is constant but not necessarily progressive. I think, especially in Western culture, this notion of movement without progress in *art* – over which we poor humans should have control – has been especially difficult to take. People like to think humanity makes "progress" for its own sake. Adaptation reminds us that the idea of progress doesn't have any intrinsic meaning. Defensive adaptation – a process that is interminably referential – is so hard to see because the process always asks one to ignore the significance of the mediation even as it proclaims its presence. "But to see something," as John Fowles writes in *The French Lieutenant's Woman,* "is not the same as to acknowledge it."[3] It is one thing to know all this and quite another to see it happen over and over again in adaptation.

The scenes of adaptation I have examined thus far have been hidden, minor, or silent in the spaces of the texts in which they appear, defending themselves against too much attention. In recent years, though, there have been several films that take as their centerpiece the process and problems of adaptation: *Tristram Shandy: A Cock and Bull Story* (Winterbottom 2005), *Lost in LaMancha* (Fulton and Pepe 2006) and, most loudly, *Adaptation* (Jonze 2002). What do these adaptations have to say for themselves? These self-reflexive adaptations are all about defensive adaptation – they use themselves to defend against too much notice being paid to what they might

[3] John Fowles, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1969).

say about human experience. The social anxieties they manage are ever-present, but balanced against so much narrative and technical baggage that the problems themselves seem well-tamed in comparison.

As I hinted in my introduction, *Tristram Shandy* challenges knowledge of a source text as a marker of social or intellectual status. Because all of the characters who know the text identify different aspects of it as salient for adaptation purposes, their preferences bear little weight on the final product. And, in fact, the moments when characters reference the source text ultimately turn out to be instances of themselves and other characters fighting for room in the disrupted space of the novel. Like minor characters in *Pride and Prejudice* who pulse at the margins of both the narrative and society, the actors and actresses in *Tristram Shandy* bristle against their assigned space. The director enthusiastically enlists actress Gillian Anderson (as herself) to play the Widow Wadman, who is the love interest for the novel's secondary protagonist, Uncle Toby. At first, Anderson is thrilled: "I love that character."[4] But when she sees the final cut of the film, she wonders: "what happened to the whole Widow Wadman story?" She shot for two weeks, and saw only two minutes of herself on film. And indeed, "what happened" is the refrain from all involved in the film, from the screenwriter to the producer. Everyone agrees that for all their work, the film is cut badly; it does not manage to represent the narrative the way they imagined. Of course, no one seems to agree on how it might be done "right." No matter how well or poorly they know the rules of the game – the ins and outs of Laurence Sterne's novel – they cannot escape the fact that their perspective must compete with those around them. In the end, we see, even the savviest and most successful are subject to Steve Coogan's accidental insight: "You can't pretend that you're not the fool." To someone else, as the incongruent complaints against

[4] *Tristram Shandy: A Cock and Bull Story*. Dir. Michael Winterbottom. Perf. Jeremy Northam, Steve Coogan, Keeley Hawes, and Shirley Henderson. 2005. DVD. Alliance, 2006.

the adaptation prove, you might always be "deficient in judgment or sense."[5] Adaptation, however, always leaves us with the hope that a recut or revision might eventually go in our favor.

And yet the desire to escape or outstrip social failures is persistent. Charlie Kauffman and Spike Jonze's *Adaptation* (2002) begins with credits on a black background. In a voiceover, Nicholas Cage, as Charlie Kauffman (yet to be introduced), provides the audience with a litany of anxieties: Is he too fat, too bald, too uncultured, and too lazy to be attractive to other people? "Why," he asks, "should I be made to feel I have to apologize for my existence?"[6] Are all of his anxieties the result of a chemical imbalance? Does it matter? While there are clues as to who this person might be in daily life (a screenwriter: maybe bald, maybe fat, definitely single), he is anonymous and his anxieties are common. As the film continues and we get to know its version of Charlie Kauffman, we see that many of his anxieties are somewhat justified, if mostly self-imposed. The specification of those common anxieties to the character of Charlie Kauffman should not diminish their broad applicability from the opening credits – but the film makes sure that the mediation from the spectators' personal anxieties is exactly what happens.

As Charlie Kauffman frenetically tries to adapt Susan Orleans' non-fiction book for the screen, the anxieties he experiences are increasingly spun as creative anxieties. They are the "special" problems of the artist. Charlie's musings on the big bang theory and human evolution are juxtaposed with his being hired to adapt *The Orchid Thief*. He wants it to, "exist […] rather than be artificially plot driven." He doesn't want to "ruin it by making it a Hollywood thing." The dichotomy he draws between the ability to "speak artist" and the desire to "speak Hollywood" should be ominously familiar from *In a Lonely Place.* He doesn't want to write an orchid heist movie, car chases, or, (as the film executive suggests) for LaRoche (the main character) and Susan Orlean to fall in love. He doesn't want there to be "life lessons" or for

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[5] "fool," *The Oxford English Dictionary* <www.oed.com.>

[6] *Adaptation,* dir. Spike Jonze, perf. Nicholas Cage, Meryl Streep, and Chris Cooper, 2002, DVD, Sony Pictures, 2003.

people to "grow": "The book isn't like that and life isn't like that. It just isn't." The displacement of the "problem" – that *life* does not function positively and progressively but simply exists – onto formal, narrative, and commercial concerns mimics the way the film displaces the unfixed anxieties of the opening credits on the problems of the artist. Charlie comes to believe that he is "only qualified to write about [himself]." The progress of *Adaptation* cycles back on itself then as, over and over, we watch Charlie write what we have just seen. Inevitably, the version of *The Orchid Thief* that emerges does precisely what Kauffman hopes he, as the artist, can help the story avoid. The increasing specificity of the film to the adaptation and the adapted narratives may imprint the ideas that literary adaptation and organic adaptation are related processes – processes that have distant beginnings and unforeseeable endings. But it also suggests that artists like Charlie and Susan Orlean are specifically suited to bring that work to the world. Susan desires to desire, like a good Hollywood protagonist. The anxieties and imperfections they express, therefore, seem special – part of what gives them their creativity. By fixing the unfixed anxieties of the opening credits onto the public Other of the artist, Kauffman and Jonze's film defends their audiences against having to confront those anxieties themselves. Even though Charlie's "Hollwood-speaking" twin brother, Donald explains the secret behind his complete lack of social anxiety (he believes "You are what you love, not what loves you.") the effect is blunted by his death in the thriller style car chase/swamp run scene that follows. When we are given time to consider the implication of Donald's truism, it is through Charlie's voice; the broader social anxiety is filtered through the artist. The very expansiveness of the notion of "adaptation" and the very specificity of the social anxieties that Charlie and Susan battle appear to leave everything and everyone in the middle out of the equation.

And yet, the quintessential adaptation project that has been associated with the particular madness of the artist is also an example of how defensive adaptations circulate, invisible in plain sight. Orson Welles, that temperamental film genius, spent years cobbling together time and money to complete his version of *Don Quixote*. The film was still unfinished when he died in

1985 and has long since become, in the film world at least, "conclusive 'proof' that this director suffered from a fear of completion."[7] In 2002, Keith Fulton and Louis Pepe released a documentary about a more recent failed effort to adapt Cervantes' tale to the screen. *Lost in La Mancha* chronicles director Terry Gilliam's tumultuous production of *The Man Who Killed Quixote*, the story of contemporary advertising executive (Johnny Depp) who is transported back to sixteenth century Spain where Don Quixote (Jean Rochforte) mistakes him for Sancho Panza.[8] Like Welles, Gilliam has something of a professional reputation for dreaming his films beyond their means – and a reputation for pressing on despite the odds. *Lost in La Mancha* matches the director's impossible dream with that of his lead character. Gilliam has none of the resources or the *luck* that would make it possible to complete the film. He might as well mistake windmills for giants. Reflecting on the documentary Gilliam notes: "Unlike Quixote I've got to actually put films together […] but what drives me is the same thing that drives Quixote. It's an unwillingness to accept the rather banal world we live in."[9] Gilliam's film was never finished.

The documentary is an object lesson in how money, time, and life get in the way of bringing this particular fiction to reality. If you will, this is a film about how the life of *The Man Who Killed Don Quixote* was interrupted. "Everything that can go wrong goes wrong," one of the producers marvels: "Everything. Everything. Everything." Jean Rochforte develops an illness that will keep him out of the film for months. Trying to calm the crew, another producer reflects on the situation: "And we are once again reminded of the fragility of the human being and the fragility of cinema itself." As it becomes clear that the film will not be made, Gilliam watches the dailies of Johnny Depp – some of the only images they were able to capture. They are silent; planes overhead on that day of shooting forced Gilliam to rely on the images alone to tell this one part of the story. Cutting back and forth between the silent film images and a defeated Gilliam

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[7] Clinton Heylin, *Despite the System: Orson Welles Versus the Hollywood System* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2006) 336.
[8] *Lost in La Mancha*, dir. Kevin Fulton and Louis Pepe, perf. Terry Gilliam, Johnny Depp, and Jean Rochefort, 2002, DVD, New Video, 2003.
[9] Terry Gilliam, "Interview," *Lost in La Mancha: Special Features*, 2003, DVD, New Video, 2003.

looking on, the plights of these characters, the ways their lives have been as interrupted as the life of this film, are drawn very closely together. Like the Hales, who spend years pretending their Frederick never existed, Gilliam wrestles with the pain the interruption has caused him: "It's almost like I've forgotten about this film. It's like it doesn't exist. It can't exist because if it does exist then it's too painful." Where it does exist is in the documentary we watch. If the film failed on its own, was interrupted without being recorded, it would disappear with all of the other unfinished films. But, because there is *Lost in La Mancha*, because we have a text that contains the scene of adaptation, this is not just a movie about making a movie. It is a movie about how adaptation can keep those painful problems of being in the world in check, even if they sometimes do so by pretending that they don't exist.

At the end of his definition of "mediation," in *Keywords,* Raymond Williams makes this final point: There are, he posits, "varying marks on the word, which in its most thoughtful uses recalls, if it cannot solve, the inevitable and important difficulties."[10] "The" difficulties Williams refers to may be the many uses of the word that he saw as conflicting. But Williams's formulation is open. Mediation does not just recall the difficulties in its own usage. It can also recall, if not solve, *the* inevitable and important difficulties of the conditions of human life it describes. In the same way, we can see more clearly in the potent mediation of defensive adaptations how real the anxieties are—and confront the problems of existence they disclose.

[10] Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society,* Revised ed. (New York: Oxford UP, 1983) 207.

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