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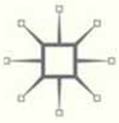
TEACHING ADAPTATIONS

Edited by DEBORAH CARTMELL
and IMELDA WHELEHAN



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Teaching Adaptations

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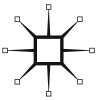

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Summary: "This volume looks at the ways in which adaptations can and have been taught by leading academics in the field of Adaptation Studies from all over the world. While aware that Shakespeare and canonical literature remain the mainstay of adaptation study in English, Teaching Adaptations addresses the challenges and appeal of teaching popular fiction and culture, video games and new media content, which serve to enrich the curriculum, as well as exploit the changing methods by which English students read and consume literary and screen texts. The volume is structured to appeal to both those who are considering teaching adaptations for the first time as well as those who are familiar with key perspectives in adaptation criticism"– Provided by publisher.
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Contents

Series Editor's Preface

One of the many exciting achievements of the early years of the UK English Subject Centre was the agreement with Palgrave Macmillan to initiate the series 'Teaching the New English'. The intention of Philip Martin, the then Centre Director, was to create a series of short and accessible books which would focus on curriculum fields (or themes) and develop the connections between scholarly knowledge and the demands of teaching.

Since its inception as a university subject, 'English' has been committed to what is now known by the portmanteau phrase 'learning and teaching'. The subject grew up in a dialogue between scholars, critics, and their students inside and outside the university. Yet university teachers of English often struggle to make their own tacit pedagogic knowledge conscious, or to bring it up to a level where it might be shared, developed, or critiqued. In the experience of the English Subject Centre, colleagues found it relatively easy to talk about curriculum, but far harder to talk about the success or failure of seminars, how to vary modes of assessment, or to make imaginative use of virtual learning environments or web tools. Too often, this reticence meant falling back on received assumptions about how students learn, about how to teach or create assessment tasks. At the same time, we found, colleagues were generally suspicious of the insights and methods arising from generic educational research. The challenge for the extended group of English disciplines has been to articulate ways in which our own subject knowledge and forms of enquiry might themselves refresh debates about pedagogy. The need becomes all the more pressing in the era of rising fees, student loans, the NSS, and the characterization of the student as a demanding consumer of an educational product. The implicit invitation of the present series is to take fields of knowledge and survey them through a pedagogic lens.

'Teachers', people used to say, 'are born, not made'. There may be some tenuous truth in this. There may perhaps be generosities of spirit (or, alternatively, drives for didactic control) laid down in early childhood. But the implication that you cannot train or

develop teachers is dubious. Why should we assume that even 'born' teachers should not need to learn or review the skills of their trade? Amateurishness about teaching has far more to do with the mystique of university status than with evidence about how people learn. This series of books is dedicated to the development of the craft of teaching within university English Studies.

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1
A Short History of Adaptation Studies in the Classroom

Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan

Adaptation studies is a growth area in the Arts and Humanities and has brought numerous multidisciplinary perspectives to what used to be more commonly known as 'novel to film' or 'literature and film' studies. The impact of adaptation studies on English has been indisputably significant, and it could be argued that the study of adaptations has changed the way we teach the subject for good; at the very least it is now common to see English modules delivered with varying degrees of adaptation content across the globe, even if, as Thomas Leitch asserts, 'English studies has continued to treat film adaptation not so much with hostility as with benign neglect'.[1] While fictional texts and their feature film adaptations remain at the subject's core,[2] the study of adaptations has broadened to embrace 'literature' and the 'screen' in the broadest senses of each word. With a new theoretical richness and interdisciplinary confidence, adaptation studies has facilitated fresh approaches to issues of interpretation, rewriting, and refunctioning, enabling purposeful reflection on our contemporary obsession with reworking culture to suit our own needs.

In order to demonstrate how adaptation studies has changed, we take the case of the use of films based on Austen's fictions within literary studies. Like Shakespeare, Jane Austen is firmly embedded in the field of adaptation studies as an author who has repeatedly had the 'adaptation treatment', beginning with a chapter on Robert Z. Leonard's 1940 adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* (starring Greer Garson and Laurence Olivier) in the first full-length study of literature and film, George Bluestone's *Novel into Film* (1957). By 2009, Austen and film had become a major critical preoccupation,

as Pamela Church Gibson's summary of work on Austen and film demonstrates,[3] with a list that includes Sue Parrill's *Jane Austen on Film and Television: A Critical Study of the Adaptation* (2002), Linda Troost and Sayre Greenfield's *Jane Austen in Hollywood* (1998; 2nd edn 2001), Suzanne R. Pucci and James Thompson's *Jane Austen and Co*. (2003), Gina MacDonald and Andrew F. MacDonald's *Jane Austen on Screen* (2003), and David Monaghan, Ariane Hudelet and John Wiltshire's *The Cinematic Jane Austen: Essays on the Filmic Sensibility of the Novels* (2009). Claire Harmon's *Jane's Fame* (2009) and the online journal *Persuasions*, which frequently delivers articles on Austen films, demonstrate a modern tendency to move away from an absorption in the novels themselves to the fictions' afterlives. It now seems obligatory to include at least one chapter on 'Austen films' or 'Austen offshoots' in collected essays on her work, because studies of Austen are no longer complete until they show consideration of how her work provides inspiration for other trends in contemporary culture, from chick lit to dating manuals, to testing the ability of contemporary bestselling writers like Joanna Trollope and Val McDermid to 'reimagine Austen' all over again.[4]

Given the number of films of Austen's novels, it has been hard to ignore them in the classroom, and for many years much teaching has relied on them to explicate the text for a new cohort of students. Since the availability of videos in the 1970s, teaching often involved showing a short clip 'illustrating' a part of a novel or play as a means to open up discussion, but always as a path back to consideration of the book. While it is easy to appreciate the relevance of film clips within Shakespeare classes (given that the plays are performance pieces), showing novel adaptations was a practice harder to justify in the early days of video. Such a practice was, more often than not, scorned rather than applauded, a legacy of the chequered history of literature and film, when critics, in the first half of the twentieth century, blushed when suggesting that an author's work might be influenced by cinema.[5] Showing film clips, however, could be defended as a means of inspiring discussion that would often take the form of reflecting on what was wrong with the film adaptation, how it misunderstood the literary text, thereby empowering the students (as 'ENGLISH students') to feel a sense of superiority over those involved in the making of such films. In the not-so-distant past (certainly in our memories), the showing of films in literature classes

was often stigmatized by academics and teachers, who believed such practice as lazy and, even more unforgivably, a devaluing of literature that unwittingly encouraged pupils to watch movies rather than read books. As Timothy Corrigan has noted, for most of the twentieth century, adaptation studies failed to capture the interest of film scholars (as the approach taken by their literary colleagues so frequently devalued the film text) and English academics (who regarded the use of film as either offering a cheap substitute for literature or as an excuse to bask in the superiority of literature over cinema).[6] Still within the field of Austen studies today, it is remarkable how little reflection there is on the implications of showing a clip from a film to 'illustrate' a novel, how little the film itself is valued as a product of many, rather than belonging to an individual, and how the concepts of popularization and commercial value are dismissed as either irrelevant or demeaning. Adaptation teachers have a steep hill to climb.

There is no doubt, however, that the field developed in English Studies through the inclusion of screen adaptations of canonical authors in the everyday practice of teaching and that authors and authorship still shape what is taught today. Following Shakespeare, Austen made a breakthrough, thanks partially to the numerous film adaptations since 1940 and thanks, too, to the fact that she is a major player in the English literature syllabus. Indeed these two facts are interrelated; today canonical status is not only assigned to a work by a single literary critical guru, such as F.R. Leavis, or by the number of citations it receives long after the death of the author, but is often bestowed in recognition of the number of films it has generated. We still have some way to go in breaking Austen adaptations away from exclusively author-centred approaches, as is the case with other canonical writers whose screen treatment is growing to industrial proportions. As several of the contributors to this volume suggest, following on from Robert Stam's introduction to *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation* (2003),[7] one way of approaching the afterlife of, say, Austen's fiction is to adapt Gérard Genette's concept of transtextuality to Austen adaptations, to think of her novels, not as sources but as 'hypotexts' and consider adaptations as texts in their own right, through an analysis of intertextuality (quotations or allusions to other texts), paratextuality (the materials surrounding the text, such as posters, reviews, trailers),

metatextuality (the commentary on the text within the text), and architextuality (the title chosen, the structure adopted).

Scholarship on Austen and film is not the only critical turning point in adaptation studies. Since the mid-1990s adaptations themselves have had a significant part to play in popularizing an interest in the process itself, and in the people who contribute to it. Andrew Davies' role in scripting the 1995 BBC TV version of *Pride and Prejudice* was foregrounded in critical appraisals of the work, particularly in his 'unfaithful' development of a profound sexual tension between the two chief protagonists which lasted for most of the miniseries' five and half hours duration, and which is best remembered for a drenched and dishevelled Darcy encountering Elizabeth Bennet in the grounds of Pemberley. Colin Firth's performance as Darcy was also credited with focusing the attention of a new generation of female viewers, and the components of such a winning formula were discussed and dissected by the broadsheets and a 'making of' documentary and book. Davies by his own admission, 'sexed up' Austen and more or less got away with it; Patricia Rozema's feature film adaptation of *Mansfield Park* (1999) used sex *and* postcolonial critique to encourage a newly interactive Austen audience to read her against the grain. The initial furore around such versions was essential raw material in the seminar room, and while we look back at the 1990s as a time when we were stuck in the canon, these adaptation case studies redirected students' attention to how the canon was constantly reforming itself and could work in reverse thrust too, as is the case when costumes from Austen adaptations end up doing the rounds of stately homes as *ersatz* heritage artefacts.

Adaptation studies can open our minds to considerations often swept beneath the carpet in literary studies, regarding the popularization of a text through marketing, standardization (or genre), intertextuality, or plagiarism, and the targeting of specific audiences. What this offers students is an opportunity to go in countless directions; rather than each writing the same essay on, say the representation of Pemberley in Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Joe Wright's 2005 *Pride and Prejudice* (with the inevitable conclusion, much to the chagrin of the adaptation teacher, that the book is better and more complexly articulated). Removed from the need to foreground the novel as ur-text, students explore aspects previously uncharted, such as soundtracks, costumes, *mise en scène*, trailers,

posters, games, music, tie-ins, book covers using film illustrations, casting, genre, intertextual references to earlier films, and popular forms; the list seems endless. An example of this approach is a student essay that demonstrated how Joe Wright's *Pride and Prejudice* adapts 'Cinderella' (as much as Austen's novel) in the Pemberley sequence, with Elizabeth running away from her embarrassment at being found out, hotly pursued by Darcy (now Prince Charming). This analysis was a springboard for a consideration of the unacknowledged use of fairy tale narrative and iconography throughout the film, pushing aside the significance of Austen's narrative. Adaptation studies today, as is evident in the variety of articles in our journal *Adaptation* (OUP, 2008–) and in numerous volumes commenting on the state of the discipline, is far from fixed on seeing adaptation as a one-way, essentially dead-end journey from literary text to film, and is by no means restricted to canonical literature.

We began, at De Montfort University in 1992, teaching a third year course in Shakespeare on film which developed into a course on adaptations (initially, largely adaptations of canonical texts to placate our literary colleagues), which gradually introduced popular adaptations of children's fiction and graphic novels. The course expanded to three courses for years one, two, and three and then, as students progressed and demanded more, a taught Masters. We were able to show that, contrary to the fears expressed by some colleagues, learning adaptations made our students better 'readers' of both film and literary texts, and much more adept textual critics.

The MA was taught jointly with Film Studies colleagues, itself representing a sea change in the disciplinary organization of such courses, and included modules on Gothic, Popular Forms, Classic Adaptations, and Shakespeare. Work on genre and popular fiction, much as lecturers who have taught it know, stretches the students and encourages them to produce their most sophisticated work on the seemingly less sophisticated subjects, topics which challenged their literary and film studies training. We found adaptation an area also attractive to PhD students, possibly for the same reasons that it flourished at undergraduate level, in that it offered so much uncharted territory to explore and it so easily lent itself to fierce opinions and debate through shared experiences, but also because of its interdisciplinarity and the availability of original and challenging projects.

Teaching adaptations to all levels of students made us completely unembarrassed about the use of film clips. There is something to be said about the benefits of film clips offering a welcome break from the pressures of teaching, and postgraduates, like English teachers, find film a useful crutch in their first presentations of their research to their peers. The wheel, to an extent, has come full circle: showing films is sometimes still regarded as effortless and captivating, but it need not be a guilty pleasure, as it tended to be in English Studies in the last half of the twentieth century. As part of a doctoral training programme at De Montfort University's Centre for Adaptations, research students each present a film clip to their peers to view and then discuss in relation to their research project. At first the presenting student remains quiet, absorbing the comments of their colleagues, but as the discussion develops, the student takes an increasingly leading role in the seminar as their superior knowledge becomes evident, both to themselves and to their colleagues. These sessions are entertaining and informative as well as confidence building, providing a gentle introduction to the art of seminar presentation and teaching, while at the same time stressing that there is nothing wrong with showing clips.

In many respects, adaptation studies should not be ashamed of its history, especially in its quest to both empower and entertain, which it was implicitly criticized for doing for most of the twentieth century. Empowering readers (and viewers) is an important feature of the teaching of adaptation, and in this respect it is not new, but has a history that pre-dates the Leavises – indeed cinema itself. Early modern manuscript culture can be seen as an early form of 'adaptation studies' in which readers, oblivious to the sanctity of an 'original', were encouraged to revise, strikeout, and offer alternatives or solutions to questions posed by a text in manuscript, which was seen as essentially and importantly incomplete in itself.[8] What Chris Stamatakis describes as 'the rhetoric of rewriting', as it applies to Thomas Wyatt, is a model for adaptation studies as a whole that, in its numerous failed attempts to find 'a theory of adaptation' (significantly the title of Linda Hutcheon's seminal work in the field)[9] is, as this volume testifies, united in at least one thing: its view of both the adaptation and the adaptation critic as engaged in the process of 'rewriting'. Adaptation is essentially about a response to change.

This collection offers some suggestions, through accounts of the authors' teaching practices, of useful ways to respond to change at

the heart of the teaching of English using adaptations. In 'Canons, Critical Approaches, and Contexts', Shelley Cobb identifies an emerging 'canon' of adaptation studies across the US, UK, and Australia, an ironic consequence of the institutional effects of curriculum development, even in area that attempts to destabilize literary and film studies canons. She notes that the term 'adaptation' is often suppressed in course outlines, once more drawing attention to the uneasy placing of adaptation studies in either the study of film or literature. She finds 'Shakespeare on Screen' the most common, followed by courses that include 'classic' novel adaptations, with Dickens, Austen, *Dracula*, *Frankenstein*, and *A Room with a View* the most frequently taught, although contemporary adaptations, including those of graphic narratives, recur on course outlines. Cobb argues that literary text- or genre-based approaches risk de-historicizing adaptations and she argues for an historical approach that reads adaptations made within the same period, so that questions relating to cultural, social, and industrial contexts are more rooted and therefore more graspable by students. Like the current state of English literary studies, adaptation teaching has taken a decidedly creative turn, both in the UK and abroad. Laurence Raw, writing about his experience of EFL teaching in Turkey, demonstrates how getting students to adapt texts and relate them to their own backgrounds enables them to deconstruct cultural values they previously took for granted. By getting them to assess their own adaptations, he encourages them to think about the commercial processes required to prepare an adaptation for audience consumption. This reflective and collaborative approach to learning produces students with increased language confidence and developed critical thinking skills.

In the next chapter, Ariane Hudelet considers the booming field of adaptation studies in France, which still clings to the model 'one book/one film' due to the present 'compare and contrast' mindset, as seen in the *concours* to become an English teacher (which introduced a compulsory text and adaptation in 1998) and whose selection of texts for examination tends to affirm the notion that the book is better. Hudelet proposes foregrounding theory, in particular, Stam's revision of Genette's transtextuality, to allow students to approach a film text from a variety of angles, helping to shift attention from linear hierarchies as articulated in the institutional *concours* and encouraging them to think of 'textual studies' as a blending of visual and theoretical literacy with the literary knowledge already assumed and privileged.

Imelda Whelehan and David Sadler's chapter focuses on teachers, offering an account of their experiences leading an Australian government-funded project to identify a 'community of practice' of adaptation scholars and provide a repository in which they can share and comment on each other's teaching materials. As they show, there are many obstacles to sharing in teaching, quite contrary to academic norms in research; this reality, coupled with the varied pressures to perform which beset the contemporary academic, make this project a somewhat utopian work in progress.

Echoing Laurence Raw in Chapter 3, Kamilla Elliott in Chapter 6 notes how adaptation studies struggles with traditional theorization because the adaptations themselves refuse to be fixed; Elliott reminds us that adaptation's very etymology means 'changing' and that its development has been arrested due to the continual urge to pin it down. Elliott recounts how, in exasperation, she tried to wrestle her students from the seemingly unshakeable belief that a book is better than a film by getting them to adapt: to learn in practice what they resisted in theory. For Elliott's students, *doing* adaptation blends aesthetic practices of creation with theory as reflection. Likewise, Jamie Sherry outlines how teaching screenwriting, a vital but undervalued part of the adaptation process, is a useful pedagogical tool for teaching the aesthetics and the industrial practicalities of adaptation. By focusing on the space between source and adaptation, other unexpected consequences arise which prompt a critique of the impact of English and Film Studies' pedagogical norms on practice-based assessment.

Alessandra Raengo considers how the black body 'appears as both the source and destination of the adaptation process', which because of its racialized otherness in film culture is the 'ultimate measure of fidelity'. Her chapter, using *The Jackie Robinson Story* (1950) and *Precious* (2009) as case studies, develops approaches to adaptation and embodiment by showing how, in Robinson's performance of his younger more athletic self, and Gabourey Sidibe's performance as Precious, the distinction between actor and role is collapsed. While Robinson's performance accords with Hollywood's assimilationist narratives, Sidibe's 'excessive corporeality' obstructs any kind of assimilation, visual or otherwise.

Looking at the transition between school and university, Natalie Hayton champions the study of adaptations for easing students into theoretical issues and debates through the study of children's literary

adaptations and focuses on her experience in teaching one of our own courses, on adaptations of children's literature. As Hayton observes, such a course offers a surprisingly challenging and entertaining opportunity for students to move beyond their assumptions about texts and their adaptations, considering the imposition of other forgotten narratives – in this case fairy tales – within the adapted narratives. Fairy tale adaptations, so much a feature of most students' childhood viewing, offer a useful set of core knowledges which can be deployed in ways that decentre adaptation as one-to-one textual exchange.

Rachel Carroll also provides examples of how to better engage students, but rather than focusing on what are seemingly accessible and non-threatening adaptations, Carroll opts for contemporaneous adaptations with no critical apparatus to support them. Answering Cobb's call for an historical approach to the field, Carroll settles on the contemporary as a way of justifying the choice of texts and limiting the study to a specific period. She describes the materials gathered from her student project 'Adaptation Watch', tracing debates and issues, as they happen, in the examples of *Brideshead Revisited* (Julian Jarrold, 2007), *Wuthering Heights* (Andrea Arnold, 2011), and *Life of Pi* (Ang Lee, 2012). Her approach encourages focus on paratextual apparatuses as much as the adaptations, and invites students to scrutinize literary prize culture and pre-release marketing, and their roles in the construction of cultural value. Deborah Cartmell also adopts an historical approach by uncovering the origins of what has become known as adaptation studies in marketing materials of the early 1930s. With reference to F.R. Leavis and Denys Thompson's simultaneous repulsion and attraction to the language of advertising in *Culture and Environment* (published in 1933), this chapter argues for a return to teaching 'the pitch', in order to teach students (like Thompson and Leavis before us) to uncover what posters, trailers, and press books reveal about a film's audience. Cartmell shows that while Leavis, Thompson, and their peers' distaste for film adaptation motivated them to champion high literature through an analysis of the language of advertising and commerce, their critical achievement was to facilitate the opposite, and ironically anticipate the birth of media and cultural studies approaches some decades later.

This volume offers a variety of overviews, perspectives, and examples of teaching adaptation within English studies, as well as showing

how the field is always straining at the boundaries of the subject and threatening to blur into film and cultural studies. As this collection testifies, it is an area much practised if not much discussed, and one that not only brings new material to the undergraduate and postgraduate curriculum, but also prompts innovative teaching and approaches to student learning. As many of the essays in this volume imply, adaptation studies capitalizes on students' informal knowledges to enhance their academic studies. While most undergraduates come to university as skilled readers of literary texts, they have rarely exploited their usually more innate skills of reading and intervening in popular and visual cultures. Adaptation studies blends the experience of consumption with that of academic criticism to produce graduates whose critical acuity even Leavis would be proud of. We share the wish, expressed by Ariane Hudelet in this volume, that our students succeed in transforming the discipline that still tends to hide adaptation studies in its outer reaches.

Notes

1. Thomas Leitch, 'How to Teach Film Adaptations, and Why', in D. Cutchin, L. Raw, and J. M. Welsh, eds, *The Pedagogy of Adaptation* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2010), pp. 3–4.
2. See Shelley Cobb's discussion in Chapter 2.
3. Pamela Church Gibson, 'Jane Austen on Screen – Overlapping Dialogues, Different Takes', *Adaptation,* 2(2), 2009, pp. 180–190.
4. See http://theaustenproject.com (accessed 6.3.14).
5. Lara Feigel, *Literature, Cinema and Politics: 1930–1945* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010); and Robin Wood, 'Leavis, Marxism and Film Culture', *Cineaction,* 87(8), p. 3.
6. Timothy Corrigan, 'Literature on screen, a history: in the gap', in D. Cartmell and I. Whelehan, eds, *The Cambridge Companion to Literature on Screen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 29–45.
7. A seminal essay on adaptation and frequently cited, Robert Stam, 'Introduction: The Theory and Practice of Adaptation', in R. Stam and A. Raengo, eds, *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation* (Oxford and Malden: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 1–52.
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9. Linda Hutcheon with Siobhan O'Flynn, 2006, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 2nd edn (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013).