



Studia  
Filmoznawcze  
33  
Wrocław 2012

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## **READING LIKE ADULTS, PERFORMING LIKE CHILDREN: TWO WAYS OF EXPERIENCING ADAPTATIONS**

It is a truth universally acknowledged that in order to experience an adaptation as an adaptation, you have to recognize it as an adaptation, and in order to recognize it as an adaptation, you have to know its source. These are adult skills unavailable to children; we might call them part of the skill set that makes child readers into adult readers. As Linda Hutcheon has put it, “adaptation as adaptation involves, for its knowing audience, an interpretive doubling, a conceptual flipping back and forth between the work we know and the work we are experiencing” (139). But what qualifies an audience as a knowing, adult audience capable of this flipping back and forth? How much do you have to know, and what kinds of things do you have to know about a given adaptation’s source, in order to experience the “repetition with variation” (116) that provides the distinctive pleasures of adaptation?

Contrasting two adaptations of Proust, Volker Schlöndorff’s *Un Amour de Swann*, which is “a primer of what not to do when adapting *A la recherche*,” and Raúl Ruiz’s *Le Temps retrouvé*, which remains “[t]rue to Proust’s aesthetic,” Melissa Anderson revealingly remarks, “For those who are unfamiliar with Proust’s sprawling novel, Ruiz’s film may seem somewhat impenetrable, since he wastes no time in exposition” (102, 104). Given that Proust devotes six even more sprawling novels to exposition before arriving at *Le Temps retrouvé*, it would seem captious to require filmgoers to have read not only Proust’s final novel but all the earlier portions of *A la recherche du temps perdu* in order to appreciate Ruiz’s film adaptation as an

adaptation, or even to be able to follow it as a story. Hutcheon is surely correct to say that although the creators of cinematic adaptations often rely on the ability the audience's foreknowledge of the text under adaptation gives them "to fill in the gaps when moving from the discursive expansion of telling to the performative time and space limitations of showing," it is also true that "[s]ometimes they rely too much, and the resulting adaptation makes no sense without reference to a foreknowledge of the adapted text. For an adaptation to be successful in its own right, it must be so for both knowing and unknowing audiences" (121).

This commonsensical formulation turns out to be uncommonly tricky to enforce. For one thing, as Hutcheon acknowledges, no adaptation borrows its material from a single source, and no two viewers or readers will bring exactly the same experience of earlier texts to bear on a given adaptation. Even if they know its nominal source, audience members will experience *Clueless*, *Watchmen*, or *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* differently if their knowledge of the avowed source's contexts or generic affiliations is different. They will have widely varying expectations about how closely the adaptation will follow its source, what changes it will make because of evolving historical or cultural contexts, and how it will negotiate the compromises between the demands of its source, its status as a movie, its specific genre, and what may well be a watchful and activist fan base. So the reasonable proposition that no audience can experience a given adaptation as an adaptation unless they know its source would end by leading to a requirement that in order to experience an adaptation as an adaptation, every audience would have to share the same comprehensive knowledge of myriad sources, myriad contexts of both the adaptation and its sources, and the generic rules governing this entire constellation of texts.

Another complication provides an even greater obstacle to theorizing audiences' experiences of adaptations. For not only do most adaptations draw on a surprising range of sources, contexts, and generic expectations; in addition, the kinds of knowledge different audience members have of these sources may themselves be very different. Hutcheon acknowledges that "[i]f the adapted work is a canonical one, we may not actually have direct experience of it, but may rely on 'a generally circulated cultural memory'" (122; cf. Ellis 3). But she does not consider the problems this distinction introduces into her model of audienceship.

Sticking for the moment to cinematic adaptations of literary texts, as this essay will mostly do, there are clearly many kinds of experience an audience can have of an adapted text that will encourage them to experience it as an adaptation. Students in a high-school class might have read *Romeo and Juliet* or *Hamlet* just before seeing one of its film versions. Older audiences might be relying on memories of a novel or play they have not read for many years before seeing its film adaptation. Many filmgoers would know that *The Da Vinci Code* or *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* was a contemporary best-seller without ever having read the novel. Dating

teenagers or long-suffering spouses might accompany their mates to the movies to see films whose source texts were familiar to their vocally enthusiastic partners but not themselves. Even audience members who know nothing of a film's sources, not even by reputation, would presumably be alerted to its status as an adaptation by seeing the credit, "Based on the novel by . . ."

Different as these experiences are, any of them might well encourage a given audience to experience an adaptation as an adaptation. Even an audience that picks up none of these intertextual cues might well suspect on the basis of textual cues — for example, abrupt leaps forward in time between scenes, or a voiceover narrative providing a bridge from one scene to the next — that a given film was an adaptation of a longer novel marked by its omissions. In that case, can any of these experiences reasonably be considered normative? Is there any particular entrance requirement, any standard of knowledge or foreknowledge, that gives a given audience the adult competence to experience an adaptation as an adaptation? Is encouragement to experience an adaptation as an adaptation sufficient to confer on childlike readers and viewers the competence to experience an adaptation as an adaptation?

These questions are both impossible to answer definitively and vitally important to raise because of their implications for any account of what it means to experience an adaptation as an adaptation. Consider the case of "transcriptions of orchestral music for piano," which Hutcheon brackets with "literary translations" and places immediately before "condensations and bowdlerizations or censorings" and "adaptation proper" in her continuum of possible intertextual relations ranging from close imitations or copies and the kinds of radical "expansions" represented by every spin-off, merchandising tie-in, and museum exhibition that "takes material objects from the past and recontextualizes them within a historical narrative" (171, 172).

Broadly speaking, there are two very different ways of experiencing piano transcriptions as adaptations, each rooted in a particular historical context. The nineteenth-century way is by listening to them as someone who has never heard, and perhaps has no opportunity to hear, a performance of the orchestral score on which a given transcription is based. Nineteenth-century audiences for piano transcriptions were often performers of them as well. A few of them were professional virtuosos like Franz Liszt, whose transcriptions of Beethoven were designed specifically to demonstrate the power of the modern piano and a gifted performer to evoke the whole expressive world of a Beethoven symphony. But most were amateur pianists, often young people who practiced the music their parents had purchased in order to experience as much as possible of the original version's power, even if they were unable to attend an orchestral performance of that original, by mastering its performance and sharing it with others in order to make it their own. For this audience, the piano transcription was a substitute for the original that was both less powerful (because it involved a much more limited range of sonorities and less expert per-

formances) and more powerful (because it could be reproduced and reinterpreted at the performing purchaser's will).

The invention and widespread popularity of the gramophone changed the relation between concert music and its audience, for now many members of the audience could hear a reproduction of a complete orchestral performance, which they could repeat but not reinterpret as performers, without the need for piano reduction, endless practice, or significant musical talent. Indeed, as Leon Botstein has pointed out:

People now initially become familiar with music through the new mechanical devices, through records. If they go to concerts, they do so with a critical perspective which refers them back not to a live occasion, to their memory of a prior hearing, or their own personal encounter with the musical score, but to a mechanical recording (352).

The ability of twentieth- and twenty-first-century audiences to listen to recorded music without performing it themselves dramatically shrank the market for piano transcriptions. From this point on, anyone who purchased or perused such a score was much more likely to have heard an orchestral performance of the music already and to know the music well before ever looking at the score. Paradoxically, modern audiences who read and play piano transcriptions are more likely to read and play them like nineteenth-century adult virtuosos, admiring the artistry of the transcription per se and enjoying familiar music in a new version, rather than like nineteenth-century young performers, for whom the transcription often provided the only possible opportunity to experience anything like an original orchestral performance. Twenty-first-century concertgoers similarly attend concerts not in order to hear new music — most audience members' limited tolerance for contemporary music is a truism among orchestral programmers — but in order to hear new performances of music they already know and love, and to enjoy an upscale social event in the process. Programmers and audiences alike share an interest in music that is curatorial rather than performative. They listen attentively to performances. Indeed, if they have already heard the *Eroica* Symphony dozens of times, they may well be more attentive to individual variations in performances than to the familiar music itself. But they make no effort to perform the music themselves.

Here then is my premise: Contemporary adaptation theorists assume that the audience that experiences adaptations as adaptations is basically like the twentieth-century audience for piano transcriptions, an adult audience that is already familiar with the original text on which a given adaptation is based, an audience that is experiencing the adaptation primarily as a performance or reworking of that text as "a theme with variations" (Hutcheon 115), an audience whose interest in the whole process is fundamentally retrospective and curatorial. One might compare such an audience to a group of judges in a piano competition who already know the pieces that candidates are playing so well that they can concentrate entirely on evaluating variations among different candidates' performances. But contemporary audiences

who experience adaptations as adaptations are much more like relatively childlike nineteenth-century audiences for piano transcriptions — audiences less interested in the curatorial preservation of well-known sources than in new performances of works based on sources of which they may have scant knowledge — in important ways adaptation theory has overlooked to its cost.

Contemporary audiences' ability to experience adaptations as adaptations is based on different kinds of knowledge about the adaptations' sources than adaptation theory has assumed. When these audiences experience cinematic adaptations of literary texts as adaptations, they very likely have not read the poems or plays or novels on which the adaptations are based. But it does not follow that they do not know anything about these literary texts. Amateur pianists of the nineteenth century chose to purchase, practice, and perform the music they did often without ever having heard that music, almost certainly without having heard it more than one time that was insufficient to fix it in their memories. Indeed, it was only by repeated practice and personal performance, not repeated listening to orchestral performances, that many amateurs learned the music they grew to love (or hate). Their choices were based not only on their close familiarity with a given score but also on the reputation of the composer, the level of difficulty the score seemed to pose, the pressure of parents and teachers to learn specific pieces, and the availability determined by the mechanisms of production and distribution that favored sheet music that could be played on the piano over music that could be played only by chamber groups or orchestras.

This distinction between two kinds of knowing audiences suggests that the questions that Hutcheon asks about whether a given audience experiences an adaptation as an adaptation — do “we recognize it as such and . . . know its adapted text” (120–121)? “what if we have never read the novels on which [the adaptations] are based?” (122) — can usefully be broken down into a further series of questions. What kinds of knowledge equip an audience to experience an adaptation as an adaptation? How do they come by that knowledge? What do they know about an adaptation's putative source, and what other kinds of knowledge are available to them? Do they look for specific kinds of knowledge or accept whatever comes to them? How do they use those kinds of knowledge in approaching a given adaptation? What difference do different kinds of knowledge make in their experience of adaptations as adaptations?

It might seem that the big difference that sets contemporary audiences for adaptations apart from nineteenth-century amateur pianists is that modern audiences are simply consumers, not performers. As I have recently argued of vampire movies, however,

the performative nature of vampirism suggests more specifically that adaptations are recognized as such only to the extent that they are performed — that is, situated, advertised, discerned,

consumed, analyzed and taught — as adaptations. . . . [M]ore generalized performances of vampirism remind us that the power to perform adaptations, like the power to perform vampires, is shared alike by performers, producers and consumers (Leitch 23).

Literature teachers who show film versions of *Jane Eyre* or *The Importance of Being Earnest* in class are performing them as adaptations. So are fans who want to see Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet act the leading roles in *Revolutionary Road* instead of envisioning the characters in Richard Ford's novel, and readers who are watching *The Bridges of Madison County* or *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* as substitutes for best-selling novels they fear are too long or saccharine.

Even students who sit through screenings of Shakespearean films, while hoping fervently that they will never have to read the plays themselves, are performing the films as adaptations in a very precise sense. They may be bored; they may be ignorant; their basis for comparison between Mel Gibson's *Hamlet* and Shakespeare's *Hamlet* may be severely limited. But to the extent that they are using the films as substitutes for the plays and not simply dozing through them, they are actively attempting to extract what they hope, based on their teacher's introductory remarks, will be Shakespearean elements from the films, looking for illustrations of those remarks they can feed back during class discussions and mining every scene for information that could serve as answers to potential essay prompts or exam questions. No less than Gibson, they are performing the films as adaptations. In fact, the less well they know Shakespeare's play, the more active and inventive their performance of the film as an adaptation is likely to be.

This last example raises an important general principle. No audience needs the kind of detailed textual knowledge the phrase "know its adapted text" might seem to imply in order to perform an adaptation as an adaptation. E.D. Hirsch, Jr., has observed that

[i]n the minds of literary specialists, a literary work is a text, but that is not the cultural reality. The information about literature that exists in the minds of literate people may have been derived from conversation, criticism, cinema, television, or student crib sheets like *Cliff's Notes* (146–147).

But these literate people are eminently capable of performing literary culture as literary culture even in the absence of specific, detailed textual information. So too readers and viewers can perform adaptation as adaptation if they are equipped with a general knowledge about the adapted text's content, context, and value, together with a sense of what kinds of knowledge are appropriate to the particular context within which they are performing the adaptation as adaptation. A high-school student watching Franco Zeffirelli's *Hamlet* as a substitute for Shakespeare, a high-school teacher preparing to teach the Zeffirelli film to a class of students whose experiences of reading Shakespeare are likely to be very different from one another,

and a group leader of English studies deciding which film version of *Hamlet* is the best candidate to add to a curriculum unit on the play — these three performers will draw on quite different, but equally relevant, kinds of knowledge in order to perform the film as an adaptation.

Nor do these three positions exhaust the possibilities. For *Hamlet* is often encountered outside the classroom by audiences whose leading interest in the film may be as a costume drama, a Zeffirelli film, a Mel Gibson film, a Glenn Close film, a shining example of judicious cutting, or an instructively horrible example of the Bard betrayed. It can be watched for its acting, its sets, its evocation of a historical period, even its swordplay or its staging of a ghostly apparition. Whichever focus an audience chooses will involve a comparison between Zeffirelli's film and at least one other text against which it is measured evaluatively, analytically, and heuristically. Any such comparison will entangle the audience in performing the adaptation as an adaptation — of Shakespeare, of the genre of costume drama, of a particular performance style or technique. Even to give the film a thumbs-up or thumbs-down requires comparing it to a whole body of films it is better or worse than, performing it as above or below average instead of simply consuming it without comment.

Most audiences, even if they are relatively young, can perform film adaptations as adaptations without having detailed textual knowledge of the adapted texts because the makers of such films take care in the ways they shape and market their products to situate them as adaptations even, or especially, for audience members whose knowledge of the adapted texts is modest. When I showed Tim Burton's recent adaptation of *Alice in Wonderland* to a hundred undergraduates, only a handful of them had ever read the Lewis Carroll stories on which it was based. Many of them did not even know Carroll's name. But every one of them knew that Burton's film was an adaptation of something. When I asked before the screening what they already knew about the story, the most common answers concerned characters: a girl who fell down a rabbit hole, the white rabbit, the Mad Hatter, the Caterpillar, Tweedledum and Tweedledee, the Queen of Hearts. No one, not even the students who had read Carroll, offered any sustained account of the story in which these characters took part, though several people agreed that Wonderland was "pretty weird." The only incident they could describe in any detail was the episode in which Alice changed size in response to eating or drinking different foods she discovered. I would have suspected that the primary source of their knowledge about *Alice in Wonderland* was not Carroll's story but Walt Disney's 1951 animated film adaptation of the story even if several of them had not volunteered as much.

Nor was it inappropriate that they were experiencing Burton's film as an adaptation of the Disney cartoon — or at least a film with some significant relation to that cartoon — for the film took considerable care to position itself this way, from

its rollout under the banner “Walt Disney Pictures Presents a Roth Films/Zanuck Company/Team Todd Production” to the heading on the DVD package, “Johnny Depp/Disney/A Film by Tim Burton,” to Mark Salisbury’s picture book, *Alice in Wonderland: A Visual Companion*, published, inevitably, by Disney Editions. No wonder then that Frances Bonner and Jason Jacobs, in their analysis of the impact on audiences’ experience of *Alice* stories of the sequence of their encounters with earlier versions of the story, observe: “Our experience with students . . . as well as our own practice, when we examined it, has revealed that ordinary encounters, as opposed to scholarly investigations, are at least as likely to start with an adaptation as with the originating text” (39).

Since many viewers of the Burton *Alice in Wonderland* measure it not against Lewis Carroll but against Walt Disney, it is reasonable to ask what these viewers need to know about earlier *Alices* to make sense of this one, what they need to know to experience it as an adaptation, how they are rewarded for having this knowledge, and whether and how they are punished, or at least set up for a less pleasurable experience, by having certain kinds of knowledge. Since these are highly pertinent questions to ask of any adaptation of *Alice in Wonderland*, of any adaptation, and indeed of any intertext whatsoever, I’d like to consider several earlier *Alice* adaptations before concluding with a brief look at Burton’s film.

The most notable early film *Alice* is the 1933 version Norman McLeod directed for Paramount. Although, like most filmed *Alices*, it intermingles material from *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking-Glass* (1872), it is unusually faithful to Carroll’s (and his illustrator John Tenniel’s) visual design for characters and settings, given the technological limitations of its period, and to Carroll’s dialogue and poetic set-pieces. The film wastes no time in establishing itself as an adaptation of a literary classic. It begins with that Hollywood stand-by, a leather-bound book labeled *Alice in Wonderland*, whose pages open to reveal its first credit: “Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*.” Subsequent pages show each of twenty-seven characters pictured full-length in costume, each page dissolving into a page showing the actor playing that character in a conventional uncostumed close-up before a hand turns to the next page and the next heavily costumed character.

Once this unusually elaborate credit sequence ends, the story begins with Alice (Charlotte Henry) sitting impatiently with her cat Dinah because she cannot go outside in the snow. As she prowls the room restlessly under the authoritarian eye of her governess, Miss Simpson (Ethel Griffies), she stops to salute her pet turtle, swimming in a tank; fuss with her father’s chess pieces, then claim that the white queen knocked over the white king; watch a white rabbit scurry across a croquet lawn outdoors, then claim that it had been wearing a muffler and overcoat; and respond to Miss Simpson’s observation that there is one more egg left for her to eat for tea by explaining, “Oh, I did eat both eggs, but I put one of them all back together



again.” All these moments anticipate more extended encounters Alice will have on the other side of the looking glass, but none of them is either necessary to grasp the significance of those later encounters or especially revealing in themselves. Their function is not to provide expository information to filmgoers who do not know Carroll’s story but to reward readers who do by inviting insiders to perform them as a preview of coming attractions. In the same way, when Alice, meeting Humpty Dumpty (W.C. Fields), asks him if he can explain a poem called *Jabberwocky* without reciting it to him or the audience, his reply, “I could, but I won’t,” reminds knowing readers that *Jabberwocky* is a nonsense poem Carroll incorporated into *Through the Looking-Glass*, inviting them to perform the poem themselves, perhaps by silently reciting its opening lines or by recalling some of its many fanciful nonce words, while leaving non-readers in the dark.

One passage that is illuminating for both readers who know Carroll and filmgoers who do not is the moment when Alice apparently awakens from slumber to approach the mirror about whose enigmatic properties she has already spoken prophetically, in words closely adapted from *Through the Looking-Glass*, to Dinah. As Alice crosses over to the mirror and pulls up a chair so that she can climb to the mantelpiece and stand full-length before the mirror, Dimitri Tiomkin’s music, which has been playing throughout the scene, rises to a crescendo, even though Alice is doing nothing very significant visually. The intensifying musical cue both rewards readers who know that Alice is about to pass through the looking glass to a fantasy world (and helps mollify them for being deprived of a sequence that has become obligatory in most *Alice* adaptations, the heroine’s fall down the rabbit hole) and alerts filmgoers unfamiliar with Carroll that something significant is about to happen. More generally, the predominance of Tiomkin’s music here and throughout the film emphasizes the film’s links to Paramount operettas like *The Vagabond King* (1930) and *The Smiling Lieutenant* (1931), a link that Paramount also emphasized to encourage the established audience for operettas to go see quasi-operettas like *Love Me Tonight* (1932) and non-operettas like *Trouble in Paradise* (1932) and perform them as members of this popular genre.

Once its story gets underway, the McLeod film makes no more effort than most screen *Alices* to provide any rationale for its action or even any sense of what is going to happen next. Instead, like many another early adaptation, it relies on the audience’s knowledge of the Alice books to provide a structural framework. In the absence of any such knowledge, the film inevitably seems fanciful and chaotic. Filmgoers who know the Alice books well, however, may well find their knowledge tinged with chagrin, for although it makes every attempt to include all the best-known characters from both *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*, it freely mixes characters and episodes from both books, omitting many episodes and building toward a climax, the crowning of Queen Alice, that feels

a good deal less climactic than it does in *Through the Looking-Glass*. The main compensation the film offers for its inconsequential structure is not the occasional bones it throws to readers of the Alice books but an all-star cast that includes, along with Fields, Richard Arlen, Gary Cooper, Leon Errol, Louise Fazenda, Cary Grant, Mae Marsh, Edna May Oliver, May Robson, Charles Ruggles, Alison Skipworth, and Ford Sterling. Because most of these stars, along with such noted character actors as Skeets Gallagher, Raymond Hatton, Sterling Holloway, Edward Everett Horton, Roscoe Karns, Baby LeRoy, Jack Oakie, and Ned Sparks, are recognizable only by their voices under heavy makeup and costume, the film concludes with a series of end credits, very rare in Paramount films, identifying the leading performers and characters once again in order to remind the audience which famous faces they have just seen (or not seen), and incidentally supplementing what contemporary analysts might take to be the film's primary genre, the adaptation of a literary classic, with the very different genre of the all-star revue. Although the film includes a few expository devices designed to bring the audience ignorant of Lewis Carroll up to speed, it is more interested in rewarding readers who already know the Alice books and situating itself in a generic framework that is available to all filmgoers by encouraging its audience to consider its well-known performers as Hollywood performers rather than Lewis Carroll's characters.

These same tactics are commonly used in films whose relation to the Alice books is more tenuous. *Betty in Blunderland* (1934) establishes its genre credentials from the opening credits, which end with the appearance of Betty Boop emerging to sing her trademark greeting, "Boop-a-doop-a-doop-a-doop, Boop-boop-be-doop," from behind a set of curtains picturing such franchise characters as Bimbo the Bear and Koko the Clown. These familiar supporting characters, however, are absent from the story, which, even though it never mentions Lewis Carroll or his books in its credits, remains remarkably close to Carroll in its cast, visual style, and physical transformations, though even less close than the McLeod film to Carroll in its narrative structure.

Apart from the looking glass through which Betty, dozing after she is unable to complete her Wonderland Jigsaw Puzzle by finding a rabbit's head, follows a white rabbit who arises from the puzzle outfitted much like his Tenniel model, the film sticks to *Alice in Wonderland* rather than *Through the Looking-Glass* for its inspiration. Dave Fleischer, who directed the film, manages to cram into the film's seven minutes a surprising number of characters from Carroll's story — the Caterpillar and his hookah, the Mock Turtle and the Gryphon, the Walrus and the Carpenter, the oysters and lobsters, Tweedledum and Tweedledee, the Duchess — all easily recognizable visually, even though none of them has a speaking role. Betty clearly recognizes all these characters and gives every sign of assuming that her audience recognizes them as well. "Oh, the crazy Mad Hatter," she says on first spotting him, and then, after he has departed the scene, tips over the outsized hat he has left behind to reveal the cast members she duly catalogues as they spill forth to follow him

across and off the screen — “The Duchess, and the Froggie, and Humpty Dumpty, and the March Hare . . . and everybody else” — that telling last phrase indicating her knowledge that these characters have an existence that precedes their appearance in her dream.

Because it assumes its viewers are already familiar enough with Carroll’s characters to perform them as Carroll’s even when their images flash by in rapid succession, the film feels free to update them by incorporating twentieth-century jokes. Betty, following the White Rabbit, falls down a long shaft labeled “Subway” at its entrance and decorated all the way down with playing-card pips. After the Rabbit runs off and leaves through a small door, he is followed by a king who downs a draft of “Shrink-ola” and becomes small enough to fit through the door, then a court card whose mug of “Shrink-ola” reduces him from a Ten to a Two of Diamonds, and finally Betty herself, whose dress refuses to shrink along with her until the mouse running the “Shrink-ola” concession douses it in the concoction too. The Mad Hatter’s hat is labeled not “10/6” but “98.” The Walrus prances back and forth on a seesaw, his movements causing fish to leap out of the fishbowls at either end of the seesaw and into his mouth. Tweedledum and Tweedledee knock off each others’ heads and then run up bloomers as surrender flags from their hollow necks. The Duchess dances an Irish jig so energetically that her swollen feet turn into a pair of dogs.

Such updates announce the affinity between Carroll’s nonsense logic and the surrealistic transformations common to the cartoons Fleischer made throughout the early 1930s, from the grandfather clock that suddenly grows a human face and reminds Betty that “it’s time to go to sleep” as she works on her Wonderland Puzzle to the jar of jam she grabs as she falls down the subway shaft, only to see the viscous glob she pulls from it assuming the form of a laughing man’s head. The illustration on the top of the puzzle’s box, showing a white rabbit and a young woman with long dark hair, seems arbitrary until Betty, about to follow her own animated rabbit through the looking glass, suddenly sprouts long hair that makes her look exactly like the young woman in the illustration. Even the monster that concludes “Everyone, How Do You Do?,” a takeoff on Harry Ruby and Bert Kalmar’s “Everyone Says I Love You” that Betty sings to the assembled company, by emerging from the Mad Hatter’s hat to seize Betty and run off with her to the strains of Liszt’s Second Hungarian Rhapsody is addressed in hushed tones as “Jabberwocky,” even though he looks suspiciously like the dragon in Fleischer’s *Snow-White*, another Betty Boop short released the previous year. *Betty in Blunderland* can readily be performed by children who have never heard of *Alice in Wonderland* as a magical tale of a dream, a fantastic adventure, and a miraculous survival. None of the film’s many visual references to Carroll and Tenniel, or to popular or classical music tags, makes it easier to follow as a story or unlock hidden depths to its meaning. Instead, they are optional references that make it possible for viewers to perform the first two-thirds of the film, up to the Jabberwocky’s appearance, as more amusing and richly layered without ever becoming necessary for the unaware.

Walt Disney's lifelong fascination with the Alice books illustrates a wide range of relations film adaptations can establish with their avowed sources and an equally wide range of consequences for filmgoers who accept the invitation to perform them as adaptations. The earliest of the Disney films, *Alice's Wonderland* (1923), announces in its title that, like the first six animated shorts the fledgling Disney had produced the previous year, it is an adaptation of a familiar story. Yet practically nothing in the film, which mixes live action and animation, confirms this promise. After visiting an animation studio and seeing three episodes of animals fighting, dancing, and making music, five-year-old Alice (Virginia Davis) dreams that night of her journey to Cartoonland, where she is rapturously greeted as a visiting dignitary by four canine selectmen and a crowd of animals carrying placards reading, "LONG LIVE ALICE," "HOORAY FOR ALICE," and "WELCOME TO OUR CITY." She responds to this adulation by dancing in delight, but the festivities end when four lions escape from the Cartoonland Zoo and pursue Alice through a series of scrapes until she jumps off a cliff to escape them and ends up back home in bed.

Apart from the title, the similarities to the Alice books are limited to the heroine's name, the dream that takes her to a marvelous new place, and her long vertical fall. But these similarities are far outweighed by differences. As Donald Crafton has observed, "Whereas Carroll's little girl was the aggressive protagonist of the adventures, Disney's Alice tended to watch the action in her animated wonderland, reacting with histrionic gestures" (284). Even so, she is hailed as a celebrity in Cartoonland by generic animals bearing no visual relation to Carroll's cast. The film makes no use of the physical transformations that abound in both *Betty in Blunderland* and the Alice books. Even Alice's plunge from the cliff, the film's closest visual echo of Carroll, does not introduce Alice to a wondrous new land but takes her home to safety. Filmgoers who perform the film as an adaptation of Carroll are therefore likely to be disappointed by its decision to situate itself not with primary reference to the Alice books, which its title invokes to establish an analogy between Carroll's Wonderland and Disney's animation studio, but as an inversion of Dave Fleischer's rotoscoped *Out of the Inkwell* series, which allowed Betty Boop's future friend Koko the Clown to interact with human characters in a live-action world, and as the kickoff to a franchise of four dozen Alice shorts that followed. Although all these shorts mixed live action with animation in the manner of *Alice's Wonderland*, none of them took the heroine to a place anything like Wonderland. After a few more early films — *Alice Gets in Dutch*, *Alice's Day at Sea*, *Alice's Spooky Adventure* (all 1924) — they did not even show Alice crossing over from a realistic live-action world to a fantastic animated world, but either presented a live-action Alice recounting her adventures in live-action/cartoon flashbacks (*Alice's Wild West Show*, 1924) or began by accepting her without explanation as an increasingly marginal element in a live-action/animated universe (*Alice's Egg Plant*, 1925, and many others).

The connection to Carroll, tenuous from the beginning, soon reached a vanishing point that would reward filmgoers determined to perform them as adaptations of Carroll with nothing but frustration.

Although Disney never realized his dream of featuring Mary Pickford in another live-action/animated Alice film ten years later, he continued to draw inspiration from Carroll. A 1936 Mickey Mouse short, *Thru the Mirror*, shows his success at integrating Carroll's influence into the wider range of influences that produced his studio's signature style. The film, whose credits list only two names, Walt Disney and Mickey Mouse, acknowledges its principal source explicitly only in its opening shot, which shows Mickey asleep in bed under an open copy of "Alice Through the Looking Glass," a portmanteau text duly credited to "Lewis Carroll." As the hero sleeps, he is split in two in the manner of Buster Keaton in *Sherlock Jr.* (1924), and his more active self, obviously inspired by his bedtime reading, walks across the room, climbs onto a mantelpiece, experimentally pokes the mirror's yielding surface, then passes through to a room whose furnishings combine Carrollesque inversions with Disney inventions. A clothes pole is given a face and surmounted by a top hat that it seems to be wearing rather than storing. The armchair into which Mickey leaps recoils from him and regards him disapprovingly. The ottoman he lands on yelps in protest and retreats to the seat of the chair, whose arm strokes it protectively as it sits on its (or her) lap. An inverted umbrella Mickey bumps into pulls up its skirts and stalks off in a huff, and he watches a nutcracker that eats the shells and tosses the nutmeats away. When Mickey eats one of the discarded bits of nutmeat, his body, in a comically frenzied elaboration of Carroll, grows to an alarming height, one limb popping out at a time, until a last pop makes it instantaneously shrink to a tiny size.

Mickey's adventures through the mirror take the form of a series of the visual puns that were the trademark of Disney's mature animation style. A ringing telephone with a call for Mickey is rapidly transformed into a telephone operator, an elevator, and a jump rope, this last in response to Mickey's impatient "Skip it." When Mickey lands in an ashtray, he uses a matchstick as a cane and a liner from one of the ashtray's indentations as a top hat and does a creditable imitation of Fred Astaire. A pair of gloves come to life to carry a larger top hat on a walking stick.

The most extended series of visual puns begins when Mickey skids into a deck of playing cards. At first he leads them in marching formations. Together they execute a series of maneuvers that pun on the mechanics of shuffling, cutting, and dealing the deck, ending with Mickey fanning the cards behind himself in the manner of a peacock or fan dancer before an overhead shot shows the cards dancing in Busby Berkeley formation. When Mickey dances with a Queen of Hearts who strongly favors Greta Garbo and an outraged King of Hearts attacks him, the film is combining contemporary references with Carroll's trick of treating court cards as individuals.

The duel between the King of Hearts, his two half-bodies appropriately armed with a pair of swords, and Mickey, who plucks a needle from a spool of thread to defend himself, leads to the film's Carrollesque climax, in which Mickey is pursued by a deck of cards summoned by a humanized radio's nasal summons: "Calling all cards." He fights them off by squirting them with ink from a fountain pen turned Gatling gun, then runs off, leaping onto a globe whose waters promptly open to engulf him and whose crisscrossing lines of latitude and longitude turn into a net that entangles him when he emerges from beneath the surface. Scurrying back to the mirror, he grows in size with every step until he finally leaps back into his bedroom full-size to discover that the telephone's repeated ringing is actually the sound of his alarm clock, which he tosses into the drawer of his nightstand before he goes back to sleep.

Like *Betty in Blunderland*, *Thru the Mirror* rewards filmgoers who accept its invitation to perform it as an adaptation of Carroll without requiring them to do so or penalizing them for their ignorance of Carroll. None of its rapid succession of visual puns requires any knowledge of *Through the Looking-Glass* for its success. Although filmgoers watching Mickey's initial passage through the mirror could congratulate themselves on picking up the reference to Carroll, this provoking incident is perfectly intelligible on its own terms. As it proceeds, the film, even more than Carroll's tale, establishes conventions of everyday magic that motivate all its puns and transformations without the need of any literary gloss. In addition, its anthropomorphic mutations of chairs and ottomans and umbrellas and telephones and its range of contemporary references — to *The Nutcracker*, to Astaire and Garbo and Busby Berkeley, to Gatling guns and police radios — make it clear that *Through the Looking-Glass*, even if it served as the film's original inspiration, is treated as only one element in a much more heterogeneous mix of references that the film, unlike the surrealistically chaotic *Betty in Blunderland*, naturalizes and integrates as its own.

Disney's trademark tendency to assimilate a wide range of visual transformations into a signature style continues in the 1951 *Alice in Wonderland*. This time, however, as befits a feature film that has to entice families into the theater by its own means, the film invokes its classic text more pointedly even as it subordinates Carroll's logic to Disney's. The opening credits stage this conflict economically. In the first of them, two playing card courtiers whose Tenniel-esque hatching "impl[ies] depth and shape, a stylistic homage at the level of drawing technique that is missing from the rest of the film" (Bonner and Jacobs 42), frame a sign identifying the film as an RKO Radio Picture. The second, illustrated by a line drawing of the White Rabbit that already smacks more of Disney than Tenniel, reads, "WALT DISNEY Presents." The third, accompanied by a drawing of Alice at her most Victorian (though still more reminiscent of Phiz than Tenniel) encountering a more Disneyesque miniature door and its key, reads, "*ALICE/in/Wonderland/ an adaptation of/LEWIS CARROLL'S/The Adventures of Alice in Wonderland/and Through the Looking-Glass,*" completed, at the bottom of the screen, by the credit, "Color

by TECHNICOLOR.” The only explicit invocation of Carroll or his books in the whole film gets both titles wrong and forces them to share the title screen with the Technicolor Corporation.

The opening scene of the film invokes Victorian England by its setting in Hyde Park, with swans skimming The Serpentine and Big Ben visible in the background, and by the period costume it gives Alice’s sister. Yet having emphasized this association with the culture of Victorian public leisure, it immediately distances itself from it, presenting Alice herself in a blue pinafore that could just as easily be dated to 1951 as 1865, and expanding on the dislike Carroll’s Alice has for books with “no pictures or conversations” (Carroll 11) by showing Alice’s older sister reading a soporific passage from a history book, not to herself, as in Carroll, but to Alice as her history lesson. Alice is already actively imagining a world in which “the books would be nothing but pictures” presumably just like the movie that is getting underway.

This critique of print culture, amounting virtually to a dismissal of it as mind-numbing and imprisoning, begins even earlier than the film’s opening credits. Frances Bonner and Jason Jacobs have noted the pivotal importance of *One Hour in Wonderland* (1950), the first television segment Disney ever produced, in simultaneously providing a baseline knowledge of the Alice story that would render direct exposure to Carroll’s books unnecessary and rooting Disney’s forthcoming film, which the television segment was designed to promote, in a matrix of other Disney films “as a means of refreshing the viewer’s experience of them” (40) in accord with Disney’s synergistic policy of using every new product as a selling point for its old products, and vice versa. Jacobs and Bonner read the ventriloquist Edgar Bergen’s synopsis of the story for a highly resistant Charlie McCarthy as providing a surrogate who could anticipate the reactions of “the distracted child audience,” who would be bored by “adult storytelling that merely use[d] verbal description” (41) as a way of encouraging an appetite for the film’s inventive visuals. When Charlie meets Kathryn Beaumont, she is neither clearly actress nor character, but a figure quite as transitional in her own way as the heroine of *Alice’s Wonderland*:

She has some traits of Alice in the books and the movie: gestures and dialogue expressive of polite intelligence, wide-eyed curiosity and a capacity for wonder and surprise. In this way she is a blend, Disney’s Beaumont/Alice, an embodiment of his skill in casting and creative control (41).

As it unfolds, the Disney feature presents many memorable vocal and visual characterizations by Ed Wynn, Jerry Colonna, and Sterling Holloway, who voiced the Cheshire Cat after having appeared as the Frog in the 1933 film. Richard Haydn’s Caterpillar is especially noteworthy for his revival by the flower children of a later generation. Because it chastely avoids the obviously topical references that make *Thru the Mirror* so antic, the film has the flavor of an authorized and definitive version. At the same time, it keeps a deliberate distance from Carroll. Partly

through the framing of its opening scene, partly through the framing of *An Hour in Wonderland*, the 1951 *Alice* invokes Carroll and Victorian culture generally as touchstones in order to encourage parents to bring their children to the theater, but does its best to make Victorian mores antipathetic and Carroll extraneous. Despite its widespread criticism by academics, the film has achieved canonical status for an enormous audience that knows it better than Carroll precisely because of its success in framing itself as independent of its avowed source, a film that aims for the cachet of an adaptation of a children's classic without depending for its effects on any particular literary source.

This impetus to trade on the associations of the classic source text while inverting or ignoring that text as a potential frame for establishing meaning and facilitating interpretation reaches a climax in Tim Burton's *Alice in Wonderland*, whose contradictory attitude toward its forbears begins with its parentage. Disney had already had the project under development before Burton was signed as director. By this time, of course, "Disney" referred not to Walt Disney, who had died in 1966, but to the Disney Corporation, which continued to use his name and image as benevolent paterfamilias to market increasingly adventurous adaptations. As Disney had retained Carroll's name in *Thru the Mirror* and *Alice in Wonderland* while declaring his film's independence from him, Burton and his frequent collaborator Johnny Depp retained certain features of both Carroll's and Disney's authorship — the heritage of immaculate and innovative animation, the canonical status of the 1951 *Alice in Wonderland*, the franchising synergy of the Disney empire — while openly contesting or simply discarding other features.

The most clearly distinctive feature of Burton's film as an adaptation is that it is not really an adaptation at all. It is more properly described as a mashup or, as Kamilla Elliott describes it, a "compendium": "It is precisely because Burton's film adapts so much besides the Alice books that it fails to tick both originality and literary adaptation boxes for reviewers" (195). Elliott's catalogue of the film's daunting variety of intertextual references, which range from *Lord of the Rings* to *Apocalypse Now* to *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids* to what composer Danny Elfman called Burton's own "prior classics" (197) — it also borrows at least two elements, Alice's non-shrinking dress and the Jabberwocky climax, from *Betty in Blunderland* — might seem to leave little room for Carroll. Yet the film's relation to Carroll's stories is as fundamental as it is contradictory.

The film explicitly presents itself as a sequel to Carroll's stories rather than an adaptation of them. Burton's Alice is a young woman of nineteen who has clearly been to Wonderland as a child, many years before. Although she has forgotten her earlier experience, many of the characters she meets, accusing her of being "the wrong Alice," remember it, and the audience is expected to remember it too. Hence, as Bonner and Jacobs note, the film is "predicated on not being a first encounter with the story and the characters for anyone other than Alice herself" (46). By insist-



ing that the audience remember an earlier story the heroine has forgotten, the film frames itself uncompromisingly as an adaptation.

Reviewers agreed that the film owed more to Disney's 1951 film than to Carroll's books. And certainly the earlier animated feature is the single text Burton's film assumes its audience is most likely to know and remember. Yet its relation to both Carroll and Disney is more complicated, even contradictory. Two comments on the film by prominent creators of it illustrate some of these contradictions. Johnny Depp, who plays the Mad Hatter, maintains:

People who love the books, I think, will love it . . . because it's just an embellishment on what already existed. It's done with such regard for the original books, and Linda Woolverton's work on the screenplay is really an accomplishment. How many people have done their version or have attempted to do their version of *Alice in Wonderland*? What she's done . . . I truly believe Lewis Carroll would be ecstatic, because it's done with such respect and its roots are deeply in the original material. . . . I mean, there's no one better to have done *Alice in Wonderland* than Tim Burton (Salisbury 227).

Depp's rhetoric is as obscure as his observations. According to him, screenwriter Linda Woolverton has expressed her high regard for Lewis Carroll by creating her own very different version. So people who love the Alice books will love it because its deep roots in Carroll's work express that high regard. The most coherent argument that can be extracted from these remarks is that Carroll, an irreverent inventor in his own right, would certainly approve of adapters who approached his stories with a similar irreverence.

Where Depp seems confused, producer Jennifer Todd is altogether more forthright:

Tim Burton is an incredible visionary. . . . He has such an amazing, individual style, and he was the right person to bring this material to life, because as cool as *Alice* is, it needed to be reinvented. I don't think anyone was really interested in seeing a little girl in a blue and white dress. Tim's created a whole new world for Alice to live in. The tone is a little bit darker and a little more adult than what people would be expecting from *Alice in Wonderland*. It's great that Disney is allowing Tim to make a movie that has a bit more edge. It's not a little kid's version of *Alice in Wonderland* (Salisbury 65).

*Alice in Wonderland*, Todd implies, is such a universally popular story that it needed to be reinvented for an audience that remembered it fondly from their childhood but no longer wanted to see a version aimed at children. Yet the particulars of the story that needed to be reinvented — the little girl in the blue and white dress, the lack of an edge, the tailoring of the material for an audience of children alone — are more precisely properties of Disney than Carroll. Like the producers of film remakes, the creative team for the Burton *Alice in Wonderland* approached and marketed their work in a spirit neither of the reverence Depp claims nor of the independence Todd sees but more precisely of disavowal.

Burton and his collaborators expect their audience to know the original *Alice in Wonderland* — that is, the 1951 Disney film — so well that they are hungry for

changes that include a more adult Alice who is repeatedly sexualized, more floridly inventive CGI visuals, more self-plagiarisms, more winking references to other recent blockbuster films, and a climactic battle that pits the cast of *Alice in Wonderland* against the cast of *Through the Looking-Glass*. This target audience wants a version of *Alice* that freely departs from Carroll but just as freely recycles other sources, inspirations, and touchstones, something that, to invert Hutcheon's terms, is different but the same. How original do Burton's radical departures from Carroll make his film? As Owen Allaway comments on Internet Movie Database's Reviews and Ratings page: "Even if you've not seen a single still photo or second of footage, if you know Wonderland and you know Tim Burton, you can picture it yourself effortlessly." In other words, even audiences who have not yet seen the film can already perform it as an adaptation. All they have to know is something of Wonderland and something of Tim Burton.

Elliott acutely observes that "Tim Burton's *Alice* manifests in practice what adaptation scholars address in theory": the awareness that "each cultural production draws on — and adapts — a host of prior cultural productions" (195). Even more than other *Alice* adaptations, the film stands as an unanswerable challenge to Hutcheon's binary distinction between knowing and unknowing audiences. Bonner and Jacobs, noting that Hutcheon "spend[s] more time on varieties of knowingness" than on investigations of secondhand general knowledge of source texts, "is unable to stop herself presenting this [secondhand knowledge of a source] as very much the second best encounter," even though "it surely leads to a very different experience from that gained via exposure to an actual text" (39). The most fundamental problem with Hutcheon's binary, however, is not the evaluative dimension Bonner and Jacobs rightly criticize, but the distinction between knowing and unknowing audiences that their phrase "exposure to an actual text" preserves.

As Bonner and Jacobs rightly observe, Hutcheon's distinction — "If we do not know that what we are experiencing actually is an adaptation or if we are not familiar with the particular work that it adapts, we simply experience the adaptation as we would any other work" (120) — fallaciously implies that childishly experiencing adaptations as we would any other work is inferior to having the specific knowledge of earlier texts that would allow an audience to experience the new work as adults. Hutcheon overlooks the ways in which every audience experiences every text through multiple lenses of literary, generic, contextual, and linguistic competences. Even if "all agree that even adaptations must stand on their own," no audience approaching any text, whether or not it is an adaptation, ever simply "experien[ces] the work for itself" (127). Hence one of the questions I began by asking — "Is encouragement to experience an adaptation as an adaptation sufficient to confer competence to experience an adaptation as an adaptation?" — gets the problem backward because audiences always have this competence. It is the opposite kind of competence, the competence to make sense of a text without reference to any other text, that they never have.

So instead of distinguishing between knowing and unknowing audiences, adult audiences who experience a given adaptation as an adaptation and childish audiences who do not, Burton's film, like *Alice* adaptations generally, poses a more challenging series of questions. Given that every audience for every text, adaptation or not, knows something, so that they never encounter texts that stand on their own and experience them on their own terms, what do different texts and their presentational contexts ask audiences to know about which prior texts? How do they reward them for knowing what they ought and penalize them for knowing what they ought not? And given that every competent audience has derived its competence specifically from its knowledge of other texts, why do we sometimes feel like a knowing, sometimes like an unknowing, audience? In the very last sentence of her book, Hutcheon concludes that "[i]n the workings of the human imagination, adaptation is the norm, not the exception" (177). Both Carroll's stories and their film adaptations remind us of the passion for performance that supposedly unknowing children like Alice and her many audiences bring to every transcription, every adaptation, every text, even if adults have forgotten this wisdom.

## CZYTAJĄC JAK DOROŚLI, ODGRYWAJĄC JAK DZIECI: DWA SPOSOBY DOŚWIADCZANIA ADAPTACJI

### Streszczenie

W jakich warunkach dana publiczność doświadcza adaptacji, jak to ujmują Linda Hutcheon, jako adaptacji? W niniejszym eseju koncentruję się na kilku adaptacjach *Alicji w krainie czarów* oraz *Po drugiej stronie lustra*, aby zbadać dwa sposoby, w jakie ich odbiorcy mogą doświadczać ich jako adaptacji: jako dorośli, porównując je z opowieściami Lewisa Carrolla, które znają, i jako dzieci, odgrywając je jako adaptacje tekstów, których mogą nie znać w ogóle. Poprzez udratyzowanie sposobów, w jakie kompetencja do doświadczenia jakichkolwiek tekstów zależy od intertekstualnej wiedzy, adaptacja Tima Burtona z 2010 roku stanowi szczególne wyzwanie dla dystynkcji Lindy Hutcheon między „wiedzą” i „niewiedzą” publiczności, dorosłej i dziecięcej publiczności, pokazując, że nie ma czegoś takiego jak niewiedząca publiczność „doświadcza” dzieła samego w sobie”.

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