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NINETEENTH-CENTURY THEATRICAL ADAPTATIONS  
OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY LITERATURE

by

Kathryn Hartvigsen

A thesis submitted to the faculty of

Brigham Young University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Humanities, Classics, and Comparative Literature

Brigham Young University

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## ABSTRACT

### NINETEENTH-CENTURY THEATRICAL ADAPTATIONS OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY LITERATURE

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Master of Arts

The theatre in the nineteenth century was a source of entertainment similar in popularity to today's film culture, but critics, of both that age and today, often look down on nineteenth-century theatre as lacking in aesthetic merit. Just as many of the films now being produced in Hollywood are adapted from popular or classic literature, many theatrical productions in the early 1800s were based on popular literary works, and it is in that practice of adaptation that value in nineteenth-century theatre can be discerned. The abundance of theatrical adaptations during the nineteenth century expanded the arena in which the public could experience and interact with the great popular literature produced during the period. Additionally, theatrical adaptations afforded audiences the opportunity of considering how the medium of theatre functions artistically, since a story on stage is communicated differently than a story in print.

Studying theatrical work as adaptation – especially when we focus on the manner in which the subject is communicated rather than on alterations in the subject itself – reminds us that the theatrical medium is not constituted of the same formal elements as literature and should not be judged according to the same criteria. The stage of the early nineteenth century, perhaps more than in any other age, was defined by its appeal to the sense of sight rather than by attempts to be literary by using literary devices on the stage. Instead, theatre of this age found ways of communicating the subject material of popular literature in an entirely new “language” system, with varying degrees of success. Considering adaptation as a process of translation from one aesthetic language to another reveals that some creative minds were more attuned to the unique aesthetic capabilities of each medium than others. Two case studies of theatrical adaptations produced in nineteenth-century England apply this model of adaptation while considering the unique stage conventions, expectations, and culture of the day. These analyses reveal differing degrees of sensitivity to the mode of communication in literature and theatre.

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## 1. A Model of Adaptation: Literature to Cinema

*“Intellectual or scholarly examinations of this kind are not aimed at identifying ‘good’ or ‘bad’ adaptations. On what grounds, after all, could such a judgement be made? Fidelity to the original? [...] The sheer possibility of testing fidelity in any tangible way is surely also in question. [...] Adaptation studies are, then, not about making polarized value judgements, but about analyzing process, ideology, and methodology.”*

Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, 19-20

An examination of nineteenth-century theatre reveals a trend toward adapting material from sources other than the playwrights’ own imaginations, often from novels or other popular literature of the age. Such a trend is fascinating in light of today’s popular fixation on cinematic adaptation. Today one of the most pervasive and visible realms of adaptations of literature is Hollywood. We need not look farther than the local movie theater to find multiple examples of films adapted from novels, whether of the classical canon or contemporary best-seller lists. Linda Hutcheon, in her book *A Theory of Adaptation*, notes that as of 1992, 85 percent of films that have won Oscars for best picture are adaptations, and the percentage is even higher for Emmy Award-winning miniseries and TV movies (4).

In light of this trend of films taking their material from literary work, theorists have produced much academic writing on the theory and practice of adapting films from literature. Since there is such fertile ground for analysis of the adaptive process in cinema, and because the practice of adapting within the genre of film is so culturally immediate, this project, which focuses on theatrical adaptations of the literature of nineteenth-century England, begins here with a discussion of adaptation from literature to film. Then will follow an application of the film adaptation model to adaptive live stage productions of the Romantic and Victorian eras. The appropriateness of beginning with a



literature-to-film model for adaptation becomes apparent as similarities between nineteenth-century theatre culture and twenty-first-century film culture are considered; namely, the impressive popularity of both filmic and theatrical works that are adapted from another source. In addition the similar adaptation impulse in each century seems related in part to the way both film and theatre are well-suited for the communication of the dramatic material found in narrative literature.

Although some approaches to analyzing adaptation from literature to film focus on similarities and differences in themes, characterization, and plot, a description and an illustration of a model which is more grounded in the practice of formal artistic analysis is a clearer and more specific way of discussing adaptation.

The most popular, and perhaps most superficial (though this does not mean it is unimportant) criterion for evaluating an adapted film is the idea of fidelity to plot, characters, and themes. Hutcheon writes of “fidelity criticism” as an out-of-date theoretical framework (6-7). Part of the reason many critics now frown on fidelity criticism is their apparent feeling that it insults the intelligence or creativity of the adapter. As Hutcheon explains, adapters “are just as likely to want to contest the aesthetic or political values of the adapted text as to pay homage. [... Adaptation] is always a double process of interpreting and then creating something new” (20). Still, pop audiences seem to value fidelity above other considerations in their evaluations of adapted films.

Audiences of popular film adaptations such as Andrew Adamson’s *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (2005) or Joe Wright’s *Pride and Prejudice* (2005) who have also read the books they are based on might debate whether or not Aslan is convincingly

voiced or whether the actor playing Darcy pulls off the charm and mystery of the literary character appropriately. Pop audiences might also discuss plot omissions, additions, or permutations, which necessarily emphasize some themes over others. They may note, for example, the screenwriter's choice to diverge from Lewis and show the Pevensie children in London during an air raid in the opening sequence of the film. This new backdrop becomes a way to emphasize the children's distaste for war later in the film as they prepare for battle against the White Witch in Narnia.

Hutcheon explains these kinds of popular discussions about fidelity by noting that the literature that is most popular is subject to the most scrutiny in adapted forms:

One of the central beliefs of film adaptation theory is that audiences are more demanding of fidelity when dealing with classics, such as the work of Dickens or Austen. But a whole new set of cult popular classics, especially the work of J.R.R. Tolkien, Philip Pullman, and J.K. Rowling, are now being made visible [...] and their readers are proving to be just as demanding. (29)

Hutcheon reveals why discussions about fidelity are problematic by introducing the idea of "fidelity to the imagination." The "demand" she speaks of on the part of readers and viewers is manifest in exclamations such as "Ron Weasley is just as I pictured him" or "they did a wonderful job with the dark riders. They are exactly the way I imagined them." This is the problem with analyzing film adaptations in terms of fidelity: so often fidelity comes down to a matter of individual interpretations and personal taste. And how can we measure fidelity to imagination in a reliable way, since the only indicators we have are general statements of satisfaction from fans after they

have already been swept away in the spectacle of the screen? Film critic Roger Ebert of the *Chicago Sun Times* writes of the first Harry Potter film that it was “a red-blooded adventure movie, dripping with atmosphere, filled with the gruesome and the sublime, and surprisingly faithful to the novel” and adds that Daniel Radcliffe, who plays Harry Potter, “looks much as I imagined him, but a little older.” It is not only the actors who are faithful to Ebert’s imagination; he says the same of Quidditch. “The game, like so much else in the movie, is more or less as I visualized it.”<sup>1</sup>

Hutcheon speaks against this demand for fidelity to the imagination not just because it is hard to measure, but because it threatens to destroy all imagined versions but the one captured in its popular adaptive form: “I suspect I will never be able to recapture my first imagined versions again. Palimpsests make for permanent change” (29).

In addition to these concerns there is the problem of describing a method for practicing this kind of adaptation. Is there any ideological significance in simply finding an actor who can somehow exude a vague quirkiness and has the shade of hair the author described? Is there any artistic merit or intellectual rigor in this process? Some will argue that popular films do not even aspire to artistic achievement, and yet there must be a degree of aesthetic significance in at least some of them if Hutcheon’s statistics about award-winning films holds true. Perhaps whatever merit these films have is independent of their being adaptations. Despite these possibilities I agree with theorists who propose

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<sup>1</sup> Ebert also writes, “Our first glimpse of Hogwarts sets the tone for the movie’s special effects. Although computers can make anything look realistic, too much realism would be the wrong choice for “Harry Potter,” which is a story in which everything, including the sets and locations, should look a little made up. The school, rising on ominous Gothic battlements from a moonlit lake, looks about as real as Xanadu in “Citizen Kane,” and its corridors, cellars and great hall, although in some cases making use of real buildings, continue the feeling of an atmospheric book illustration.”

that there are other ways of analyzing the adaptive procedure and product that reveal more convincingly that art and intellect are at work.

A slightly more sophisticated framework for discussing adaptation begins with the question “what can a film do that a work of literature cannot?” Another way of phrasing this question might be, “how is a picture different from a word?” Philip Pullman addresses this question in a 2007 interview about the film adaptation of his novel *The Golden Compass*. “Words work in time, and pictures work in space,” he explains before elaborating:

Pictures are very good at showing you where things are, what things look like, how far away things are – that sort of thing. But a single picture on its own cannot show us the order of things happening. Stories are all about the order of things happening. This happened, and then that happened because of what happened earlier on. (*Barnes & Noble Review*)

Pullman is implying here that if a story is to be told through images, it must be a series of images shown in succession. And further, the words or the images are both alluding to something beyond themselves that makes up the essence of what a story is. Pullman explains this idea while describing his decision to allow a film adaptation of the book:

I had come to think that stories are not actually made of words. Stories can be presented in the form of words, but they can also be presented in the form of pictures. You can even present a story in the form of a dance. Whatever stories are made of, words aren't fundamental to it. [...] what I think is fundamental to the narrative process is events. [...] It doesn't really matter that they are going to take my novel, which is made of

words, and put it in a film which is made of words and pictures. The story has already been told in a number of different ways<sup>2</sup> [...] All these things had a bearing on *how the story was told*, and the story survived. The story I told seemed to come through, and I have every faith that it will come through in what the movie people are doing. (my emphasis)

What Pullman says about various genres having “a bearing on how the story was told” begins to approach what I see as the heart of the issue and art of adaptation. But before I develop that idea, I wish to continue exploring the question of what literature can do that film cannot. One generic formal limitation is the difficulty films have in allowing audiences into the minds of the characters, which novels do with ease. Although a film may be all-seeing, it is difficult for it to be all-knowing. The omniscient narrator is a difficult device to handle on screen. Some filmmakers have resorted to using voice-overs that take the place of the narrator, but that seems to work convincingly only when the narrator has something general to say about groups of characters or events. An example of this can be seen in Douglas McGrath’s 1996 adaptation of Jane Austen’s *Emma*. At the end of the film, during the scene that depicts Emma and Mr. Knightly’s wedding celebration, a voice says, “There were those who thought the wedding a little shabby.” Then in a twist on typical uses of voiceovers, we find that this voice belongs to a specific character: the catty Mrs. Elton. She continues, “I can tell you: there was a shocking lack of satin.”

McGrath’s film does make use of voiceovers a few other times, and without being connected to a specific character, but they only occur at the beginning and end of the

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<sup>2</sup> These include an audiobook, a full cast recording, a radio dramatization, and a stage play with music and stage effects.

film, as a means of “setting the stage” and then of drawing a conclusion. This way, they do not interrupt the more typical narrative structure of the film, wherein the story is told primarily through the dialogue and reactions of the actors, and the way camera angles, lighting, and so on draw our attention to these things.

In general the voiceover technique is used sparingly in film adaptations because it tends to remind audiences that they’re experiencing an illusion – something constructed rather than reality. This is partly because voiceovers do not work very well for instances in which the narrator has something specific to say about what a character is thinking or feeling, as in this excerpt from Burnett’s *The Secret Garden*, in which Martha muses on a subtle change coming over Mary: “She was thinking that the small plain face did not look quite as sour at this moment as it had done the first morning she saw it. It looked just a trifle like little Susan Ann’s when she wanted something very much” (50). Imagine the effect of hearing this as a voiceover in a film version. It would be difficult for an audience member to “suspend his disbelief,” to borrow the well-known phrase from Coleridge, and imagine himself an observer actually present at Misselthwaite Manor, if he were suddenly made aware of his unexplained ability to hear Martha’s thoughts.

McGrath’s *Emma* finds subtle ways to solve this problem of adapting the narrator – which in Austen’s novel is a witty voice that continually offers commentary – by using the motion and positioning of the camera to imply that voice without making it audible. In an early scene of the film, the heroine is talking to her friend Harriet in hopes of making her the beneficiary of her matchmaking endeavors. Emma finds that her friend talks quite a lot about a farmer she knows, and during the pause when Emma replies “Ah, I see. Then he is ... unmarried?” the camera quickly pans from its overhead position

down to a level parallel with the actresses (0:13:09-46). The effect of this is to imply that Emma thinks the farmer would make a terrible match for Harriet, as if a narrator is saying, “Emma quickly determined that there would be no match for Harriet but the one she had in mind.” This solution, which is not a literal transposition from a narrator whose words we read to a narrator whose voice we hear, but rather the discovery of a parallel means of expression in the language of a different medium, leads me to the model of adaptation which I aim to focus on in this project. It is a model based on the formal elements of the genres involved in the adaptive process.

The metaphor of translating a text from one language to another serves well: A good translator of *The Divine Comedy* into English does not simply relate the events of the pilgrimage, she also attempts to reproduce the rhyme, the images, the unique similes and metaphors. She may even try to approximate the line breaks and, depending on her agenda, the placement of words or ideas within the line. Similarly, when a sensitive filmmaker sets out to adapt a work of literature for the screen, he will pay attention to how the author has related his tale, evoked the setting, breathed life into the characters, and appealed to our aesthetic sensibilities. He may select a visual cue – an iconic motif to parallel a symbol used repeatedly in the text.

I have used the word *parallel* twice already, instead of *equivalent* or *exact*. Hutcheon explains, “just as there is no such thing as a literal translation, there can be no literal adaptation” (16). An attempt to make a literal translation of a work of literature from one language to another will most likely result in the loss of some connoted meaning, not to mention the aesthetic effect of the original. For example, our Dante translator might have difficulty because Italian has a larger abundance of rhyming words

than English, so she might need to resort to determining the *effect* of the use of rhyme in the original and find some way in which English is capable of producing a similar effect. Similarly, in the task of adapting from novel to film, efforts to replicate exactly what happens in the text, such as using a voiceover to portray the narrator, sacrifice the film's artistry, and in some cases, its credibility. On the other hand, if a filmmaker were to ask himself, "is there some lighting technique, parallel to the phrase the narrator uses, that expresses the same feeling of revulsion mingled with pity?" she is on her way to an appropriate "translation" of the work.

To expand on the metaphor of adaptation as translation, I must describe the language of film and the language of literature as I mean them. The formal elements that make up the language of an art form are the things which define its mode of expression. For literature this would include overall structural organization (chapter lengths and divisions), sentence length, diction, allusions, metaphors, and the sound of the language used: Is it alliterative? Is there a sense of cacophony? In addition, such elements as symbols, syntax, and the quantity of verbs or adjectives used are the formal tools that help make up the specific "language" any given text employs. In film, the elements at work include the length and number of shots edited together, and the speed of their transitions; the use of lighting, camera angles, and in more recent films, color and sound. (Some theorists will argue that these two are of secondary importance since the earliest motion pictures did not employ them, and since, at their most basic level, motion pictures are simply a series of still photographed images shown in succession to give the illusion of movement; therefore the elements that make up the language of photography – camera angle, lens aperture, shot composition – should be paramount.) Narrative films in



particular make use of visual symbols to express themes. They also use various kinds of transitions that imply varying psychological experiences involving time and space.

An example will serve to illustrate how translation works in adapting the formal techniques of literature to parallel techniques in film<sup>3</sup> (parallel and not equivalent, since translation can never be literal). Part of director Franco Zeffirelli's success in his acclaimed film *Romeo and Juliet* is the result of his attention to how Shakespeare gives the story an air of universal significance. (And here I consider *Romeo and Juliet* a literary work of drama rather than a theatrical play because however else it has existed at various points in history, it also has a permanent life as a written script.) The story of two young people in love in the midst of a family feud in a town in Italy seems cosmically important because Shakespeare describes them as "star-crossed lovers" in the prologue and peppers celestial imagery throughout the play, as in the famous metaphor "Juliet is the sun" (2.3.3), as well as less-often quoted instances such as Romeo's comparison of Juliet to a star: "O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright! / It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night / Like a rich jewel in an Ethiope's ear" (1.5.46-48). In addition to such cosmic metaphors and similes, Shakespeare suggests that the heavens (specifically, the sun) are mindful and concerned for the lovers' fate. "One fairer than my love! The all-seeing sun / Ne'er saw her match since first the world begun," Romeo declares, (1.2.97-98), and the play concludes with a celestial lament for the death of the young people: "the sun, for sorrow, will not show his head" (5.3.306).

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<sup>3</sup> This model was proposed by Dr. Larry Peer in his "Literature and Cinema" course. The first example mentioned, the one from Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet*, is one Professor Peer pointed out. The second example, from Hurst's *A Christmas Carol*, is the product of my own analysis.

In addition to including most of these lines in the dialogue of his film, Zeffirelli shows his appreciation of the repetition and his understanding of its significance in that he transposes this celestial imagery into the language of film by featuring a sunburst design on the floor at the Capulet's feast when Romeo and Juliet first meet. The guests at the celebration form a circle around this sun motif while they listen to the minstrel, and it is around this circle that Juliet and Romeo slowly but inexorably make their way toward each other.

Perhaps Zeffirelli is somewhat too high-brow to include in a discussion of popular film adaptations set within a project about popular stage adaptations. We'll turn now to a work that bridges centuries and artistic genres in terms of its adaptive life: Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*. This work has enjoyed a long life in adapted form as well as in its native literary form, having been adapted perhaps hundreds of times in media ranging from live readings to radio dramas, from stage to silver screen. Julie Sanders points out that often "adaptations adapt other adaptations" (13). Indeed, Dickens scholar Paul Davis refers to *A Christmas Carol* as a "culture text," explaining that we think of it "as a cluster of phrases, images, and ideas," demanding some elements of the story always to be included, while other elements of the story have almost disappeared from our folk version" (3-5). Chapter five of this project examines one nineteenth-century stage adaptation of the classic, but I will take time here to analyze in some depth Brian Desmond Hurst's 1951 film version starring Alastair Sim, focusing on formal elements of the mode of story-telling, rather than the popular "folk" elements of the story.

This film is an excellent illustration of adaptation as translation; that is to say Hurst exercises a sensitive understanding of the language of literature Dickens employs

in the text, and finds parallel ways of expressing in the language of film things which are of ideological and symbolic significance in the beloved story. Specifically Hurst's film uses patterns of three in editing sequences, visual and aural cues related to the passage of time, and emphatic placement of shadows as a means of transforming Dickens's devices into the language of film.

### **Patterns of Three**

An examination of the structure and style of Dickens's text and of its rendering in Hurst's cinema will serve as an appropriate starting point. The rhythm of Dickens's prose is infused with patterns of three. This is somewhat difficult to notice at first glance because Dickens also uses catalogues of objects, people, or actions in his descriptive passages (examples of this cataloging is seen in the first paragraphs of the book, as in this excerpt from page 14: "Scrooge was his sole executor, his sole administrator, his sole assign, his sole residuary legatee, his sole friend, and his sole mourner"). Nevertheless, the threes are frequently present. Perhaps the most noticeable example of three-part rhythm is in the well-known description of Scrooge as "secret, and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster" (15).

The passages leading up to Marley's visit use the pattern of triplets repeatedly. "Nobody under the bed; nobody in the closet; nobody in his dressing-gown, which was hanging up in a suspicious attitude against the wall" (28). A little later, we read a section that is divided into three clauses with separate verbs and clarified by the presence of semi-colons: "He took off his cravat; put on his dressing-gown and slippers, and his nightcap; and sat himself down before the fire to take his gruel" (29). Marley himself

speaks in patterns of three when Dickens is his scribe. He complains, “I cannot rest, I cannot stay, I cannot linger anywhere” (34).

The tri-meter rhythm in the prose serves to reinforce the pattern of three included in the structure of the story with the visitation of the three Spirits of Christmas. The use of threes is significant in light of the story’s Christmas and Christian theme – the three spirits Scrooge is visited by before his spiritual renewal can be said to echo the three days Christ spent in the tomb before his resurrection – and Hurst does not ignore its presence or its significance in Dickens’s text. There is a striking sequence in the film just before Marley’s ghost appears. Scrooge hears two bells ring and the clock chime supernaturally. The sequence is made up of three shots edited together, and this is repeated three times, with a reaction shot of Scrooge set between each repetition, seemingly to reset the sequence. The first shot shows the bell on the wall, the second shows the bell on the table next to a bewildered Scrooge, and the third shows the grandfather clock against the opposite wall. The third repetition of this sequence uses closer shots of the wall bell, the table bell, and the clock (0:14:19-0:15:05). Another example of patterns of three in editing sequences occurs a little earlier in the film, when Scrooge sees Marley’s face in the door knocker. The sequence is composed of a shot of the knocker followed by a reaction shot of Scrooge’s face, repeated three times. Here, the third repetition is paced more slowly, and comes after a pause, drawing attention to the fact that it is being repeated (0:12:12-18).

### **Time**

Language evoking time is central to Dickens’s plan for expressing his moral theme: the passage of time culminates in death, and it is the account you are prepared to

make when time runs out that makes the difference for your situation in the hereafter. Stated another way, it is how a man spends his means and his time in the years allotted him that determines his wages, whether it is heavy chains or a lightness of conscience. Before examining the more obvious allusions to the theme of time that occur in the pages where Marley and Scrooge converse, it will be helpful to note how Dickens sets up this metaphor in an earlier passage.

Dickens has established a “dismal” disposition in Scrooge juxtaposed against a merry disposition in his nephew when Scrooge utters a sermon on stinginess, sprinkled with language about time (and as a side note, here Dickens has again used a pattern of three, divided by semi-colons):

What’s Christmas-*time* to you but a *time* for paying your bills without money; a *time* for finding yourself *a year older*, and not an *hour* richer; a *time* for balancing your books, and having every item in ‘em through a *round dozen of months* presented *dead* against you? (18, italics added)

The finality of death expressed in this passage is immediately echoed and emphasized by Scrooge’s shocking description of death by pudding and holly. Scrooge’s nephew then counters him using the same kind of language (once again, a pattern of three is set off by semi-colons):

I am sure I have always thought of Christmas-*time*, when it has come round,—apart from the veneration due to its sacred name and origin, if any thing belonging to it can be apart from that,—as a good *time*; a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant *time*; the only *time* I know of, in the *long calendar of the year*, when men and women seem by one consent to open

their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow passengers to the *grave*, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys. (18-19, italics added)

Doubtless many adapters before and since Hurst have noted the language of commerce in these passages – paying bills, not being richer, balancing your books, and opening hearts freely – and they have done so appropriately. Marley’s chain, which looks like the chain Scrooge has been collecting, is made of cash boxes and purses, among other things (Dickens 30), and Scrooge is after all a miser who learns to be charitable to human kind. But Hurst has picked up on this imagery of passing time and expressed it through a repeated visual (and sometimes aural) cue: clocks.

Hurst’s clock motif is notable in several shots and sequences building up to Marley’s visit, and is featured in that scene as well. In the first shot, which takes place at the London Exchange, a clock is visible on the wall. It may escape notice on a first viewing because it is small, but it is prominent in the composition of the shot because it is situated directly above Scrooge’s head for several frames as he walks toward the camera (0:02:55-58). The clock then remains centered in the background between the speakers in the foreground for nearly twenty seconds (0:03:00-19). This setting is visited again by Scrooge later, in the company of one of the spirits, and here the composition and accompanying dialogue highlight it noticeably.

In another scene that takes place a short time later when Scrooge is about to enter his counting house, the establishing shot features a wall-clock behind and above Bob Cratchit, and its presence is reaffirmed by the accompanying audio track – the chiming of the hour (0:04:34-43). The next time we notice a clock is when Tiny Tim gazes with

delight into the window of a toy shop. As the camera pans across all of the trinkets and automated dolls, an elaborate wall-clock passes through the frame, traveling in a diagonal line from the upper right-hand corner to the left of the screen in the middle, becoming more prominent as it travels across the screen (0:08:26-37).

In Dickens's text, as his meeting with Marley approaches, references to clocks and chimes appear and language highlighting time continues. The men canvassing for charitable donations use the words *season*, *year*, and *present time*, concluding their argument with "We choose this time, because it is a time, of all others, when Want is keenly felt, and Abundance rejoices" (21-22). Later, a visual reminder of time in the form of a church bell tower disappears into the fog as the bell tolls out the hour (23).

The import of this time imagery becomes clear when the ghost of Jacob Marley, who has died seven years earlier to the day, visits his old business partner. Giving the warning that Scrooge's burdensome chain "was full as heavy and as long as [his own], seven Christmas Eves ago" (Dickens 34), he exclaims, "Not to know that any Christian spirit working kindly in its little sphere, whatever it may be, will find its mortal life too short for its vast means of usefulness!" (35). The forecast looks bleak for Scrooge; he has already spent so much of the time allotted him turning away from the human beings who surround him, and now he learns that even those who behave as Christians find themselves wanting more time in which to do good. In addition, it is "at this time of the rolling year" (36), the season Scrooge has so often complained of with "humbugs," that Marley's guilt and remorse plague him the most. With a heavy and final warning, Marley cries, "Hear me! [...] My time is nearly gone" (36), words which we imagine would echo with another meaning in the aging Scrooge's mind. Finally Marley's ghost foretells the

visitation of other spirits at prescribed times. After all this, Scrooge falls asleep “on the instant,” which Dickens explains is partly because of the “lateness of the hour” (38), a phrase by now too loaded with the metaphor of mortal life to be understood simply as an explanation for being tired.

All of the shots emphasizing clocks in Hurst’s film previously mentioned encourage the audience to think about the time metaphor and prepare us for the prominent inclusion of the imposing grandfather clock in the scene of Marley’s visit. When Scrooge first enters his bed chamber, the clock seems to emerge threateningly from the shadows. It occupies the right third of the frame and moves steadily nearer to Scrooge as the camera pans behind Scrooge, who is locking and bolting the door (Hurst 0:13:27-48). The effect of the shot is that it allows us to perceive the ironic ineffectiveness of Scrooge’s attempt to lock the frightening out because the clock, symbolic of a menace within the chamber (or within Scrooge), looms just over his shoulder. A little later, comes that previously mentioned pattern of three which highlights the clock in an emphatic way when the bells ring supernaturally. Here, the clock imagery is felt more prominently because in Dickens (as in other adaptations) it is only the bells that ring so strangely. Hurst composes the next sequence in the film so that the clock appears a sentinel guarding the door through which Marley’s ghost enters, and most of the conversation that ensues between Scrooge and Marley is filmed from an angle that places the clock, clearly visible in the background, between the man and the spirit (0:16:30-0:17:41).

A short transition shot that segues into the sequence featuring Scrooge’s experience with the Ghost of Christmas Past is notable for its time imagery. An image of an hourglass appears in a tunnel, traveling away from the camera. Not only does it act as



a visual cue that Scrooge and the Ghost are about to visit a different period of time, but it also reminds the audience of the irreversible passage of time (0:24:12-17).

### **Shadows**

The third element Hurst transposes from Dickens's text is his use of shadows. The precedent for this is the text's rich imagery evoking a ghostly atmosphere and suggesting haunting in general, and specifically hinting that Scrooge has been haunted by Marley long before his ghost pays such an obtrusive visit:

Scrooge never painted out Old Marley's name. There it stood, years afterwards, above the warehouse door: Scrooge and Marley. The firm was known as Scrooge and Marley. Sometimes people new to the business called Scrooge Scrooge, and sometimes Marley, but he answered to both names (15).

This passage depicts Jacob Marley symbolically hovering over Scrooge's door for seven years. And by answering to Marley's name in addition to his own, Scrooge in essence calls him out of the grave and links arms with him. Dickens also tells us that Scrooge has been living surrounded by echoes of Marley in another part of his life. "He lived in chambers which had once belonged to his deceased partner." This bit of information is mingled with the recurring imagery of darkness: "They were a gloomy suite of rooms [...] It was old enough now, and dreary enough, for nobody lived in it but Scrooge" (26), and this is imagery that begs further exploration, but first Hurst's communication of the idea that Scrooge is haunted by Marley must be examined.

Hurst develops this idea in the use of a prominent shadow that often accompanies Scrooge. In one of the earliest scenes of the film, Scrooge is shown walking to his

counting house (which bears the sign reading “Scrooge and Marley” above the door). He is dogged by his shadow, which moves in and out of other shadows as Scrooge approaches the camera (0:04:15-26). A little later, Scrooge sits at his desk conversing with the men canvassing for charitable donations. His shadow, centered between Scrooge and the two men, seems to be a silent witness to the conversation. This scene is a series of shots edited together, and the shadow is visible in the shots used while Scrooge is speaking. The scene ends with a closer shot of Scrooge and his shadow, balanced equally on the right and left thirds of the frame (0:05:15-52).

Dickens’s clever word choice in the dialogue seems to sanction Hurst’s shadow as suggested ghost. Scrooge, addressing Marley, says, “You’re particular, for a shade” (31). Indeed Dickens, using Marley’s voice, validates our suspicion that Marley has haunted Scrooge all along. The ghost says, “How it is that I appear before you in a shape that you can see, I may not tell. I have sat invisible beside you many and many a day” (36).

While Dickens’s text and Hurst’s film specifically highlight the presence of Marley’s spirit before he appears to Scrooge, both works of art also suggest the presence of other spirits from an unseen realm. Dickens’s evocation of thick, dark, cold fog is vivid, nearly becoming a character in the story. “The fog came pouring in at every chink and keyhole, and was so dense without, that, although the court was of the narrowest, the houses opposite were mere phantoms” (17). Repeated mention of the fog growing denser is included, and finally, as Scrooge approaches his house, Dickens narrates that “the yard was so dark that even Scrooge, who knew its every stone, was fain to grope with his hands. The fog and frost so hung about the black old gateway of the house, that it seemed as if the Genius of the Weather sat in mournful meditation on the threshold” (26).

In another film adaptation of *A Christmas Carol* (starring George C. Scott), the opening sequence reveals townspeople emerging specter-like from the London fog. In Hurst's version however, the sense of the other world is achieved through the use of darkened, shadowy space in the frame. One shot in which this is especially noticeable depicts Scrooge ascending the stairs to his bedchamber, just after having seen Marley's face in the door-knocker. The shot is entirely framed in shade as Scrooge (with his shadow still following) makes a slow ascent up the staircase toward the camera (Hurst 0:12:36-0:13:26).

Dickens describes a chorus of wailing spirits producing "incoherent sounds of lamentation and regret; wailings inexpressibly sorrowful and self-accusatory. [Jacob's ghost], after listening for a moment, joined in the mournful dirge; and floated out upon the bleak, dark night" (37-38). The film expresses this image and the feeling behind it adeptly. While the audio here is brim with sorrowful moans and cries, it is only an augmentation of the visual strength of the scene. The spirits are writhing in anguish, and the motion gives the sense of Dickens's description even without the audio (Hurst 0:20:49-0:21:27).

Hurst's shadows go beyond these uses to express a world beyond our perception. Dickens writes of Scrooge's "glimpse of the Invisible World" (38), and Hurst suggests that this assumes more than spirits walking the earth. That Scrooge already has a chain we know from Marley's description of it, but in some scenes of the film, shadows cast by latticed windows form images suggestive of chains, nets, or confinement. This is especially prominent in Scrooge's bedchamber during Marley's visit (0:20:29-46). In addition, Dickens's story is of course a story about being Christian and about Christmas.

Accordingly, when the light of the Ghost of Christmas Past first appears and begins to grow, it is centered on the crux of a cross formed with shadows (0:22:37-45).

While it is true that many adaptations of Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* succeed in expressing the theme and tone of the beloved story, Hurst's version stands out as a work of art that successfully translates the way the text works as literary art into the language of film. The passages and shots mentioned here represent only a sampling of the ways Dickens and Hurst use patterns of three, imagery associated with passing time, and techniques suggestive of a spirit world beyond our general perception, but the examples I have described serve to illustrate how Hurst succeeds in translating Dickens's techniques into the language of another medium, and thus expresses the tale with the same powerful effect.

This example illustrates why a successful adaptation ought to consider how the story is told in addition to what it is about. The task that remains in this thesis is to describe the language of the stage and illustrate how the model of adaptation introduced here may be applied to stage adaptation.

## 2. The Language of the Stage: A Critic's Senses

*“The staging stresses certain signs, and fatally distances others, it ‘punctuates’ the performance [...] Semiology is concerned with the discourse of staging, with the way in which the performance is marked out by the sequence of events, by the dialogue and the visual and musical elements.”*

- Patrice Pavis, *Languages of the Stage*, 19-20.

Early in the twentieth century Sergei Eisenstein pointed out what he thought was evidence that film techniques were an evolution of literary devices used in the nineteenth-century novel. Film theorist Bruce Morrisette explains, “Eisenstein sought principally to find in pre-cinematic novels the formal sources for film techniques: close-ups in Dickens, parallel montage in Flaubert, and the like.” But in contrast, other theorists have argued that film effects like flashbacks and dissolves (which at some points in the history of film theory have been considered to have a function parallel to adverbs like “meanwhile” in novels) have affected the way novels function aesthetically (140, 142). Either way, it is apparent that there are points of contact in the modes of communication for each of these genres.

Narrative literature, film, and theatre share common ground as media forms insofar as their respective genres center on dramatic tension and conflict. However, the conventions through which they communicate their dramatic subjects cover a spectrum of similarities and differences. Literary thinkers in the early days of film history (primarily surrealist poets) described the respective languages of literature and film as potentially poetic: “film aesthetics constituted a logical extension of the search for unconscious imagery; unusual lighting, bizarre camera angles, strange confrontations of objects, sequences run backward or repeated, slow motion, all showed the film to be, in Yvan

Goll's phrase, 'visual poetry', the primary difference being that film was "perhaps more immediate or intense" (Morrissette 138).

Others saw a close link between the way in which film and theatre communicate meaning. When sound was introduced to cinema, there was "a tendency to presume that film had at last discovered its true identity as a sort of conveniently recorded stage drama," though this idea is now considered to have had a negative influence on film production for a time (Morrissette 138).

In general it might be said that when theatre and film adapt from a novel or other (dramatic) literary form, they both enact the drama in spatial and temporal dimensions. However, each makes use of space and time differently. Film theorist Béla Balázs argues that the most important elements that distinguish theatre from film have to do with the way the audience experiences the art in space. He notes that in traditional theatre, "1) the spectator sees the enacted scene as a whole in space; 2) he sees it from a fixed, unchanging distance; and 3) he sees it from a fixed, unchanging point of view or angle of vision." Film, on the other hand, allows for cohesive scenes to be subdivided into individual shots, for the distance between the viewer and the subject to change (even within one continuous shot), and for the angle of perspective to change frequently within shots, scenes, and the entire film. The ability to arrange shots through editing techniques changes the experience for film spectators, so that not only can the viewer experience one scene through intimate, close-up shots and the next in an all-encompassing overview long shot, but he can have both of these experiences within the same scene. Balázs generalizes the differences between theatre and film by explaining that whereas the theatre enacts its subject through images, action, and sound, film enacts it and interprets it as well

(Morrisette 139). In other words, while the theatre presents a stage-full of information and can only gently guide the audience to what to pay attention to, a film decides for the viewer which characters' facial expressions they will see, which part of the room they may observe, and in general controls more tightly what the audience experience will be.<sup>4</sup>

Theatre and film also both have temporal characteristics, as do novels. The tempo of a book is influenced by things like the length of words, sentences, chapters, and other organizational units, by the amount of verbs, and by other techniques such as the use of flashback or the amount of time that is skipped over between successive passages or chapters. Similarly, theatre and film may both manipulate the sensation of passing time through speech (both the way the lines are written and the way the actors deliver them), movement of actors, and length of scenes. However, the individual capabilities and constraints of film and theatre result in some different approaches to varying tempo as well. A film may increase the number and frequency of shots edited together, or seamlessly change locations in an instant. A theatrical performance, however, might speed or slow its pacing through changes in lighting and scenery (Palmer 87, 95-96).

Although each medium has tools with which to send messages concerning time and space, theatre practitioners have a unique challenge, which Aston and Savona express eloquently in their book *Theatre as Sign-System*:

Ideally, theatrical signs should combine (a) to transmit clear messages and (b) to hierarchise the messages sent. In the case of film, where semiotics has been widely adopted as a critical tool, the 'eye' of the camera helps to

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<sup>4</sup> There are, of course, exceptions to this generalization. One that comes to mind is a scene in John Frankenheimer's 1962 film, *The Manchurian Candidate*, which depicts a press conference where one of the main characters is interrogated. The shot uses deep focus and includes several characters visible in the same clarity as a television in the shot which shows the main character's reactions. Because of the deep focus, all of these things are visible simultaneously, and all are emphasized equally.

direct meaning. It selects the subject(s) to be viewed, thereby focusing our attention and directing the meaning-creating processes. In theatre, there is no such mediating device. Everything is put before us and we have a panoramic as opposed to a partial and pre-selected view of the stage. Signs operating within the theatrical frame need to be hierarchised in such a way as to help ‘fix’ meaning. (101)

A description of the major expressive elements of theatre will give a sense of how theatre practitioners can hierarchise meaning, but first it will be helpful to explain how the theatre can be considered to have its own language or sign system, rather than simply a set of characteristics.

Scholars in the field of theatre studies have drawn heavily on the theory of semioticians like Saussure who described language as a sign system wherein signs are made up of signifiers and signifieds, and where the signs are all arbitrary.<sup>5</sup> Some might argue that a discussion of how meaning is created and communicated in theatre is more accurately described as a set of dramatic and stage conventions than as a language. But language has been defined as a mode of communication that uses “arbitrary sounds in conventional ways with conventional meanings,” and as a “system of formalized symbols, signs, sounds, gestures, or the like used [...] as a means of communicating thought, emotion, etc.” (dictionary.com, based on the 2006 Random House Unabridged Dictionary).

Saussure defined the basis for semiology within the context of linguistics: “a science that studies the life of signs in the midst of social life” which “should

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<sup>5</sup> See the 1916 book compiled from Ferdinand de Saussure’s lectures (*Course in General Linguistics*).



demonstrate what signs consist of and what laws govern them” (quoted in Pavis 13). This definition can also be applied within the context of theatre.

As Aston and Savona note, we might read theatrical productions in the same way we read people or situations according to accepted codes. But there is an important difference between reading people according to codes and reading theatre according to codes, which they explain by using the example of clothing vs. costuming:

Although we instinctively engage in such readings because of our knowledge of [real world] dress codes, and act upon them accordingly, we have no way of knowing whether they are truly *meant*. This contrasts with theatre where everyone and everything placed within the theatrical frame has an artificial or pre-determined meaning. The process of signification is directed and controlled. Even if something has arbitrarily entered into the frame it is read as significant. (Aston and Savona 99)

The language, and consequently, the process of interpreting a stage performance is complex because of what Roland Barthes refers to as the “polysemic” character of the theatre. This means that an audience member receives several pieces of information at once (setting, costume, acting, lights, words, gestures, sound). Aston and Savona explain it this way: theatre “draw[s] on a number of sign-systems which do not operate in a linear mode but in a complex and simultaneously operating network unfolding in time and space” (99). Theatre theorist Patrice Pavis calls for an analytical approach that takes the “polysemic” nature of theatre into account, explaining that observers of theatre ought to be conscious of theatre’s existence as a “meeting point” for sign systems of music, of gesture, of space, of text (15).

Let us turn our attention then to a description of some of the “languages of expression” that make up the polysemic stage.

### **Sign systems of the stage**

There are several ways of codifying the various semiotic systems that operate in theatre. Aston and Savona describe some classifications that other scholars have proposed and outline one of their own. Tadeusz Kowzan, they note, creates a listing and organization of various sign systems that include word, tone, mime, gesture, movement, make-up, hairstyle, costume, properties, setting, lighting, music, and sound effects. He then classifies each of these signs as auditory or visual signs, actor-centered or actor-external signs, and signs that operate in time, or space, or both (Aston and Savona 105).

In a more comprehensive approach, Martin Esslin, in his book *The Field of Drama*, expands the sign systems from thirteen to twenty-two and included in his model categories that address the packaging or “framing” systems of drama, such as the architecture of the theatre or promotional materials for a performance. (Aston and Savona 108).

Aston and Savona also summarize and transcribe a questionnaire Patrice Pavis created to guide his theatre students in their evaluation of performance. This questionnaire hits some of the same points as Esslin’s and Kowzan’s models. Among Pavis’s considerations are the following elements: scenography, lighting system, stage properties, costumes, actors’ performances, music and sound, pace of performance, interpretation of story in performance, text in performance, and audience (Aston and Savona 109-111).

Aston and Savona's own system is influenced partly by their conception of stage directions, which may be indicated within the dialogue or given in the stage directions external to the dialogue. Their system is rather complex and somewhat bewildering in its distinctions, but again, they include many of the same elements that appear in the other classification systems. They use six general classifications, three of which deal with character: character identification, physical definition of character, vocal definition of character. The other three categories are formal concerns of speech, design elements, and technical aspects. A sampling of the more minute elements they concern themselves with reveals their preoccupation with semiology centered on characters: identification or description of character at first entrance, detailed description of character at or prior to first entrance, dominant traits, the manner in which the character makes his entrance and exit, carriage, posture and gesture of the character, action involving self and an object, action involving another person and an object. (82-90).

Although Aston and Savona's taxonomy is perhaps so exhaustive that it becomes difficult to apply in understanding a stage performance, its focus on character is not necessarily inappropriate. However, there are glaring omissions, such as the sign systems involved with the performance venue and the audience.

The list of theatrical elements that will be used here includes many of the same elements used in the models outlined by the scholars mentioned above. However, it is useful for this specific project to base the conception and organization of the sub-languages of theater on the performance elements that theatre reviewers tune into. A critic's senses are attuned not only to the systems that are most telling of intended meaning and quality of a performance, but also to the preferences and values of theatre

audiences (Palmer 1-2, 39). Richard Palmer's *The Critics' Canon* offers useful insight into how reviewers and audiences in general might evaluate various components of a performance. Describing the following areas of theatrical communication (which is not an exhaustive list) will serve to give a sense of what the language of theatre is and how it communicates meaning: acting, audience, text (script and stage directions), movement and gesture, mise en scene, scenery and stage design, and venue.

### **Actor**

Aston and Savona note (perhaps justifying their weighted focus on character portrayal) that the actor is a bridge between drama and theatre (104). In other words, the actor mediates the written play for the audience in the performed version. In most instances, the majority of an audience will not have read the script and the stage directions, and although other elements of theatre such as costume and lighting can contribute in very significant ways to the meaning that is communicated, the performance could still exist if it were composed of nothing but actors portraying their characters to an audience. Indeed, Palmer considers everything beyond actor and audience an embellishment (40), and Aston and Savona point out that historically, the actor "has generally remained dominant in the shifting hierarchy" of theatre sign systems (102).

The mediating role of the actor is complicated in the context of nineteenth century adaptations of literature because audiences, though they had not read the script, were very familiar with the novels they were based on. In this context actors remain indispensable, but their role shifts a bit, as they must aim to satisfy the expectations of an informed audience. Palmer's point that "accuracy of imitation becomes particularly important

when an actor depicts a known personality” can also be applied to actors portraying well-known fictional personalities (57).

An actor creates signs and communicates meanings in a variety of ways. These signs may be considered intra-textual or extra-textual – or to use Roman Ingarden’s terms, *Haupttext* or *Nebentext* (Aston and Savona 51) – which means that the sign either depends upon what the performer says (which arises from the script) or what the actor does (which arises from the stage directions, the director’s instructions, or the actor’s own interpretive choices). Thus, as Aston and Savona explain, the actor’s work involves

speaking the written or *Haupttext* and realizing the potential of the *Nebentext*. Whereas these two ‘texts’ are clearly differentiated in the dramatic script, in performance the two are synthesized into a ‘density of signs’ which generate largely from the actor, and it is in this sense that we can refer to the performer as a locus of multiple interconnecting sign systems. (104-105)

The choices an actor makes – choices that affect characterization and the meaning communicated to the audience – can involve movement, gesture, and facial expression. These choices exist in addition to those involving the vocal delivery of lines, which themselves involve many possibilities, as Palmer notes: “How a character says something may be more important than the meaning of the words themselves. An actor uses variations in pitch, tempo, and vocal quality to texture or ‘interpret’ a speech, communicate meaning, and build character” (45).

But besides the conscious, chosen signs the actor uses in her/his performance, there exist what could be called “natural signs” that result in meaning-making on the part

of the audience. These include the physical characteristics of the actor, including those which are most difficult to mask, such as size. (The example Aston and Savona use is Sarah Bernhardt's small, slim body, "which signified frailty.") Natural signs could also be idiosyncratic mannerisms of performers, such as nervous habits or physical limitations which have to be worked in to the performance (Aston and Savona 107).

Some meaning that is communicated is more related to the identity of the performer than the character she portrays. Palmer observes the significance that "an audience always knows that a performer exists behind a character" (66). This becomes an especially interesting phenomenon when the performer is well-known, a celebrity. In such a situation the audience may know personal information about the actor, acquired in the realm outside the theatre, and consciously or unconsciously associate it with the character being portrayed. (Aston and Savona 102-103, Palmer 66). Even when the actor is not so famous that he has a recognized persona and history, he might be associated with a specific style of acting (Aston and Savona 103), or with previous roles played by the actor.

### **Audience**

One of the most important distinguishing characteristics of theatre is explained by Patrice Pavis when he writes, "More than any other art, theatre demands, through the connecting link of the actor, an active mediation on the part of the spectator confronted by the performance; this happens only during the *event* of aesthetic experience" (70).

While acknowledging Pavis's argument that the spectator plays a primary role in the creation of meaning, Aston and Savona assert that such entertainment-oriented theater as is presented in London's West End or on Broadway "[require] the spectator to

consume, rather than think. The consequence of this reduction of the role of the spectator is an unproductive erosion of the traditional communicative function of theatre” (Aston and Savona 120). This is an important consideration for nineteenth-century theatre, which, as will be discussed in a later chapter, has been criticized for being a commercial, entertainment-driven industry for much of the century.

The spectator has an undeniable influence on the performance. Audience reaction can affect the mood and performance of the actor, which in turn can “alter the levels of signification” for the audience (Aston and Savona 108). Consider, for example, a scene that depicts a mother comforting a daughter who has done something wrong. If a member of the audience happened to laugh, the actress playing the mother might develop tension because she is worried about the laughter in the middle of a serious scene. The rest of the audience might then interpret her tension as the mother’s anger toward the daughter. Audience members can even have a psychological effect on one another that changes their interpretation of the performance.

Some aspects of the spectator’s influence on a performance are difficult to control or anticipate, but other aspects have to do with the way in which the audience is prepared for the performance through publicity, with their orientation toward and distance from the performers, or even with the lighting and sound design of the performance as it relates to the sight lines of the seating area (Aston and Savona 115). In other words, a spectator’s interpretation of a performance depends not only on individual biases, preferences, life experiences, and so on, but also on publicity, reviews, and word of mouth about the performance, in addition to “location of venue [and] knowledge of the text” (Aston and Savona 120 – 121). A performance given in a small theater, for example, would be likely

to foster a feeling of intimacy, which would be more congruent for the presentation of a family drama than of a historical play about military battle.

Reviewers recognize the powerful influence of the audience as well. In fact, Palmer writes, “critics often ‘review’ the predisposition, comfort, attention span, degree of involvement, and reaction of the audience” (136). Audience preconceptions are important enough to theatres that directors may even give a curtain speech, and at any rate, directors, producers, and managers will be conscious of the theatre’s reputation, which affects what the audience expects (Palmer 136).

**Text: script and stage directions**

The text of a play determines and defines much of the sign system specific to any performance. Sources of meaning arise in the composition of the script – the dialogue and other spoken elements of the play – as well as in other textual elements such as stage directions and director’s notes, *dramatis personae* (which gives information about character relationships and status), and textual indicators such as italics, which might suggest the way a line should be delivered instead of describing how it should be done in a stage direction. (Aston and Savona 79-80).

In many – perhaps most – cases, the audience does not read the script, and so most of the meaning will be communicated via a mediator (the actor), with the accompanying meaning-making systems that relate to the *mise en scène*. But some of the information in the script does not have a traditional means of transmission to the audience without the aid of a program or playbill, for example, the titles of songs in music-drama. Some dramatists have experimented with ways to include such information in what is presented on stage. For example, in Brechtian theatre, “both captions and titles of songs



and verses may be incorporated into production, either announced by the actors or signaled by means of placard, projection or news-panel, as further distancing devices” (Aston and Savona 80). This issue is relevant for the stage adaptation of Scott’s long poem, *The Lady of the Lake*, which in its stage version has the characters speaking prose, and only acknowledges the poetic form of its source material by inserting songs.

The stage directions themselves are sometimes not discernible to the audience; that is to say, it is not always clear to the audience what is specifically indicated in the directions, what actions and inflections are implied in the lines, and what is the personal interpretation of actors, director, or other people involved in the production. Stage directions can be either intra-dialogic or extra-dialogic. (Aston and Savona 71, 76; 117-118). In other words, an entrance cue may be noted in the stage directions, or it may be indicated by the dialogue, for example, if a character were to say, “Here comes my sister now. Let’s hide these gifts!”

Stage directions are of special interest from an adaptation perspective. One theorist in particular, Jiří Veltruský, considers stage directions (as long as they are not very long or descriptive) to be a sort of “dramatic equivalent of the authorial metatext (narrative voice/s) in the nineteenth-century realist novel” (Aston and Savona 73-74). This theorist argues that just as in novels, the meaning in a stage production is “conveyed by two entirely different forms of language – the speeches attributed to the interlocutors and the author’s notes (usually called stage directions)” (ibid).

### **Movement and gesture**

Movement, gesture, facial expression – these things not only tell the audience what a character is doing, but they also imply what a character is feeling and thinking,

how he views the world, and what motivates him. This can extend beyond the seemingly natural and unconscious movement of actors to more stylized gestures and even dance, as Palmer notes: “A choreographer helps an actor express character through dance by allowing personality to partly shape movement” (131). Aston and Savona’s idea of the function of movement extends slightly beyond Palmer’s. They explain that “how actors arrange and present themselves on stage is important in directing and focusing the spectator’s attention. Spatial arrangements between actors are important indicators of identity, status, relationships and centrality to action” (115).

Patrice Pavis’s use of the term *gestus*, as it relates to gesture and movement in theatre, reveals the wealth of meaning that can be communicated through movement. Pavis defines the term: “the basic *Gestus* describes a condensed version of the story; it constitutes the inalienable substratum of the gestural relationship between at least two people, a relationship which must always be readable whatever the options of the *mise en scene*” (42). In implying social and economic information through interactions on the stage, subtle tensions in relationships are expressed, which largely give rise to conflict, the building block of drama.

Information about complex social interactions of people in the real world can be communicated through vocal inflection, true, but it is also largely communicated through posture, attitude, facial expression, space between characters, their physical orientation with respect to each other, the speed of their movements, etc. All these things can indicate a social relationship: “the characters are cursing, flattering, instructing one another, and so on” (Pavis 41). We associate some gestures or actions with social conventions and thus can interpret meaning from a sign. For example, “When Mother

Courage bites on the coin that a purchaser has just given her, she [...] carries out a social *Gestus* which is quite precise: that of the suspicious saleswoman motivated by the prospect of gain.” But Pavis is careful to note that *gestus* is not the iconic theatricality of pantomime or other dramatic gesture; rather, it is borrowed from the actual movement behaviors in which people participate in the real world (41).

According to Aston and Savona, some theatre semioticians use *kinesics* as a tool to index and categorize movement in performances. They insist that though it is very complicated to do so, “reading the body is a task which the theatre semiotician must face up to, given its centrality to the theatrical sign-system and the production of meaning.” (116). The importance of movement is perhaps even more central to theatre than to film. This is because, experiencing the dramatization in a stage full of signs, theatre audiences are conditioned to pay attention to body language in order to retain clues to produce meaning, whereas in film, effects that editing allows, such as unique sequencing and juxtaposing very different locations side by side instantaneously, play a large role in creating meaning. Perhaps more significantly, the wide open theatrical space urges audiences to pay close attention to movement and gesture to create meaning, since they do not have the benefit of, say, an extreme close-up on a character’s facial expression.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to being communicated through speech or movement, Pavis indicates that the information contained in the *gestus* can be “translated” to or “conducted” in a variety of stage materials, presumably elements of the *mise en scene* such as lighting, props, costume, makeup, and sound (46). It is to these theatrical elements we will now

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<sup>6</sup> A possible example is in the film *Enchanted April*, in which an extreme close-up of a character’s mouth while he is eating emphasizes that he is a consumer. In a play, it is of course not possible to zero in on a mouth, but an actor might create stage business for himself to communicate the same characterization, perhaps continually eating bits of food throughout the production.

turn our attention, beginning with scene design, and followed by other, complementary elements that make the drama vivid for audiences.

### **Scenery and stage design**

“Of the technical aspects of a performance, scenery attracts the most reviewer attention” (Palmer 99). This is perhaps simply because it is less subtle and easier to write about than lighting effects, and because in some cases there is more room for creative exploration in scene design than in the costumes and props made necessary by the script. Obviously, the use of recognizable icons in scenery can communicate important information about era and location to the audience; for example the empire state building will immediately situate the audience in twentieth century New York City, and a cottage at the foot of the Alps would induce the audience to expect a pre-industrial Swiss setting. But scenery can also communicate more subtle ideological information, such as the wistful yearning for the past that would be implied by gothic ruins in the set of Romantic-era drama.

The scene design may also symbolically reinforce or contradict the themes of a play (Palmer 105, 111). For example, a play about a lone woman on a desert island that explores themes of isolation and vulnerability might be somewhat weakened if the scene paintings featured trees, cliffs, and other variations of landscape instead of perhaps portraying a flat, level plain and a bare, stark horizon.

Sometimes, traditional visual elements associated with a particular time and place can thwart intended themes by disrupting the appropriate tone of a performance. Palmer cites a review of a 1987 production of *A Christmas Carol* which succeeded in correcting

some of the sunny images of Victorian London modern audiences occasionally associate with the well-loved story:

Bob McNamee writes: ‘Gone is the Christmas-card staging, the colorful Victorian buildings with icicles on the windows. Instead there are grimy, gritty buildings. These give Scrooge’s bitterness and the degradation suffered by the poor more of a hard edge. The result is that Scrooge’s transformation into a protector of the needy is more exhilarating, the dancing at Fezziwig’s and the Christmas day celebrations more wondrous’ (*Pawtucket Evening Times*, 12/5/87). (110)

In addition the scenery can communicate other kinds of information to the audience, external to considerations of economic status of characters, physical location of the action, or historical setting. Palmer points out that “A stage setting conditions audience expectations regarding the overall style of a production. As soon as the audience sees the setting, it cues them as to the degree of realism or exaggeration in the script, acting, and other production components” (113).

An element of “intertextuality” is possible in scenic design. In other words, the meaning communicated can be influenced through allusions to paintings or works of art, just as a poem or novel can evoke imagery, themes, style, and history, by alluding to another work or author. Though Palmer explains his mention of the following reviews as a way to illustrate a tactic of reviewers to maximize limited article space, it remains notable that artists and artworks of various genres are mentioned, and it is not difficult to imagine that the scenic designers whom the reviewers write about use visual allusions

from time to time as a means of communicating something appropriate to the performance:

A new adaptation of *Frankenstein* uses ‘coal-black furniture, and set pieces are nightmarishly distorted à la *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*,’ according to William Albright (*The Houston Post*, 9/16/86). Frank Rich describes John Lee Beatty’s scenery for *Bloody Poetry* as ‘abstract canvas settings, hinting lightly of Turner’s brushstrokes’ (*New York Times*, 1/7/87). For the Folger Theatre’s *Love’s Labor’s Lost*, the ‘set is straight out of a Maxfield Parrish illustration,’ according to Joe Brown. (Palmer 113)

## Venue

A few words ought to be said about the packaging of the performance because the way it functions to communicate meaning is similar to that of scenery. Palmer rightly points out that reviewers (and audiences) only take notice of the architectural setting for a performance if it is new, unusual, or has some kind of overt relationship to the play being performed (99). But occasionally the venue can completely alter the way an audience experiences a performance. A concave stage boundary, for example, could make the audience feel more involved in or surrounded by the action. A performance staged in a well-known or historical building will guide spectators subtly to associate the events connected with the building to the drama of the performance.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Palmer uses this review as an illustration of the phenomenon: “The faded grandeur of the [train] station lends an elegant framework to a play that so often touches on the magnified ideals of classical drama. And the station itself sets off shock waves of collective reminiscences through an audience who will come to see themselves as participants in the development of the drama (*Narragansett Times*, 10/9/87)” (Palmer 100).

Aston and Savona expand on this idea, explaining that “The style in which [a theatre] is designated and built is in itself a cultural sign both of theatre and the society which creates it.” They note specifically the ornate, luxurious style of building used in Victorian theatres, which reflects the bourgeois temperament for climbing the ladder of affluence (112).

### **Mise en scène: lighting, costume, sound**

Light may be manipulated in terms of “color, intensity, quality (diffusion and luminousness), direction, and shape of light distributed” and has the capability of conveying a wide range of kinds of information (Palmer 117). It can also help focus, or to use Aston and Savona’s term, to hierarchise the elements drawing the audience attention. (Film, in comparison, has tools to more explicitly and precisely focus the audience’s attention, for example by using close ups or unique camera angles.) In addition, lighting design can lend support to the established tempo of the drama – the rate at which the lighting changes can produce the feeling of tension and fast-paced movement or evoke an atmosphere of tranquility, even lethargy (Palmer 117, 121). Finally, “striking use of light for symbolic effects usually merits special attention” (Palmer 123), an effect used similarly in film. One example of this is noticeable in Orson Welles’ *The Trial* (based on Kafka’s story), which uses shadows that resemble prison bars to emphasize K’s feeling of being condemned.

Another theatrical sign system related to the mise-en scène is that of costume and makeup design. These elements, like gesture, are related to real-life social codes that transmit messages about a person’s occupation, age, wealth, and even beliefs and culture. “Most societies,” Palmer explains, “develop an elaborate language of clothing” (123-4).

Costumes and make-up, like scenery, can be used to allude to the visual style of a particular artist in any genre (Palmer 136), along with any accompanying connotations the audience might draw. Costuming can similarly be used to make witty references to similar ends, as is noted in of this 1986 production of *Tartuffe*:

Costumes may help an actor to impersonate a character well known to the audience. When the Old Globe transfers *Tartuffe* to postbellum Kentucky, Jonathan Saville calls attention to the plainspeaking brother-in-law, ‘cleverly dressed by costume designer Lewis Brown to look like Mark Twain’ (*San Diego Reader*, 6/26/86). (Palmer 125)

It is also worth mentioning that a costume can affect the way an actor moves, and “the way an actor wears, uses, or moves in a costume” can lead the audience to draw conclusions about character or themes as well (Palmer 125).

Beyond considerations of lighting and costume, a few words about the signifying capabilities of music are appropriate, especially in light of the designation of *The Knight of Snowdown* as a “musical drama.” At times, composers do not consider the historical or generic appropriateness of the style of music they compose in. Palmer notes one review in which the score of a particular production made use of rhythms common to pop-tunes, and thus failed to reinforce the emotional depth and sincerity of the main character (134). Instrumentation, whether atmospheric music or song accompaniment, has the potential of helping the audience recognize characters and make associations through the use of leitmotif (ibid).

In creating a sensitive stage adaptation of a literary work, a dramatist ought to consider the multifaceted language systems of literature and theatre. Some of these things



carry over from the model for film adaptation in chapter one. A dramatist might note the primary structural divisions, look for repeated images, and be attentive to speech patterns for characters. He should then look for parallel ways to communicate these things on stage.

Megan Sanborn Jones's BYU production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, staged January and February 2008, is a good example of various approaches to theatrical adaptation. In this production Jones has changed the setting (locality and history) of the play, presumably to help make it new or fresh for new audiences, and to tease out themes that might otherwise be overlooked (or impose themes that were hardly there to begin with). This is a dimension of adaptation that scholars are currently writing about (that there is meaning to be explored in the points of difference in an adaptation). Sanders notes Cartmell's observation about adaptive choices that move the work "closer to the audience's frame of reference in temporal, geographic, or social terms" (Sanders 21; see also 18-19). Sanborn's changes open the play for a postcolonial reading, an approach she hopes will interest students and faculty in the university community.

The most obvious adaptive choice in the production is its setting in "a mythical South American country during the colonial period of the 19<sup>th</sup> century," as the playbill puts it. Thus Hippolyta the conquered Amazon Queen becomes Hippolyta the ruler of an imaginary and recently colonized country, the fairies of the wood become the indigenous magical creatures of Hippolyta's country, and Theseus, Duke of Athens, becomes a colonizing ruler. These changes still allow the audience to retain the sense of Hippolyta having been a fierce warrior and understand the tension in her relationship with her fiancé, as a woman conquered both in love and political power.

But there is also a dimension of translating the literary devices apparent in Shakespeare's text to the devices of the stage. Beyond thematic and contemporizing considerations of adaptation, the playbill notes the parallels between the "verbal language" of the text of the play and the "physical language" of this production: The lines Shakespeare penned for Theseus, a representative of the Athenian world, "are almost entirely written in [...] iambic pentameter," perhaps the most regular and structured pattern of writing in English, while in contrast, "the language of the forest is often written in free verse." The choreographer, in attempt to reflect the differences in speech patterns for each group of characters, decided that the Athenians would "stand erect and move in primarily straight lines," while the fairies would "move through the space using a variety of levels, pacing, and patterns" (Sanborn Jones 20-21).

In addition Sanborn's production takes notice of continual references to the moon, moonshine, Diana or Phoebe, etc. in Shakespeare's text of the play. The opening lines of the play use the moon as a metaphor for Theseus' eagerness to marry Hippolyta. In the concluding lines of the drama, Robin Goodfellow speaks of the moon just before he calls the fairies forth to bless the lovers on their wedding night. In addition, Lysander, Hermia, Titania, Oberon, and even the tradesmen-turned players talk of the moon throughout the play. This repeated imagery is reflected in the set of Sanborn's production, which features a large cutout moon quite prominently as a backdrop for all of the forest scenes, and some of the other scenes as well. In both the case of the movement reflecting the speech patterns and the scene design reflecting the repeated imagery of the text, the adapters have made choices that reinforce the spoken lines of the play instead of taking their place, which adapters of novels might do. This example serves to illustrate how a

theatrical adaptation might be translated from a textual source, even when the dialogue is not transferred from novel to script.

Because the performances analyzed later in this project are from 1811 and 1844, I have gathered clues as to what the performances looked and felt like from a variety of sources. The foremost of these are the printed dramas, with the script, author notes, stage directions, *dramatis personae*, costume lists, and available scores for the music. In addition, I have perused advertisements, published reviews, and available audience descriptions. Beyond those resources, I have pieced together relevant biographical information about actors and other contributors. But before turning to the analysis of the formal parallels between the literature and stage adaptations I've chosen, I must first describe briefly the literary and dramatic climate of nineteenth-century England.

3. Nineteenth Century Theatre in London: “*The great popular entertainer of the day*”<sup>8</sup>

*“It seems preferable to follow the process of reception by a given public under certain given conditions, thus carrying out a semiological study in situ, relating the explicatory patterns to the spectators [sic] interpretive patterns”*

- Patrice Pavis, *Languages of the Stage*, 17.

### **Nineteenth-century theatre criticism**

For the past several decades, the opinion of many theatre and literary scholars about nineteenth-century theatre has been negative. In the 1960s Vera Mowry Roberts noted that “so far as dramatic literature of lasting value is concerned, almost all of the nineteenth century has been characterized as a practically arid desert” (41). The negative stereotypes associated with nineteenth-century theatre still appear in the theatrical discourse of the past twenty years. Palmer quotes a reviewer who uses melodrama to evoke images of overdone, comic gestures not to be taken seriously: the reviewer thinks that the actor “trades on a bag of character tricks that is severely limited. His double-takes and devilish glares are the tiresome stuff of villainy in 19<sup>th</sup>-century melodrama”<sup>9</sup> (quoted in Palmer 50). Nina Auerbach adds that even today, many theatre scholars are of the opinion that “Victorian theatre is the scruffy orphan of high culture [...]the stage was and is crude, embarrassing, primitive, compared to its sister arts, prose, poetry, and painting” (3). Whatever name it is called by – Romantic, Regency, Victorian – the theatrical tradition in question is often considered, in Auerbach’s words, “collaborative, messy, and

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<sup>8</sup> Michael Slater, quoted in Williams, Tony, *The Representation of London in Regency and Victorian Drama (1821-1881)* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Miller Press, 2000), xiv.

<sup>9</sup> Review appears in *The Richmond News Leader*, 11/1/86.

lost” (3), situated as it is between the grand, noble speeches of the neoclassical stage and what Auerbach calls the “self-conscious literacy of Wilde and Shaw” (3).

Perhaps it is easy for contemporary scholars to look back on the past and judge it by contemporary cultural standards or to take an intellectually elite position. Auerbach wryly critiques such a position: “In the first half of the nineteenth century, the story goes, audiences were predominantly lower class, thus by definition drunk and raucous.” In later decades – those approaching the century whose theatrical heritage scholars today are happy to claim – theatre managers “appealed to a middle-class family audience who [...] evolved grandly into the cultivated – for which we may read wealthy and fashionable – classes.” (4-5). But interestingly, negative criticism about nineteenth-century theatre did not begin in the past fifty years. It began in the era that produced it.

Coming from the tradition of neoclassical drama, many theatre critics in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries thought of theatre as the realm of language, a literary genre (O’Brien 105). It is understandable then, that when new forms of theatre like pantomime and melodrama – which were developed to accommodate the rapidly growing body of theatregoers, and, in the case of pantomime, which frequently did not include much dialogue – were introduced, some critics derided such genres a “sensual feast.” As pantomime scholar John O’Brien notes, reviewers felt these new forms of theatre “threatened to incapacitate spectators’ ability to exercise critical judgment, trumping their reason by flooding their senses with an excess of stimulation” (105). In her study of melodrama, Jacky Bratton adds that “it was almost impossible” for the literary-minded to see these most popular theatrical genres as anything other than “a

threat[,] and the emerging culture as inferior.” The intellectual elite of the day seemed to agree that theatre was sliding into a bog of considerable stench (116).

But O’Brien argues that to judge a non-literary genre on the basis of literary merit would be unfair and unproductive. He agrees with Bratton’s view that “what is amiss” in some approaches to evaluating nineteenth century theatre “is the assumption that melodrama *is* ‘a literary form’” (Bratton 117), and points out that on the other hand, scholars working in disciplines related to performance studies, film, or cultural studies possess the “critical tools [...] to explore forms that fall outside the domain of the literary without apology.” In short, we must, and a few critics of the age did, “consider pantomime not as failed drama but as successful popular entertainment” (O’Brien 105).

Auerbach asserts that it wasn’t until the last decades of the century that “the theatre, like the novel, grew ashamed of mere popularity and aspired to high art,” although historical studies have shown that some theatre managers and performers in the early 1800s lamented the shift in audience tastes. It is true that unlike the majority of their predecessors, “later Victorian and Edwardian plays were written for publication as well as performance” (6), but the contemporary opinions about the value of popular theatre trends were mixed. O’Brien has found that in some cases,

“those who recorded their admiration also express some misgivings about endorsing a form so devoted to spectacle and sensation. Its enduring popularity was occasionally a source of embarrassment to critics, as well as to theatre managers, actors, and dramatists, who believed that the British theatre was undermined by so seemingly frivolous a form of

entertainment. That audiences enjoyed entertainment filled with slapstick and spectacle rather than edifying speeches was galling.” (105)

But for better or for worse, nineteenth-century theatres were at the mercy of the tastes of their mass audiences in order to stay financially viable, and these audiences found the spectacular displays of pantomime and melodrama appealing and fascinating. An examination of the constituent parts of theatre in the nineteenth century reveals that such genres had alternate forms of meaning-making; sign systems that operated outside of the worlds of speech or the literary.

### **Pantomime and melodrama**

The two new theatrical forms with the most impact in the nineteenth century were pantomime and melodrama, though plays were advertized with a variety of genre labels such as burletta, musical drama, or simply drama. Tragedies continued to be performed as well, and beginning during the eighteenth century and continuing through the early nineteenth century, an evening of performance at the patent theatres typically began with two full-length pieces – tragedies or other serious dramatic works – followed by an afterpiece, either a one-act comedy or a pantomime (O’Brien 103, Brockett 352). This pattern grew out of a desire for a theatrical foil for the often sentimental tragedy in the 1720s, and was reinforced by the Lord Chamberlain’s theatre regulations. Only the patent houses (Drury Lane, Covent Garden, and to a limited degree, Haymarket) were licensed to perform the tragedies and serious dramas. The smaller theatres, which began to appear with the population growth in London in the late 1700s and early 1800s (Brockett 352), began to exploit or devise new genres of theatre and thus, with the use of pantomime and the invention of melodrama, they were able to stay competitive with the patent theatres

(Brockett 353-4). The mandates that gave rise to this situation lasted until 1843, when the Theatre Regulation act authorized all licensed theatres to perform any kind of play (Brockett 354).

The pantomime genre consisted of the presentation of a plot taken from classical mythology, fairytales, folklore, and later, current events and popular fiction. These stories were enacted by characters from the commedia dell'arte – Harlequin, Columbine, and Pantaloon (O'Brien 103); however, the genre emphasized plot and character much less than its visual elements; indeed, as O'Brien, an expert on the genre, observes,

The true heart of pantomime lay in acrobatics, spectacle, song, dance, travelogue, slapstick and special effects. [...] Many of pantomime's most salient pleasures were visual ones: the motions of the performers, the magic of the stage machinery, the beauty and grandeur of the scenery. (103-104)

Though the elaborate scenery and “transformations” – and these were presented through special effects that seemed magic tricks to the audience – took center stage, “pantomimes were never fully wordless – they were filled with song [...] and sometimes did contain dialogue,” but where “serious drama” emphasized speech and avoided spectacle, pantomime valued the inverse (O'Brien 104).

A decade into the nineteenth century, pantomime had changed somewhat, though it still retained the general features of the harlequin characters, a love story, emphasis on spectacle, and elements of a classical myth or fairy tale (O'Brien 109-111). The primary difference was in its structure, and perhaps in the ideological underpinnings of that change: by the early years of the nineteenth century, the humorous and fantastical bulk of



the performance was only bookended by the more serious episodes at the beginning and end, and O'Brien reports that "the shift into the magical world of the harlequinade happened at the moment when the events in the 'serious' plot had reached an impasse" (111).

As the nineteenth century progressed further, pantomime evolved to include even more spectacle. Victorian age pantomimes relegated the harlequin aspects to the very end of the presentation and spent the bulk of the performance relating a folk tale that climaxed with a "splendid transformation scene." But Harlequin remained as a sort of nostalgic nod to the conventions that gave rise to the spectacular presentations on stage at the time (O'Brien 113-114).

Melodrama, Jacky Bratton explains, is a sister art to the pantomime. Whereas the pantomime first appeared in the 1720s and continued to be popular for more than a century, the first production staged under the name melodrama on the English stage was *A Tale of Mystery*, translated from by Pixérécourt's *Coelina* and performed in 1802 (17, 19). Melodrama became the most popular of the theatrical styles presented by small theatres trying to compete with patent houses (Bratton 17). The Lord Chamberlain's technical definition of a melodrama was simply any theatrical work written in three acts with musical accompaniment (Brockett 353-354). Beyond this, melodramas typically included stock character types (hero, heroine, and villain) (Bratton 119). However, the genre has a clear link to pantomime in that it is, Bratton observes, "a genre which weaves its meanings from music, mime, comedy, and spectacle" (118).

In fact, she argues that melodrama defied the supposed literariness of theatre to an even greater degree than the scarcely dialogued pantomime, because melodrama lifted

“sensuous and spectacular performance to new heights of illusion and invaded the “serious” drama’s realm of moral and exemplary story-telling” (117). In melodrama, “music, song, and dance combine with elaborate, gestural acting, employing the whole body to express emotion.” In short, it utilizes “the entire repertoire of physical performance” (119).

Together, pantomime and melodrama introduced a new signifying system to the theatre, not to mention a new audience. For melodrama, true, but for pantomime as well, “the verbal script may be slight, but rapid exchanges between the many sign systems (plot, spectacle, fighting, music, humor) create complex meanings,” Bratton explains (119). In a study of the changes in scenic design that defined theatre in that age, Christopher Baugh argues that “new technologies of spectacle and show need not be understood as invaders and corrupters of dramatic literature, but as a part of the continuum of change whereby the theatrical experience both responded to, and reflected its audiences’ concerns and interests” (43-44). Melodrama and pantomime are genres that illustrate sensitivity to their audiences’ concerns.

Melodrama, for example, “acts out conflicts and personifies cultural meanings” in non-verbal ways (Bratton 119). Bratton posits that during the Romantic age, “the Rousseauvian appeal to the language of the heart, rejecting the potential deceptiveness of words, was effectively embodied on the melodramatic stage” through the presence of mute characters or other figures incapable of speech (119).

A parallel kind of non-verbal communication in the spectacle of pantomime served a satirical function on stage. The transformation tricks, for instance, showed audiences how one thing (or person) is similar to another, in ways that are not evident at

first glance. At times this did the work of challenging socioeconomic hierarchies by suggesting visually that, in O'Brien's words, "high and low share common characteristics" (113). The comparisons drawn were at times humorous or, indeed, satirical. A review of a pantomime in *The Times* reports the transformation of a target into "an emblematical picture in honour of the Union."<sup>10</sup>

The popularity of pantomimic and melodramatic techniques was powerful, and the influence of spectacle extended into other genres of theatre as well. Oscar Brockett describes an 1820 performance of *King Lear* at Drury Lane which played out the storm scene with trees that bent in the wind and sound effects that portrayed a violent tempest so effectively that Lear's lines were not audible (358).

### **The novelist and the stage**

Nineteenth century culture was defined as much by popular reading as by the popular stage. In her introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian and Edwardian Theatre*, Nina Auerbach writes, "in nineteenth-century England, literature and the theatre were collaborative storytellers; they were the dominant media through which audiences understood the world" (4). In the term "literature," Auerbach possibly intends to include newspapers and periodicals, as they were certainly an important part of a nineteenth-century Londoner's life. But the literary darling of the masses was unquestionably the novel.

In spite of the gulf theatre critics tried to establish between the literary and the theatrical, literature and theatre had a uniquely symbiotic relationship. The early decades of the nineteenth century saw a growing trend, especially in pantomimes and melodramas, of gleaning dramatic material from novels. O'Brien reports that in later

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<sup>10</sup> Tuesday, Dec 23, 1800; page 2.

versions of pantomime, those common in the 1800s, plots were taken from popular fiction in addition to current events, fairytales, and folklore (103-104). In a similar vein, Bratton writes that “second-generation” writers of melodrama turned to current events reported in the newspapers for their material, and that they also mined the popular novels, “making spectacles of nationhood from Walter Scott and forging a domestic typology from such writers as [...] Charles Dickens” (125-126).

Bratton’s statement alludes to the fact that Scott and Dickens are two of the most important literary sources in nineteenth-century stage adaptation. Bolton’s expansive bibliographies *Scott Dramatized* and *Dickens Dramatized* illustrate their importance to theatre more clearly. “The most prolific phase in the history of novel dramatizing began with *Guy Mannering*, from Scott,” (*Dickens Dramatized* 15) and the practice continued with strength when Dickens began to be published.

By the end of the nineteenth century, plays adapted from Dickens novels had been staged 1,000 times, and 750 plays based on Scott had been mounted. It is notable too that Scott adaptations were mostly performed at the patent theatres, while Dickens adaptations were primarily produced at the “minor” theatres such as the Royal Surrey and the Adelphi. In the same vein Scott’s material was adapted for opera much more frequently than Dickens’s (*Dickens Dramatized* 19). In addition to dramatizations that were actually produced, there were numerous scripts that were never mounted, and Bolton considers them a part of the authors’ “theatrical posterity” as well (*Scott Dramatized* vii, *Dickens Dramatized* vii).

There was undoubtedly an economic factor in the choice of dramatists to adapt works of popular fiction and of theatre managers to produce them. In the days of the Old

Price Riots, when protests against raised ticket prices lasted for two months, and in the days when theatre managers were struggling to keep up with the expense of increasingly elaborate stagings, it is easy to understand the appeal of dramatizing stories that had proved their stunning popularity in another genre. Linda Hutcheon acknowledges this financial motive for adapters in general, no matter the century (87). She also explains the appeal for theatregoers to witness on stage what they have already read. “Part of this pleasure, I want to argue, comes simply from repetition with variation, from the comfort of ritual combined with the piquancy of surprise. Recognition and remembrance are part of the pleasure (and risk) of experiencing an adaptation; so too is change” (4).

The change Hutcheon refers to consists of the sometimes inadvertent, sometimes deliberate alterations that inevitably take place in an adaptation, even if simply by virtue of transferring a message (in this case, a story) to the language of another genre. Sanders asserts that in the Victorian age especially, dramatists seem to have taken great liberty in altering the works they adapt (Sanders 3).

### **Nineteenth-century theatre “in situ”**

#### ***Scene design and stage machinery***

In spite of the monumental change in dominant theatre genres from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, Christopher Baugh’s research reveals that the biggest difference between plays of the two eras is the “reliance upon pictorial scenery” in the nineteenth century. In the 1740s, scenery was simply a “decorative background” (43), but a hundred years later, in many ways, scene design was the star of nineteenth-century theatre. By 1840, all elements of scenery, architecture, and stage effects were used in concert “to transport the spectator’s imagination into the ‘other worlds’ which the theatre

sought to (re)create” (43). The procedures surrounding nearly all the other elements of theatre were affected by changes in scene design.

In the eighteenth century tragedies, the extent of stage effects was the use of weights and pulleys to bring gods down to the stage from above. However, with the advent of the Industrial Revolution and the new technologies made available by it, scenic design and special effects used in the “minor” but popular theatrical forms became more elaborate and lighting techniques improved (Baugh 43, 45).

Brockett has found that during John Philip Kemble’s management at Covent Garden (1802-1817), some of the spectacular stage effects included a setting with “a gorge spanned by a bridge that could be cut loose so that the hero might escape from his would-be killers” for one production and “a troupe of mounted cavalry” for another. At Kemble’s retirement in 1817, “it was accepted that all drama should be ‘illustrated’ as completely as possible” (358).

Audiences had an appetite for spectacle and accuracy in scene paintings before theatrical practice and technological innovation made it available to them. A 1755 publication – *Reflections upon Theatrical Expression in Tragedy* by Roger Pickering – makes a plea for improvements:

I am not extravagant enough to propose that a *new* Set of Scenes should be produced at every *new Tragedy*. I mean only that there should never be such a *Scarcity of Scenes* in the *Theatre*, but, that, whether the Seat of Action be *Greek, Roman, Asiatic, African, Italian, Spanish, &c.*, there may be one *Set*, at least, adapted to *each* country; and that we, the Spectators,

may not be put upon to believe ourselves abroad, when we have no *local Imagery* before us, but that of our *own Country*. (quoted in Baugh 45).

If Mr. Pickering had only lived until the 1820s and 1830s, his wishes would have been gratified and then some, for in those decades panoramas were used to achieve the illusion of instantaneously traveling from Greece to Rome to Asia to Africa and beyond in a display of “spectacular transitions” (Baugh 54).

The two specific areas of scenic design upon which, in Christopher Baugh’s opinion, technology had the most profound impact were lighting innovations and the availability of improved pigments for painters. Because of discoveries made in the mining industry, colors of increased vividness became available to scene painters in greater quantities and at lower prices (53-54). Reviews of the period spent a lot of space commenting on scenery, and no wonder: the brighter hues and improved realism of the scene paintings that came about over a fairly short period seemed “nearly miraculous” to theatregoers (*The Times*, 27 December 1828, quoted in Baugh 54).

During the eighteenth century, theatres and stages were lit with oil lamps and candelabras. A new kind of wick that improved the functionality of oil lamps was developed in the late 1700s. Later, in the 1810s, gaslight began to be employed, and it was well-established by the 1820s (Baugh 51-52). The invention of gaslight was a tremendous improvement, because it allowed for the intensity of light to be adjusted as needed (53). Finally, the 1830s saw the introduction of limelight, which functioned as a sort of spotlight (53).

### *Music*

The set was a star, but the music in nineteenth-century theatre was also a leading character. It has already been established that music was a factor in the distinctions of genre. This meant that since the Lord Chamberlain was not specific about the quantity of music required for melodrama status, at times dramatists included rather scant amounts of music in order to get away with producing altered “serious plays” (Brockett 353-354).

But music had a much more substantial place in most melodramas. Jacky Bratton’s description of *A Tale of Mystery* – the first melodrama performed in England – makes this clear.

The villain acts with the scenery and delivers speeches of horror and repentance in a dialogue with the sound effects and music. The play is dubbed a ‘melodrame’ precisely because music does not accompany but actively participates in the scene, shaping the narrative and extending what the characters do and say as well as framing the audience’s responses.

Here the orchestra has the last word. (120)

### *Venue*

Some significant changes in the architectural design of theatres both affected the way some theatrical practices were carried out and influenced the way the audience experienced and thought about theatre. During the 1790s, both Covent Garden and Drury Lane were rebuilt, and the new theatres could each seat more than 3,000 audience members (Davis 57, Brockett 352). This meant that audiences were somewhat detached from the experience, in part as well because the stage – which had formerly been a thrust stage, and on which audience members sometimes stood during a performance – was now



a proscenium stage, framed by a decorated proscenium arch. This, in addition to the new custom of darkening the house lights so that actors and audience no longer shared the same light, served to define the performance space as separate and distinct from the audience space (Baugh 44-49).

Another consideration of venue is the bourgeois preference for elegance which affected the design of the theatres themselves. That is, the buildings that housed the theatres, as well as various considerations of production elements that influenced how the stage appeared, had a more opulent appearance. David Garrick, who managed Drury Lane during the later 1700s, had no hesitation about the “expense of decorating a play” (quoted in Baugh 46). It was not only that the look of theatres changed; the number of them increased dramatically as well. During the period from 1800 to 1843, the amount of theatres in London increased from six to twenty-one (Brockett 352).

### ***Direction***

During the eighteenth and much of the nineteenth century, directors as such did not exist. Theatre managers, who were almost always actors, had the most influence in overarching artistic choices, overseeing the hiring of actors, scene designers and other production artists, approving the design of the theatre, establishing ticket prices, selecting plays for production, etc., but in general, the theatrical product was the result of each of the creative artists – actors, composers, painters, dancing masters, etc. working in their own spheres. A departure from this system took place for the first time during scene painter Philippe Jacques de Loutherbourg’s employment at Drury Lane in 1772. He demanded having some artistic control over costume and machinery, and to harmonize his own work with that of the composer and ballet master (Baugh 47-48).

Brockett notes that William Charles Macready, who managed Covent Garden from 1837 to 1839 and Drury Lane from 1841 to 1843, “was one of the earliest directors in the modern sense.” Macready dictated to the actors what their placement on stage should be. In addition, he influenced the way rehearsals were held by fully acting out his own roles in rehearsal, whereas the custom had been to wait until the performance to actually act the role (362).

### *Acting*

Though actors remained indispensable to the art, their importance was deemphasized in the nineteenth century. Partly because of the increased size of the theatres, and partly because of the more elaborate scenery, acting styles had to adapt. The first change was that actors were required to exaggerate their gestures and the volume of their voices in order to be understood by the audience, which was now positioned farther from the acting space. Next, as Peter Thompson observes, lighting innovations allowed managers to create an improved illusion of verisimilitude by having actors “work among the scenery rather than in front of it.” Acting handbooks produced during that time suggested that performers “visit [art] galleries for inspiration” (17). Indeed, Shearer West has conducted a study that reveals that, partly because of the shift in emphasis toward scene painting and the actor’s relationship with the scenery, “the actor became an image, responded to, interpreted and analyzed like a work of art” (quoted in J. Davis 60).

An emphasis on gestural acting is perhaps the best-known feature of nineteenth century acting styles. Although John Philip Kemble and Sarah Siddons, whose fame began in the eighteenth century and lasted into the nineteenth, acted in a style defined by neoclassical dignity and poise, (Brockett 359), acting styles in general evolved to become

“physically vigorous and energetic” over this period (Donohue 18-19). Edmund Kean, one of the most popular actors in the early nineteenth century, was one performer who captivated audiences through his on-stage presence (Thompson 12).

### *Costume*

In general costume design was in a transitional state in the first few decades of the nineteenth century. It was slowly undergoing a shift toward greater accuracy, historical and cultural. This movement was spearheaded by Charles Kemble and James Robinson Planché (Brockett 358), and though it still had much progress to make as of the performance of *The Knight of Snowdon* in 1811, there would nevertheless have been articles of clothing in that production that served as a sort of theatrical synecdoche, visually implying the dress of Scottish Highlanders in centuries past (Brockett 357). But although complete authenticity in costuming had not yet arrived, actors and managers still considered costumes a communicative tool. For example, Thompson reports that the comic actor John Liston gave “painstaking attention to costume” in order to achieve greater comic effect. He made costuming choices that showed off “the grotesque floppiness of his body” and wore “overtight trousers” to emphasize his humorous gestures (Thompson 14).

### *Audiences*

Nineteenth-century audiences were complex in terms of their motives for attending the theatre, their behavior at the theatre, and their influence over theatrical practices. In 1800, London was already the most populous city in Europe, and its population increased dramatically over the next forty years. One of the results of this population growth was that the working class, for the first time, attended the theatre in

numbers significant enough to make their tastes an important consideration for theatre managers (Brockett 352). Nina Auerbach notes that the various genres of theatre performed “drew virtually all classes” (5), but it is only in response to the preferences of those classes that the various genres developed. In addition, theatregoers who participated in the Old Price Riots of 1809 exerted their influence in a powerful way, letting John Philip Kemble know how displeased they were with the increase in ticket prices (Thompson 16-17).

Though there was a stereotype promulgated (mostly through graphic art printed in periodicals) that audience members of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were ill-behaved, this was not really an accurate representation. Jim Davis writes that “despite the [...] occasional bouts of riotous behavior, spectators were attentive.” And they were not only attentive, but they responded emotionally to what they witnessed on stage: “Both men and women reacted with tears to the intense tragic performances of Sarah Siddons and some of her female supporters even succumbed to hysteria and fainting fits” (59).

Besides being a realm of entertainment or enlightenment, the theatre was an important social arena for audience members as well. The writings of William Hazlitt and others indicate that people attended not only to view a performance, but also to be seen and to socialize. The theatre was, as Davis points out, “the largest secular indoor space where people could meet together” (59). Audiences spent a lot of time there. During the first forty years of the nineteenth century, an evening’s offerings at the theatre lasted for upwards of six hours (Brockett 352). The effect of this coming together for a shared experience was profound in William Hazlitt’s mind. Writing in 1829, he noted the ability

of the theatre “to unite people, humanize them, reconcile their conflicting interests and give them something to talk about.” Attending the theatre, he wrote, could produce for the spectator “ideas and feelings in common with his neighbors” (quoted in Davis 59).

Theatre audiences were also literate, or at least familiar with reading culture, saturated as it was with newspapers and novels. Philip Cox, in writing about stage adaptations of Dickens novels, finds significance in the inclusion in some productions of tableaux depicting scenes from the novels. For Cox, this indicates that the audience was familiar with the novels because tableau scenes were usually recognizable scenes from literature, and it is mostly in the pleasure of recognition that audiences find enjoyment in such presentations. (Cox 144; see also Sanders 22).

### *Theatrical reviews*

Before turning finally to an analysis of the adaptive process discernible in the sample plays, it is necessary to discuss the function of reviews and describe the typical inclusions in theatrical reviews of the period. Richard Palmer introduces his handbook for critics by describing the “Nature and Functions of a Review.” In addition to reporting and recording the theatrical event, he explains, a reviewer must comply with the wishes of the readers, whose “demand for evaluation” requires the reviewer to assess what he sees in addition to describing it (1, 7-8). The reviewer bases his judgment of the play on the same cultural expectations and understandings as the audience and indeed “looks at a theatrical production from the point of view of the audience” (1). However, it is wise to remember that a critic serves his own purposes in writing as well. Reviewers sometimes strive to educate their readers in order to preserve a kind of elite understanding of drama and the stage (12), which results at times in the voicing of a viewpoint at odds with the opinions

of the public. And finally, since a reviewer hopes “to attract and retain readers,” he “usually strives to be entertaining as well” (13-14). This presumably leads theatre writers to occasionally exaggerate either their descriptions or their opinions.

A review from the dawn of the nineteenth century of an evening’s presentations at Covent Garden<sup>11</sup> demonstrates that the expectations of spectators differed depending on the genre of the performance and reflects the manner in which reviewers – and by extension audiences, viewed and thought about the theatre.

The review begins by briefly mentioning the full length plays for the evening, a tragedy and a “drama,” then spends the majority of the space discussing the afterpiece, a pantomime, which the reviewer heartily acclaims. Of the tragedy, it is simply stated that the actors played their roles “with appropriate feeling.” The drama is mentioned just as briefly, and it is noted here simply as evidence that the main plays of the evening were sometimes adapted material: the drama is titled *Emilia and Lady Macbeth*.

Then, turning our attention to the pantomime, the reviewer summarizes the event by noting the success of the humor and the “scenic magnificence” in the production.

The author acknowledges that “to look for consistency of plot in a Pantomime would be to expect that which is precluded by the very nature of this kind of representation.” If, however, a theatrical work of “dumb show” makes an appeal to the public through “fascinating” music, scenery, decorations, and costumes of quality, “splendor,” and quick and clever machinery, (as this pantomime apparently did), then, in the reviewer’s opinion, it is a roaring success.

The review goes on to praise the “transformations,” in which one object or person suddenly appears to be something else (“a pair of lamps to two Chinese giants,” for

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<sup>11</sup> *The Times*, Dec 23 1800

example), and after lauding various visual components of the presentation, the author approves the undoubtedly steep expense of the spectacle, adding the opinion that the production will, because of its certain future popularity, make a profit.

This solitary example indicates that at least on some level, audiences were conscious of the unique strengths of the different theatrical genres, and were willing to judge them based on their unique systems of signification.

#### 4. Case Study – Scott and Morton: The Lady and the Knight

*The Lady of the Lake* (Scott, 1810)

*The Knight of Snowdown* (Morton, 1811)

The script for Thomas Morton's 1811 adaptation of Sir Walter Scott's popularly acclaimed poetic narrative begins with the following notice from Morton:

This musical drama is founded on the poem of the Lady of the Lake; but as the writer's humble judgment has directed him to select, rather than to copy, he trusts the admirers of the poem will concede to him the indulgence of making such alterations in the original story, as stage necessity has induced him to adopt. (*The Knight of Snowdown*, Longworth 3)

This "advertisement" draws attention to one of the central issues of adapting from the medium of literature to that of stage performance, namely, the intriguing idea of "stage necessity." In other words, it highlights the fact that because of differences in medium, changes are unavoidable, and this will "have a bearing on how the story [is] told" (Pullman interview).

Morton's adaptation, formally titled *The Knight of Snowdown: a Musical Drama, in Three Acts*, was one of several adaptations produced in London or Scotland following the May 1810 publication and enormous success of *The Lady of the Lake*, and as Morton admits, *The Knight of Snowdown* includes some obvious alterations. Though he refers only to changes "in the original story," an analysis of Morton's theatrical elements in addition to his textual alterations explains the popular success of the adaptation in spite of negative critical opinions of the work. This analysis reveals the themes of Scott's poem



that Morton found most appropriate for the theatre-going populace of London; it also supports the assertion that the appeal of Romantic literature for the popular audience of *The Lady of the Lake* is congruent with nineteenth-century stage practices that valued illusion, spectacle, and the fantastic.

The popularity of *The Lady of the Lake* is illustrated in the fact that it sold 20,000 volumes in less than one year.<sup>12</sup> The run of the initial production of *The Knight of Snowdown* was not enormously popular, but it was respectably so, and Bolton notes that it was later produced “at least a dozen” times (*Scott Dramatized* 12). The question we are concerned with is *why*? Scott’s story had tremendous romantic appeal. It is a tale of chivalry set in the wild, unspoiled Scottish Highlands of the past. Morton is careful in his adaptation to preserve the peculiar manners of a people distant from his audience in time and space because early nineteenth-century theatregoers were fascinated with that “exotic” difference. In addition, Morton adapts Scott’s use of disguise and of mysterious identity for his dramatization. Of course, there are the “alterations” Morton warns us of, but adapter Terrence McNally writes that “the triumph of successful [...] musicals is how they reinvent the familiar and make it fresh” (quoted in Hutcheon 115), so the presence of such alterations should by no means make us doubt the adaptation’s potential for success.

Yet two contrasting critical statements about *The Knight of Snowdown* show that the quality of the play is debatable, and that the criterion that critics use in evaluating the quality of stage adaptations varies from review to review. The first, from the “remarks on the representation of The Knight of Snowdown, at Covent Garden Theatre (from a

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<sup>12</sup> This seems to be commonly known, as it appears in several sources. See *The Victorian Web’s* “Biographical Sketch of Sir Walter Scott.”

London publication)” is included in a version of the script published in New York two months after *Knight's* London stage debut. It is rather laudatory:

We feel pleasure in announcing [...] that its success was not disproportionate to its merits. With some few deviations from the original tale, the author has adhered with a laudable fidelity to the letter of his prototype [...] Upon the whole, the success of this piece may be considered as adding a leaf to the laurel that encircles the brow of the author of the poem [i.e., Scott], since the incidents and characters are his, and the language is also that of the poem varied into prose, but with diminished beauty. (Longworth 3-5)

The author of this review seems to think that the production was successful because of its quality, mostly as an adaptation, but also as a theatrical work. This reviewer's opinion is that the adapter should be applauded for being true to Scott's work. In contrast, in an 1832 commentary on British theatre, John Genest simply says of *The Knight of Snowdon*, “this poor piece was acted 23 times” (Genest 569). Though the opinion expressed is brief, it differs from that of the unspecified London publication in a significant way, especially since this short critique is mentioned in a chapter seeking to prove “that success cannot with propriety be considered as the criterion of merit” (Genest 564).

The most informative, scathing, and, it seems, reliable review is one found in the February 6 1811 issue of *The Times*, the day after *Knight's* opening performance. The reviewer calls the play “a very hazardous attempt” at adapting Scott's work, and seems to disapprove of the act of adaptation in general, calling the practice “the greatest

misfortune attendant upon literary merit.” This reviewer’s evaluation is best illustrated by the following excerpt:

To express, however, the improprieties of the play, it would be perhaps best at once to point out the deviations from the poem; and to say briefly, that where the dramatist was original he was bad, and where he was a plagiarist, injudicious. We say injudicious, because the few lines of the poem which were suffered to remain entire, had only the effect of rendering what they were combined with disagreeable; they were like misplaced ornaments on meretricious deformity, illustrating its wrinkles and obtruding its vice.

Perhaps it is questionable whether the adaptation is faithful or of quality, and I will use an analysis of the language of the script and song lyrics, an exploration of the changes in characters and plot, and an investigation of other theatrical elements of Morton’s version to explore this. First, however, we must consider how each of the cited critics determines quality.

There is not much evidence in Genest’s unfavorable review with which to construe a paradigm for measuring “merit”; however, another reviewer of similar opinion performs a more thorough exegesis. A retrospective article from the *Boston Transcript* written at the close of the nineteenth century comments on adaptations of *The Lady of the Lake* and calls Morton’s work as adapter “unsatisfactory.” (However, it does recognize strengths in certain elements of the performance, namely, the ability of the actors and the popularity of H.R. Bishop’s music.) This review also argues that “Morton took unwarrantable liberties with the story” (quoted in Bolton, 12). The *Times* article has a

similar view: “The dramatist has often deviated from the story of the poem; and in no one instance, do we conceive, with judgment.”

It seems then that both camps claim to define the quality of this adaptation based on loyalty to Scott’s original, the difference being that the anonymous London publication claims that Morton is faithful, and the *Boston Transcript* claims that he is not. The *Times* review bases its criticism on the opinion that Morton’s work neither fully preserves Scott’s language nor fully alters it, but straddles the line, and with poor judgment. How is it possible for multiple reviews to oppose each other so oppositely on the issue of adaptive fidelity? This question lies at the heart of the process of adaptation itself. The author of the *Boston Transcript* article seems to be put off by discrepancies from the specific events, characters, and details of Scott’s poem, perhaps preferring a more literal translation. The anonymous critic published in the New York script, on the other hand, while admitting “deviations from the original tale” (*The Knight of Snowdown*, Longworth 4), seems delighted with the preservation of the essence of the story and the elements which fascinated audiences. The reviewer is possibly thinking of, among other things, “the striking peculiarities of feudal manners and the barbarous but lofty and imposing pride of chivalry” (*The Knight of Snowdown*, Longworth 3).

At first glance the review in the New York script seems to take a generous approach in defining a faithful adaptation, but we must recall Linda Hutcheon’s assertion that it is the only viable approach. “Just as there is no such thing as a literal translation,” she writes, “there can be no literal adaptation” (Hutcheon 16).

To push the question of fidelity further, let us consider another area of Hutcheon’s theory of adaptation, in which she likens artistic adaptation to Darwin’s theory of

evolution. She writes, “to think of narrative adaptation in terms of a story’s fit and its process of mutation or adjustment, through adaptation, to a particular cultural environment is something I find suggestive” (Hutcheon 31). When we contextualize this analogy within the cultural environment of the English popular theatre in the early 1800s, what Hutcheon’s statement perhaps suggests is that the changes in Morton’s text may have been influenced by his sensitivity to the cultural preferences of London theatregoers and their expectations related to stage practices.

But Genest’s commentary, in a section not specifically devoted to *The Knight of Snowdown*, quotes a theatre critic who subscribes to the view that the majority of the theatre audience is unrefined or uninformed, thus supporting Genest’s claim that there is no correlation between success and merit:

Dennis observes, ‘to say that a play is good because it pleases the generality of an audience is absurd; before a play can be concluded to be good because it pleases, we ought to consider who are pleased by it, they who understand, or they who do not. They who understand? Alas they are but few.’ (564, punctuation modernized)

It has already been implied that theatregoers were at the very least familiar with Scott’s work, if they had not actually read it. This suggests already that Dennis misjudged the understanding of audiences. But beyond this, if successful plays are those that please the “generality of an audience,” then we must determine what pleases the populace in order to know whether these qualifications are compatible with the idea of “merit.” Sybil Rosenfeld, scholar of scenic design, explains that “the romantic’s passion for far-off places was matched by his passion for bye-gone ages” (41). Considering this, a story of

chivalry set in the Scottish Highlands during the sixteenth century seems a winning formula for nineteenth century British theatre-attenders, for if Scotland to them was not a far-off place, the customs of the Highlanders were certainly far removed from what was familiar to them. *The Knight of Snowdown*'s popularity should be attributed to Morton's vigilance in retaining instances from Scott's poem that described the chivalric values and Scottish customs that so fascinated the romantics (Scott xlv). One example of this is in Ellen's hospitable invitation to Fitz-James to be a guest "at the enchanted hall" (canto I line 533). Scott continues the story:

"Meet welcome to her guest she made,  
 And every courteous rite she paid  
 That hospitality could claim,  
 Though all unasked his birth and name.  
 Such then the reverence to a guest,  
 That Fellest foe might join the feast,  
 And from his deadliest foeman's door  
 Unquestioned turn, the banquet o'er." (l.582-589)

Scott's note for these lines explains that this kind of hospitality was customary among the Highlanders because a host's discovery that his guest is his feuding enemy (a likely possibility) may prevent the guest from receiving the help he needs.

Morton includes this Highland hospitality in his version of the story as well. When Fitz-James tries to thank Ellen for her kindness, she replies, "Nay, deem not this a courtesy; for, did our deadliest foeman claim hospitable aid, protected he would stay, unquestioned he would go" (l.1). Morton also has Ellen speak the words which in Scott's

poem are spoken by the unrecognized Roderick to Fitz-James: “Stranger, --that is a holy name” (Canto IV line 780).

Aside from the romantic fascination with removed places and ages, the contemporary love for spectacle is relevant in this adaptation. Roberts describes the painted scenery of the romantic stage as “fantastical,” and truly, if fantastic is an appropriate description of various visual elements of *The Knight of Snowdown*, it is also an appropriate description of the plot. Here again, Morton seems to have retained the relevant cultural points of interest for his audience in translating Scott’s work to the language of the stage in remaining true to the romantic appeal of Scott’s story, if not to specific plot details. But to discuss fantastic episodes in plot, we must first discuss alterations in the *dramatis personae* from Scott’s characters.

### **Characters and plot: Omissions, insertions, and alterations**

According to Bolton’s notes on dramatic adaptations of *The Lady of the Lake*, the characters commonly included in productions during Scott’s lifetime (up through 1832) are James Fitz-James/Knight of Snowdown, Roderick Dhu, Allan Bane, Malcolm Graeme, Malise, Blanche, Ellen, and Lady Margaret (Bolton 14). However, in Morton’s *The Knight of Snowdown*, the only characters from this list who remain are Fitz-James, Sir Roderick, and Ellen. Several new characters are introduced in Morton’s version, some of which serve to replace characters left out. However, there are two notable omissions for which there seems to be no substitution.

The characters Blanche of Devan and Brian the Hermit are noticeably missing from the drama, though they have significant roles in Scott’s poem. Blanche is something of a supernatural figure, who seems to have a prophetic gift, though a “brain-sick fool”

(IV. 556). Scott description of her as a “wasted female form [...] in tattered weeds and wild array” (canto IV lines 504-506) is decidedly pathetic, and she serves to ennoble James Fitz-James, who shows her kindness, and to incriminate Sir Roderick, who is responsible for her destitution. She also lends a motive to James’ actions, thus playing a significant role in plot development: It is Fitz-James’ vow to avenge Blanche’s murder that persuades him, when he otherwise would have avoided conflict, to spill “the best blood of Roderick Dhu” (canto IV line 688).

Brian the Hermit is an intensely supernatural character who, unlike Blanche, is insidious. He is terrifying in appearance, with a “grizzled beard,” and though covered with “scars of frantic penance” (III.67, 70),

“Not his the mien of Christian priest,  
But Druid’s, from the grave released,  
Whose hardened heart and eye might brook  
On human sacrifice to look.” (III. 75-78)

Brian performs a superstitious and somewhat grotesque ritual in hopes of gaining “the inspiration of the disembodied spirits who haunt the desolate recesses” in anticipation of the battle (see Scott’s note for canto IV line 63).

It is possible that the character of Brian the Hermit is absent from the adaptation because presenting him in a visual medium would render him so vividly and with such immediacy<sup>13</sup> that it would have been frightening or offensive for the audience. Perhaps this conjecture is supported by the fact that in staged versions of Scott’s *The Bride of Lammermoor*, the supernatural character of Alice is softened or missing. Alice, like Brian, is darkly supernatural, though she is a friend to the story’s protagonists.

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<sup>13</sup> Hutcheon notes that “the camera, like the stage, is said to be all presence and immediacy” (63).



The most significant character insertion in Morton's adaptation is the invention of Young Douglas, Douglas' son and Ellen's brother. The change is significant because it is related to some important differences in Morton's plot. The primary conflict in the story is the battle between the Highland clan of Alpine and the king's army. In Scott's poem, the reason for the conflict is that the king is about to send his forces to the Highlands to impose some order on the lawlessness of the feuding clans (Scott xli-xlii). In *The Knight of Snowdon*, however, the Highlanders gather to rescue Young Douglas, who has been captured by Earl Mar, a compatriot of the king. This especially effects the interpretation of Roderick's character, as we shall see.

One effect of the changes in characters and plot in Morton's adaptation is that it weakens the presence of Scott's Romantic anti-hero. In the poem, Roderick is a fierce character whose passion a romantic readership would surely have admired, and who is made sympathetic by his unrequited love for Ellen, his chivalrous behavior toward Fitz-James, and the unquestioning devotion his clan feels for him. In spite of his admirable qualities, his character is made villainous by his ruthlessness in battle. His multi-faceted romantic appeal culminates in one of the final scenes of *The Lady of the Lake*, when he dies a prisoner in King James' palace as Allan-Bane relates to him the story of Clan-Alpine's courage in their recent defeat.

This has the potential of being adapted meaningfully for the stage, because there was a tradition, practiced several decades earlier by David Garrick, of playing villains as morally ambiguous characters who were "irresistibly charming" (Thompson 5).

However, in Morton's version of the story, the character traits that make Roderick an anti-hero are watered down or lost. King James is championed as a virtuous, selfless, and

merciful hero when he pardons Roderick (who was not even wounded) and, putting his love for Ellen aside, arranges for the union of Roderick and Ellen. In addition, Roderick is made a saint when he turns himself over to his enemies in order to use the reward money to pay the ransom for Ellen's brother, Young Douglas.

This loss of the romantic anti-hero is one instance where Morton's adaptation seems to lose some of the romantic essence of *The Lady of the Lake*. However, the melodramatic stage convention of stock character types did call for clear heroes – the kind we can see in Morton's James and Roderick – as well as for villains who are purely rascals, and Morton's Murdock fills that role. Additional melodramatic elements of *The Knight of Snowdown* will be discussed in detail later, but the stock character types of the genre help explain Morton's changes in characterization. Morton is more clearly successful in preserving and perhaps augmenting the romantic appeal of Scott's story in the way he develops a sense of mystery surrounding the characters.

Philip Cox, in his chapter about adaptations of *The Lady of the Lake*, discusses the problem in Morton's drama of making believable Fitz-James' failure to recognize the mountaineer as Sir Roderick. It is a problem that exists in part because much of the audience attending *The Knight of Snowdown* would have already been familiar with the story and would have known that the unidentified mountaineer is Roderick. This is a circumstance that cannot, perhaps, be helped. However, the problem of the believability of James' ignorance exists also because if the adaptation had followed the poem, Roderick would have been introduced on stage many times prior to his encounter with James. This would mean that the audience would recognize the mountaineer, the sense of mystery would be lost for them, and thus the audience would not be able to identify with

James in his ignorance. Cox explains Morton's solution, which, as Cox notes, is one of Morton's "stage necessities:" Morton keeps Roderick off stage until his encounter – in the guise of the mountaineer – with James, and reveals him only through the dialogue of other characters up to that point. The effect is that "he has no identity other than that he chooses to reveal during the course of his interaction with the king" (66). Thus, not only is the sense of mystery about the mountaineer's identity preserved, but "the [viewer] has already encountered Roderick's violent and aggressive temper [through other characters' descriptions of him] and so it comes as a surprise that the honorable 'mountaineer' is one and the same man" (65).

Another character whose identity is (or at least is intended to be) shrouded in mystery is James Fitz-James / the Knight of Snowdown / King James V. That Scott intended Fitz-James' true identity to remain a secret until the final scene of the poem is evident in the following anecdote recorded in his 1830 introduction to the poem. Scott says of his friend, who was a farmer, that

Another of his remarks gave me less pleasure. He detected the identity of the king with the wandering knight, Fitz-James, when he winds his bugle to summon his attendants [...] I was at a good deal of pains to efface any marks by which I thought my secret could be traced before the conclusion.  
(Scott xlvi)

One instance of Scott's success in this is in a scene in which James arrives at the goblin's cave where Allan-Bane and Ellen have gone for protection. James arrives just as Allan has been singing a ballad about a goblin that appeared to a maiden in the guise of her brother. The ambiguity of James' identity and of his trustworthiness is likely foremost

in Ellen's mind (IV.261-382). She wonders here whether he is a brother-figure or goblin-like, and elsewhere in the poem, Scott begs the reader to wonder whether James, the Knight of Snowdown, is a friend to the Highland clans or a spy for the king (II.310-316).

Snowdown's mystery, however, is handled carelessly in Morton's adaptation: he leaves the stage in act two scene two and does not return until just before the final scene. This means that because he is out of sight, the audience has little opportunity to wonder about his character. In addition, the character who voices his suspicion most often that Fitz-James is a spy is Murdock, a character the audience does not trust because he is constantly plotting for his own gain.

A third character for whom there is a sense of romantic mystery is Ellen, and it is more pronounced in *The Knight of Snowdown* because it is rendered more dramatic. In the narrative poem, when Fitz-James asks Ellen who she is, she "turn[s] all inquiry light away" by playfully answering, "weird women we" (I.614-616; see also Cox 61-61). Later that evening, Fitz-James has a dream, foreboding in tone, that leads him to connect Ellen with the name of Douglas. In Scott's version, there seems to be no mystery surrounding Ellen's identity after this dream. In contrast, it is not until the second-to-last scene in *The Knight of Snowdown* that James realizes Ellen is the daughter of a man he has exiled and considered an enemy (3.3). James learns this at the very moment when Ellen is asking for his help in pleading for mercy from the king, whom she knows to be incensed against her family. In addition, Ellen is at this moment unaware that Fitz-James is the king whose good favor she is dependent on. Therefore, the drama of the scene is heightened, and Ellen's hidden identity becomes an important part of the fantastic plot.

A taste for the fantastic is apparent in these examples of changes in characters and characterization – some of which render the plot more fantastic, and some of which heighten the sense of mystery surrounding the characters. The popular romantic theatergoer's preference for the fantastic is also reflected in the visual elements of the performance and can be seen in a discussion of the stage directions and scenery employed in *The Knight of Snowdown*.

### **Visual elements: stage direction and scenery**

The *Times* review is not completely negative. It ends with a short paragraph that mentions the strengths of the production. It is here we learn that the music, “particularly the overture,” was “very pretty,” the characters, “well sustained,” and the scenery, “the most wild, varied, and romantic we have ever seen.” It is the appeal of the scenery that explains to this reviewer what he seems to feel is an otherwise unjustified second performance of the play.

Besides the appealing nature of the music, acting, and scenery, the function of these elements in the production indicate a level of connection to Scott's literary work, suggesting that while Morton was certainly not an accomplished adapter, he did exercise some sensitivity to the way in which Scott's poetic narrative functions artistically, and how that artistry might be achieved on stage in a parallel way.

In Morton's adaptation, as in Scott's poem, there are songs throughout, sung by various characters. A comparison of the lyrics from songs of each work clearly shows that they are not on the same literary plane:

From *The Lady of the Lake*:

Hail to the Chief who in triumph advances!  
Honored and blest be the ever-green Pine!  
Long may the tree, in his banner that glances,  
Flourish, the shelter and grace of our line!  
    Heaven send it happy dew,  
    Earth lend it sap anew,  
Gaily to bourgeon and broadly to grow,  
    While every Highland glen  
    Sends shout back again,  
“Roderigh Vich Alpine dhum ho! Ieroe!”

From *The Knight of Snowdown*:

Oh! sweet is the duty, and pleasing's the art  
Which beats such a warm rub-a-dub on the heart;  
It revives every sense, and gives courage anew,  
For none fight so well as the man that loves true,  
The little wily conqueror beckons us to come,  
The pipe is his trumpet, the tabor, his drum.

While the rhythm of both songs begins with the pattern of four stresses per line, the example from *Snowdown* feels like a nursery rhyme, far less noble than the example from *The Lady of the Lake*. This is because the rhymes are in couplets, the language is colloquial, and the feet are anapestic rather than dactylic. Although the song from *Snowdown* was intended for comic effect and the song's form is appropriate to its content, the very difference in the *kind* of songs included in the play as opposed those in Scott's narrative raises the question, how could they be considered appropriate in an adaptation from Scott?

It is a question of dramatic genre. Such songs as the one above belong in melodrama, and there are other musical considerations that identify *The Knight of Snowdown* as melodramatic. Judging solely on the stage directions of the script, there is also some of the kind of instrumental music – the sort that helps tell the story and shape audience response – of which Jacky Bratton writes, which serves as defining characteristic of melodrama. The stage directions for act one scene two indicate that a harp plays as Snowdown and Ellen make their entrance. At this point in the play, the two characters have been visible talking together upstage on the other side of some scenery doors. As soon as they enter to the accompaniment of the harp, Snowdown exclaims his admiration and fascination with Ellen: “Tis all enchantment--my soul is spellbound!” He then goes on to describe the qualities he finds so alluring in her. Later, in scene IV of the same act, Snowdown has an encounter on the highland with the villainous Murdock. Snowdown, searching for courage, says “Heart, hold thy steady pulse!” and a few moments later the stage direction indicates that “a harp sounds, at some distance, the air played in Scene II.” Snowdown responds to the music with the lines “Ah! that well-

known strain-” and “it whispers to my heart its mistress is here.” The leitmotif in these scenes communicates to the audience how to interpret Snowdown’s emotions and the effect Ellen has on him. This is reinforced through gesture: the direction indicates that “in the act of listening he averts his face from Murdock.”

The stage directions in Morton’s script indicate that the *Times* reviewer’s description of the play’s scenery as “the most wild, varied, and romantic we have ever seen” was not an exaggeration. The direction for the very first scene calls for a lake, a “luxuriantly wooded” island, a mountain, and more. This description obviously caters to the nineteenth-century theatregoer’s love for elaborate and beautiful scene paintings. The use of this stage element seems appropriately transposed from Scott’s romantic wistfulness for the unspoiled rustic highland. However, Morton’s stage direction ends with the following somewhat surprising statement: “Among the rocks, a white horse is seen dying.” This is entirely faithful to Scott’s poem: Fitz-James, eagerly engaged in a hunting expedition, has run his horse so hard that it dies of exhaustion.

Morton could have easily omitted the horse in the name of stage necessity. It is powerfully indicative of the romantic love of the fantastic that Morton should include such an inconvenient action in the stage direction. It is in fact possible that a trained horse was brought onstage at the Covent Garden theatre this early in the century. An anecdote from Charles Young’s biography describes an incident of an elephant being used in a production at Covent Garden in July of 1810, six months before the premier of *The Knight of Snowdown* (Young 36-38). And of course, Bolton’s report that John Philip Kemble hired an entire cavalry for an 1817 production at Covent Garden also indicates that an actual horse on stage was a likely possibility. According to Jacky Bratton, the



effect of the horse on-stage, especially because it is apparently somehow represented to be dying, would be to give the audience a visual sign of innocence (a creature incapable of speech – made more emphatic by Snowdown’s line as he watches the horse die – “All is silent!”). The visual indicator of goodness and innocence in the horse re-emphasize, by association, Fitz-James’ goodness. This, in consideration of Scott’s hoped-for ambiguity of character for James, may not have been a sensitive adaptation choice on Morton’s part, but the appearance of the horse on stage is appropriate and has a powerful effect.

Ellen’s entrance follows a brief soliloquy given by Snowdown. When she sees him, the stage directions note that she “enters a boat, half concealed behind the rocks, and pushes it from land with a light oar” (1.1). This would probably have been accomplished with the use of simple stage machinery. The more pressing question is how the lake was represented, especially since later in the same scene, there is a direction that Murdock “takes his sword in his mouth and jumps into the lake” in order to swim to Ellen’s Isle. The direction is worth mentioning, perhaps if only for the fantastic nature of the feat. I am incapable of thoroughly answering the question of how the lake was represented on stage. Although in 1815 Sadler’s Wells had a water tank used for staging aquatic spectacles (Mullin 75), it seems unlikely that it was a part of this production. Though it was technologically possible, it does not seem to have been commonplace, and my research gives no indication that Covent Garden was equipped that way. What’s more, none of the reviewers mention what would surely, by virtue of its novelty, earn at least a few words in their assessments.

To return to the romantic era theatergoer’s love for representations of nature, stage setting and painted scenery would have been very important to the physical

production of a *Lady of the Lake* adaptation. This is especially relevant since Loch Katrine, the setting for the poem, was famous for its beauty (Scott xlv). Vera Mowry Roberts, in explaining that at the beginning of the nineteenth century, there was an “emphasis upon the scenery depicted in terms of real nature,” suggests that there would have been a zealous attempt to paint natural scenes vividly and accurately.

Theatre Royal, Covent Garden appears to have been famed for its scenery. Rosenfeld references a review of an 1820 production of *Ivanhoe* at Covent Garden: “This theatre is so celebrated for beautiful scenery that we expected to see some splendid pictures...and we were not disappointed” (quoted in Rosenfeld 39). It seems plausible that the period of nine years between the production of *The Knight of Snowdown* and of Scott’s *Ivanhoe* could fall within the length of time necessary for Covent Garden to develop such a reputation, although one recorded incident in particular seems, at first glance, to contradict this assertion.

In an unreferenced anecdote related by scene design scholar Aloys Nagler, Charles Kemble and Charles Young – who starred in the production of *The Knight of Snowdown* as Roderick and James – are reported to have had a conversation about the wonderful presentation of scenery at an 1839 production of *Henry V*. They are said to have lamented that “[they] were denied such help to acting in [their] time” (Nagler 11). This alleged conversation, however, does not undermine other indicators of Covent Garden having displayed remarkably beautiful scenery at the time of their popularity on the boards. Their comments were probably in reference to the novelty of a moving panorama used in *Henry V* and introduced for the first time in the 1820s, not of the painted scenes themselves.

At any rate, it is clear that there were merits, at least in the physical staging aspects of the play, and I would argue, in the adaptation choices as well, though superficially, the statement from *The Times* that “where the dramatist was original he was bad, and where he was a plagiarist, injudicious” still seems to carry some weight.

It may be that the ambiguity of genre distinction for Morton’s adaptation can explain the negative criticism it received, especially in the *Times* review. As noted by Bolton, Scott theatricalizations were often adapted as operas or as dramas produced at the patent theatres. This indicates that audiences – or at least adapters and theatre managers – held some notion of nobility or refinement in association with Scott’s works. True to this pattern, *The Knight of Snowdown* was performed at Covent Garden, a patent house, and it was evidently performed as one of the evening’s full-length plays – a role usually filled by “serious drama.” In fact, the *Times* review is immediately preceded by a printed advertisement for the second performance of *The Knight of Snowdown*, to be held that evening. The advertisement notes that a pantomime will be performed as well, a sure sign that *Knight* was intended as the evening’s more dignified fare. But its identification as a musical drama in three acts would surely make spectators and reviewers unsure of how to receive it, since the official definition of a melodrama (from the Lord Chamberlain) was any play written in three acts with musical accompaniment. The play contains several elements of melodrama, including songs, some music accompanying the dialogue and action, humor (in Malcoon’s character), and elaborate scenery. But the general story, with its historical subject, seems fit for the distinction of a serious drama, and that coupled with its placement within the evening’s entertainment perhaps led the author of the *Times*

review to judge according to the standards and signifying systems of a legitimate play, what is in form and style a melodrama.

Genre considerations for both the literary and theatrical works are important in the question of adaptation as translation and in understanding how audiences might have interpreted the play. Scott's work is a poetic narrative, comparable in length to a novel, divided into six cantos. Perhaps Morton felt impelled by the constraint of the genre of Scott's work to include music in the drama. Scott does in fact include songs in his work, set apart from the rest of the poetic narrative. And yet Morton may have felt hesitant to label his adaptation as melodrama because of its reputation as light entertainment. Perhaps he felt his adaptation could not rightly be anything other than a musical drama. Perhaps in his mind, the theatrical equivalent of a narrative poem with the noble distinction of having been authored by Scott was a musical drama. Unfortunately, in aiming for appropriateness, Morton's genre identification achieves ambiguity.

In conclusion, although those who wrote negative reviews of *The Knight of Snowdown* would look down their noses at Morton for his infidelity and at audiences for making it successful without always having the refinements of good taste, it is clear that at least some of Morton's adaptive choices reveal an understanding of the interworkings of Scott's narrative poem while remaining true to the customs of nineteenth-century spectacular theatre that audiences loved. *The Knight of Snowdown* was commercially successful because it preserved the elements of Scott's story that held popular appeal for mass audiences. In addition, because it was produced at Covent Garden, it was possible to include production elements that unquestionably delighted audiences and that at times acted as a viable translation of Scott's literary techniques.

5. Case Study – Dickens and Barnett: “I am not the Man I was”<sup>14</sup>

*A Christmas Carol* (Dickens, 1843)

*A Christmas Carol: Or, the Miser’s Warning!* (Barnett, 1844)

Barnett’s play, unlike Hurst’s film, does not seem to pick up on Dickens’s repeated time imagery, the patterns of three in his prose, or, insofar as the stage directions indicate, his evocation of a ghostly atmosphere through descriptions of the London fog. The one possible exception to this is a stage direction at the end of act two, scene seven in Barnett’s drama that tells us that “*clouds roll over the stage*” during the transition from the cemetery to Scrooge’s bedchamber. Thus, at first glance, Barnett’s does not seem to be an adaptation based on the formal elements of literature and stage.

However, in reading *A Christmas Carol* with an understanding of nineteenth century stage practice, it is striking to note how some of Dickens’s literary elements appear to have been adapted from the theatre. Some of the descriptions and episodes in the novel seem directly related to the transformations and the elaborate and quickly altered scene pictures popular in pantomime. That Dickens loved the theatre is well-known, and in *The Annotated Christmas Carol*, Michael Patrick Hearn clarifies that “from the age of seven, when he was taken into London to one of the Christmas pantomimes, Dickens was fascinated with the theatre” (163). The passages in the novella which seem most closely influenced by the spectacle of pantomime are those in which the spirits take Scrooge to various locations to visit his past, present, and future, as well as the passages that describe the appearance (and disappearance) of the spirits.

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<sup>14</sup> Ebenezer Scrooge, Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol*, 108.

Dickens's description of what Scrooge sees when he looks at the Ghost of Christmas Past is multifaceted, with shifting contradictory images. "The figure itself fluctuated in its distinctness: being now a thing with one arm, now with one leg, now with twenty legs, now a pair of legs without a head, now a head without a body" (42). More clearly similar to the kind of transformation tricks of pantomime that turned lamps into Chinese Giants are the description of the spirit as "like a child; yet not so like a child as like an old man" (41), and the way in which the spirit reminds Scrooge of a candle: "from the crown of his head there sprung a bright, clear jet of light, by which all this was visible; and which was doubtless the occasion of its using, in its duller moments, a great extinguisher for a cap which it held under its arm" (42). If it is not enough that Dickens's Ghost of Christmas Past so strangely resembles a candle, Scrooge helps to enact the transformation at the end of the spirit's visit when he "seize[s] the extinguisher-cap, and by a sudden action presse[s] it down upon its head" (61).

Another episode that powerfully resembles a pantomime transformation is the disappearance of the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come. Kneeling at the spirit's feet in the graveyard at the climax of Dickens's novella, Scrooge "saw an alteration in the Phantom's hood and dress. It shrunk, collapsed, and dwindled down into a bedpost" (109).

Many episodes in the story, described as they are by Dickens, resemble the elaborate scene paintings of pantomime, rendered more fantastic by the use of panorama (which by the 1840s had already been in use for several years) to achieve the affect of instantaneously traveling between two cities continents apart. Dickens describes this kind of spectacular scene transition several times in *A Christmas Carol*, first when Scrooge

and the first spirit step through the wall of Scrooge's bedchamber at night and find themselves on a country road on a wintry day (44). It happens again when, as Scrooge follows behind the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come, they are instantly in London: "they scarcely seemed to enter the City; for the City rather seemed to spring up about them" (92).

This sense of rapid transitions between picturesque scenes is most potent in the episodes involving the Ghost of Christmas Present. Not only does each new setting magically materialize around Scrooge and the spirit, but in the narrative they visit each of the places in rapid succession. They go from the Cratchit home to a miners' village to a lighthouse to a ship at sea to Scrooge's nephew's parlor, over the span of just a few pages (78-81). Besides the spectacle created in the actual transitions from place to place, Dickens's descriptions of the locations seem the literary equivalent of the detailed and beautiful scene paintings of pantomime's stage.

Built on a dismal reef of sunken rocks, some league or so from shore, [...] there stood a solitary lighthouse. Great heaps of seaweed clung to its base, and storm-birds – born of the wind, one might suppose, as seaweed of the water – rose and fell about it, like the waves they skimmed. (80)

Even the dismal, bleak scenes have picturesque appeal in Dickens's descriptions.

A scholar of Victorian culture, Philip Allingham, also notices the influence of pantomime on *A Christmas Carol*, though he focuses on the inclusion of a parade of fairytale characters and on the ultimate spiritual transformation of Scrooge, the latter of which may be understood more significantly in light of John O'Brien's report that Victorian-age pantomimes "typically ended with a splendid transformation scene" (113).

Allingham summarizes the influence of pantomime on Dickens by quoting Edwin Eigner's *The Dickens Pantomime*:

Charles Dickens ... remained both a delighted spectator and a serious critic of pantomime throughout his life, and ... its characters, its situations, and its structures were etched deeply into the essentially dramatic and theatrical nature of his creative imagination, so deeply that the dramatis personae of his novels, the movements of his plots, and even the meaning of his vision can all be understood in terms of pantomime conventions.

(Allingham)

These elements of Dickens's writing act as a sort of adaptation from theatre, and using the "language" of pantomime as it does, *A Christmas Carol* seems perfectly suited to be presented in that medium. Whether or not Dickens wrote the *Carol* with the intent of having it dramatized, his writing caters to the theatrical imagination, a wise choice in appealing to readers, because after all, Dickens's London was "culture steeped in theatre" (Auerbach 4).

It was a successful approach, and plagiarists and adapters apparently trying to show "The Inimitable Boz" that he was wrong – that he could be imitated – didn't hesitate to produce their own versions of his extremely popular work. *A Christmas Carol*'s first printing of 6,000 volumes sold out entirely, and, Paul Davis reports, 2,000 copies of the second printing "were committed before publication" (6). But in spite of this success, and although Dickens's aim was to make the price of the book as low as possible at just five shillings, it was still too high a price for the working class, whose plight Dickens so sympathetically portrays in *A Christmas Carol*. Five shillings was a



third of the weekly wages for someone like Bob Cratchit, as Davis points out (11). A group of plagiarizers saw opportunity in this inability of the working class to afford the beautiful volumes Dickens was selling. To the hack writers it was an overlooked portion of the consumer market

A few weeks after the *Carol* was made available for purchase, *Peter Parley's Illuminated Library* published a ripped-off (completely plagiarized) version of the story, with new illustrations. On January 6 the first installment was made available. They published in serial form to help keep costs low; charging just a penny for what they called a “reorigination” of the story (P. Davis 11). Their argument in court was that their business generated a larger audience for Dickens’s story, and it was true that working class readers could afford a penny issue. But as an unauthorized “reorigination,” the message and spirit of the *Carol* in this form was altered somewhat (P. Davis 11-12). Dickens was able to overcome this issue fairly quickly. Two days after the plagiarized version appeared, Dickens sued, and in another two days, the pirates were legally forbidden to publish the second installment (P. Davis 9).

Not long after, several dramatists acted on the same impulse to seize an opportunity to capitalize on Dickens’s success, albeit in an arguably more legitimate arena than that of the literary pirates (but it appears that the similar tendency to borrow exactly – that is, to copy – undermined the aesthetic strength of at least one of the adaptations, which will be discussed later). The advertisement included in the printed script of C.Z. Barnett’s dramatization both explains the motive for and justifies the attempt at adaptation, acknowledging Barnett’s motive of personal gain and making a claim that he hoped that its publication would increase the popularity of the novel.

The extreme necessity---(the consequence of its high and deserved popularity)---that so imperatively called for its representation upon the Stage, has also demanded its publication as a Drama, which it is the Adapter's sincere wish, as it is his conviction, will considerably augment the sale of the original.

Eight theatrical adaptations of *A Christmas Carol* appeared on the London stages within two months of its publication in book form.<sup>15</sup> In addition, Bolton lists eight additional – sixteen total – separate adaptations of *A Christmas Carol* for 1844, spanning the first year after the novel's December 1843 publication (237-240). Of all these productions, the three earliest were Edward Stirling's *A Christmas Carol; or, Past, Present, and Future* at the Adelphi, Charles Webb's *A Christmas Carol; or Scrooge the Miser's Dream; or The Past, Present, and Future* at Sadler's Wells, and C. Z. Barnett's *A Christmas Carol; or The Miser's Warning!* at Royal Surrey. All three productions opened on February 5, 1844, less than two months after the publication of Dickens's work.

These three adaptations are mentioned more frequently than the others, but of them, Edward Stirling's has received the most scholarly attention, because of two pieces of information: an advertisement on the script's cover page and a comment from a letter Dickens wrote to his friend John Forster. The advertisement identifies the play as "the only dramatic version sanctioned by C. Dickens, Esqre," and in the letter Dickens calls the play "better than usual, ... but *heart breaking* to me." The letter continues: "Oh, Heaven! if any forecast of *this* was ever in my mind! Yet O. Smith<sup>16</sup> was drearily better

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<sup>15</sup> As another indicator of the popularity of Dickens's story, Davis cites a review in the *London Illustrated News* of one of these very early productions, which noted that "the story on which this piece is founded is too well known to enter into particulars of it" (Davis 12).

<sup>16</sup> The actor who played Scrooge's role.

than I expected. It is a great comfort to have that kind of meat underdone; and his face is quite perfect” (quoted in P. Davis 9).

Many scholars interpret these points as signs that Dickens favored Stirling’s version and that it is thus the superior adaptation. However there is no evidence of Dickens having attended any of the other productions, and even if he did, his failure to mention them to any of his friends in writing does not mean that they were of inferior quality. In addition, the nature of Dickens’s collaboration or approval of Stirling seems to be unknown.

I find C. Z. Barnett’s dramatization to be an interesting case study in the practice of adapting a play from a work of popular literature. Besides this, his is the only version for which a printed script with additional information about costuming, the cast, and other production elements exists. For these reason, I have chosen his version to analyze in comparison to the literary (and theatrical) elements of Dickens’s story.

Although there is plenty of theatrical material to work from in the pages of Dickens’s text, Barnett does not seem to exploit the most obvious elements to the full advantage of the stage, in light of the truly spectacular presentations common at London theatres at the time. Barnett’s comparatively tame stage effects might be excused by the fact that in Dickens’s own public readings of his novels, he employed a “deliberately simple staging of the performances, without costumes or props,” and that the charm of these readings lay more in the draw of Dickens’s characters than the sensation of spectacular settings and effects. In fact Susan Ferguson reports that Dickens “performed alone, using voice, gesture, and physical expression to enact various characters, and designing his shows to move from comedy to pathos and back to comedy over the course

of a scene or of an evening” (731). However, Dickens’s presentations were public readings, not theatre, and can not be expected to conform to the customs of the stage. Besides, in these readings Dickens was presenting his novels as novels, not plays.

In any event, Barnett’s *A Christmas Carol: or, the Miser’s Warning!*” does use some stage effects to create a sense of supernatural illusion, although not to the degree he might be expected to, as will be explored in some detail. Beyond this, what is interesting about the dramatization is that it is an example of an adaptation that fails artistically in some respects because it tries to be too literal.

One of the first lines in the play is the following quip from Bob Cratchit, a response to Scrooge’s protest that Bob has used too many coals: “I’ve been trying to warm myself by the candle for the last half hour, but not being a man of strong imagination, failed.” It is the first of many instances in which Barnett appropriates the narrator (or, it could be considered, plagiarizes Dickens’s language) by having the characters use the same words to explain things about themselves: Dickens’s version reads, “the clerk put on his white comforter, and tried to warm himself at the candle; in which effort, not being a man of strong imagination, he failed” (117). It sounds stiff and unnatural in the play because Barnett keeps the wording – which describes the characters in the third person – the same when the characters speak about themselves in the first person.

Another example of this kind of appropriation occurs soon after in Barnett’s drama. Scrooge ignores Bob’s comment and asks him to go see if anyone has come into the office. As soon as he is gone, Scrooge, speaking to himself, says

Marley has been dead seven years, and has left me his sole executor---his sole administrator---his sole residuary legatee---his sole friend---his sole mourner! My poor old partner! I was sorely grieved at his death, and shall never forget his funeral. Coming from it, I made one of the best bargains I ever made. Ha, ha! Folks say I'm tight-fisted--- that I'm a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, clutching miser. What of it?

Here again, we see the narrator's words appropriated for a character's speech, and in this case, it completely changes Scrooge's characterization. What the narrator gets away with saying tongue-in-cheek sounds out of place coming from Dickens's version of the miser, who would not see any irony in making a bargain at his deceased partner's funeral and who, "solitary as an oyster," hardly seems to notice what others think of him. The Scrooge in the play is already "not the man [he] was" in the novel, and it seems to be simply because Barnett hopes to capitalize on the popular appeal of Dickens's language at every opportunity, thus attempting to adapt too literally.

Another example of Barnett's assigning the narrator's words to various characters and the resulting change in characterization can be seen in two asides Bob utters about Scrooge, both also in the first scene of act one. The first is "Marley's dead---his late partner---dead as a door nail! If he was to follow him, it wouldn't matter much." The purpose of having Bob speak this line is unclear, since the same information about Marley's death is given soon after by Scrooge in the line quoted above. Its function seems to be simply to change Bob's characterization from the meek, soft-hearted man from the book, to a sarcastic and bitter underdog. The second of Bob's asides, appropriated from the narrator's description of Scrooge as a "covetous old sinner," has a

similar re-visioning effect on Bob's character: "Old covetous! He's worse than the rain and snow. They often come down, and handsomely too but Scrooge never does!"

Paul Davis's opinion about the changes in dialogue in *The Miser's Warning* is that they are simply for the purpose of "fit[ting] the story to stage conventions of the period." He thinks Bob's new lines are an example of "cockney wit." Davis does, however, acknowledge that "in Dickens's original, such cockney wit belongs to Scrooge or to the narrator," and that the alteration "considerably changes [Bob's] character" (47-48). And it remains true that in adapting the language of Dickens's narrator for dialogue, Barnett does not seem to realize that the formal elements of the stage work differently from those of literature.

The stage effects, it has been mentioned, are not as spectacular as one might expect from a nineteenth-century performance on the popular stage. There are fewer scene changes than some would argue the story calls for. When the First Spirit shows Scrooge scenes from his past, the memories are represented through tableaux successively illuminated behind a screen, as the following stage directions indicate: "*The Stage becomes dark---a strong light is seen behind---the wall of the Miser's chamber fades away and discovers a school room---a Child is seated reading by a fire,*" then later, "*The Scene at back is again lighted up, and discovers Fezziwig's warehouse. Fezziwig and Characters grouped as in Fronsispiece of Work. Scrooge, as a young man.*" The final tableau of the scene segues back into active representations of Scrooge's past: "*The tableau fades away. The Stage becomes dark. Enter **Ellen** in mourning. During the fading of the tableau Scrooge puts a cloak around him, &c. and seems a younger man*" (1.2).

Another disappointing staging choice is in the scenes which in the novel occur as fantastic transitions that seem to demand spectacular representation on stage – the episode that describes Scrooge and the Second Spirit visiting various Christmas celebrations. In Barnett’s version the two do visit the mining down, which is represented by “*A Bleak and Barren Moor. A poor mud cabin. [Painted in the flat.]*,” but the scenes at the lighthouse and on the ship are only indicated in the dialogue: the Ghost of Christmas present says “we will to sea---your ear shall be deafened by the roaring waters,” and then “See yonder solitary lighthouse built on a dismal reef of sunken rocks” (1. 4).

Despite these apparent failures to adapt the spectacle Dickens describes, there are times when the stage effects seem to have been appropriately exciting. The Spirits make their exits and entrances via a trapdoor in the stage floor or by “gliding” on or off stage, sometimes with spectacular effect. An example of this is the departure of the Ghost of Christmas Past. In a fit of distress at having relived his lost love’s departure, Scrooge exclaims, “I’ve seen enough---haunt me no longer!” (1.1), and the stage direction describes what ensues: “*The Spirit seizes him---he seizes the cap, presses it upon the Spirit’s head who sinks under it, and disappears in a flood of light, while Scrooge sinks exhausted on the floor.*” It is notable that the stage direction indicates that Barnett picked up on Dickens’s pantomimic transformation scene here, though the costume description for Barnett’s Ghost of Christmas Past only indicates a singular part of Dickens’s multifaceted description of the spirit: “White dress trimmed with summer flowers, rich belt, fleshings and sandals.”

In *The Miser's Warning*, Barnett does take liberties with the plot, and though this is a perfunctory level of adaptation analysis, the changes he makes are telling in consideration of the play's Victorian audience, and they suggest there is some meaningful purpose that motivates the changes. The change that is discussed most often by scholars is the subplot that surrounds the invention of a new character, Dark Sam. He is a pickpocket who appears in two scenes in the drama, one of which has no precedent in the book. The narrative that follows Scrooge's experience with the spirits is temporarily interrupted to follow Bob Cratchit on his way home from work. The scene (the second of act one) depicts Dark Sam stealing Bob's wages for the week – fifteen shillings – just as Bob is musing to himself about how he'll spend "every farthing of it" to buy food for his family's Christmas dinner.

Paul Davis, an expert on *Christmas Carol* adaptations, gives his opinion that "Barnett modifies the plot to add 'low life' and melodrama" to the story, and that this episode in particular serves the purposes of a "citizen melodrama" (48). He is referring to the fact that this scene ends with Scrooge's nephew Frank walking past just as Bob discovers he has been robbed. His gift of a golden sovereign to Bob is made more emphatic in this example of Victorian melodramatic moralizing because Frank does not know (though the audience does) that his ship has sunk. In the first scene of the play, Scrooge receives a letter informing him of his nephew's misfortune: that the Mary Jane, in which Frank had fully invested, has sunk off the coast of Africa.

Dark Sam seems to be randomly created for the sole purpose of inserting a new subplot, but such a thief fits in nicely with Old Joe's company, and Barnett weaves Dark Sam into the narrative in a cohesive way by inserting him plausibly among characters



Dickens did imagine. As Philip Allingham has noticed, Sam becomes “the undertaker’s man who robs Scrooge’s unattended corpse.” In the novel, Allingham continues, Dickens simply “designates this character as ‘the man in faded black’” (Allingham).

Names were unique communicative tools in both Dickens’s writing technique and in conventions of melodrama, and the names in *A Christmas Carol* seem to be adapted fittingly in Barnett’s drama. Dickens’s naming system works here in a comparatively subtle way to communicate a sense of characterization to the reader (Allingham describes the practice as “letting the appellation telegraph the nature of the character”). The name “Scrooge” sounds somehow miserly, although it has only become a term that means “miser” of itself since Dickens’s time (see the OED online). The naming conventions of melodrama work in a more overt way. This is illustrated in Barnett’s character names Frank Freeheart, Mr. Cheerly, and Mr. Heartly, which are nearly as overt as the names in medieval morality plays. Barnett’s overtly moralizing naming practice, with its accompanying stock character types, is an apt parallel to Dickens’s literary technique. Barnett’s Dark Sam may be less subtle than Dickens’s Fezziwig, but audiences were accustomed to the melodramatic stage practice, and they would have read it in nearly the same way, especially in light of the short appearance in Dickens’s text of characters named Want and Ignorance.

The structural divisions of the play seem to be poorly adapted in Barnett’s drama. It is identified in the title page of the script as a drama in two acts, and the choice seems odd at first glance, in consideration of the fact that the play clearly has melodramatic elements. This can be explained by the Theatre Regulation Act, which was passed in 1843, and which made it possible for all licensed theatres to perform dramatic material of

any genre. What is strange about the choice to write the play in two acts is that it does not allow for proper handling of the genre and structure of Dickens's work: a "carol" in five staves. The five divisions of the novel clearly organize the major narrative events, as the subtitles illustrate – Stave One: Marley's Ghost, Stave Two: The First of the Three Spirits, Stave Three: the Second of the Three Spirits, Stave Four: The Last of the Spirits, Stave Five: The End of It.

The two acts of Barnett's adaptation are divided into five and seven acts, respectively. As has been noted, the narration of Scrooge's evening of haunting is interrupted by the scene that introduces Dark Sam, but the story of Scrooge's instruction from the Spirits is broken up even more violently by the end of act one. In fact, the pause between acts comes in the middle of the second spirit's visit. Scrooge and the Ghost of Christmas Present have visited some cheerful, if humble, Christmas celebrations when the act ends, and they are left to pick up act two with their visit to the Cratchit Christmas festivities. This would be acceptable except for the dismal foreshadowing of Tiny Tim's death and the introduction of the characters Want and Ignorance that take place before the second spirit leaves, but after the break between acts in Barnett's play. What this means is that the audience would have experienced most of the lighter material of the story in one sitting in the first half of the evening, and most of the darker material in the second half. Dickens's expertly handled progression of dramatic tension would have better preserved if the division in the two acts had come after their visit to the Cratchit's home, or after the second spirit disappeared, so that the audience might have pondered the possibility of Tiny Tim's death before the action picked up again. As it stands, Barnett's

division destroys the story arc, and it is hard to conceive how Barnett might have justified the choice.<sup>17</sup>

The very act of bringing this novel to the stage is an aesthetically appropriate act of adaptation, but not one that the adapters can take credit for. The material culture of the novel and of the theatrical venues of the day communicated parallel messages about the economic values that middle-class audiences for both novels and plays upheld. It has already been mentioned that the architecture and luxurious design of early nineteenth-century theatres appealed to the bourgeois taste for elegance and comfort. Dickens's decisions regarding the price and the appearance of the novel had the same intended end.

Dickens decided to make the price of the book as low as possible – five shillings – in hopes of encouraging middle-class buyers to make more purchases (Hearn xlii). In addition, he designed the printed volume to be an elegant, classy-looking book that would appeal to a middle-class sensibility; it had “russet cloth binding,” and the title was stamped in gold on both the cover and the spine. The empty pages at the beginning and end of the volume were of colored paper, there was colored ink printing on the title page, and the pages had gilt edges (Hearn xlii). Added to this, John Leech's illustrations were an important part of the *Carol's* material appeal: he made four wood engravings and four hand-colored etchings for the volume, a feature that was highlighted in advertisements for the book (Hearn l). This physical design could be another indication of the influence (in this case, a subtle one) that the theatre had on Dickens's imagination, or perhaps it is simply evidence of a social sensibility that transcended both the theatrical and the literary

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<sup>17</sup> Stirling's version, in contrast, is identified as a drama in three staves, and this would seem to be a better structure for organizing the dramatic material of the story. See Bolton 237.

culture of the age. But either way, the packaging of Dickens's book and Barnett's adaptation communicate the same message about the upward-striving of the bourgeoisie.

In conclusion, Barnett's *The Miser's Warning* exemplifies some poor choices in the theatrical translation of Dickens's text because it attempts the translation too literally in simply carrying over as many of Dickens's phrases as possible. Such phrases as are written in the narrator's voice have great appeal within the context of Dickens's novella, but they are not suited for the theatrical medium of a play, in which all of the verbal information comes in dialogue and monologue. There are, however, some instances of the adaptation process here that work well because they appropriately consider the ways in which formal elements function in each medium. These successful adaptive choices include the naming of characters and (to a less elaborate degree) the use of stage effects that transpose the supernaturally spectacular episodes of the novel. However, these successes ought to be attributed more to Dickens and his culturally influenced theatrical imagination than to the ingenuity of the dramatist.

## 6. Conclusion: Adaptation as Popular Discourse

The value of studying theatrical adaptations from literary sources in the nineteenth century is that it serves as a lens through which to view the era's cultural discourse about literature. In providing this opportunity for rethinking texts, adaptations rescue theatre of that age from the negative criticism that has plagued it for so long, even when the aesthetic quality of these works is questionable.

Pavis explains that it is the distance between what is expected and what a work of art actually is that establishes its originality and, he implies, its aesthetic quality (74). He adds Jauss's observation that "The smaller the distance and the less the receptive intelligence is obliged to focus on the horizon of a still unknown experience, the closer that work gets to the level of culinary or entertainment art" (quoted in Pavis 74-75).

Perhaps with respect to adaptation, especially in nineteenth century, there is little enough distance between page and stage that critics then and now are right in considering it the junk food of the dramatic world, mere entertainment. Conventions of theatre were predictable, which means that plot and character alterations in plays adapted from literature were, to a degree, predictable as well. Literary characters were sometimes transposed into a melodramatic world and flattened into the stereotypical villain, hero, or comic old man.

But this does not mean the adapters and audiences were not thinking and intelligently receiving literature and theatre. This is evident in another venue through which readers and audiences could explore meanings of text and stage – the ubiquitous newspaper. Palmer evaluates this function of theatrical reviews articulately: "An

audience likes to compare its own judgments with the critic's, something akin to discussing the play after the performance." He continues, "a theatregoer looks to the review for expert analysis and explanation. [...] the review refreshes the audience member's memory and clarifies the significance or meaning of the performance." (10-11).

Palmer's statement concerns the function of reviews for all plays, adapted or original, but in addition a play might be considered to do the same work for the literature it is based on. A play certainly has some kind of effect on the spectator's memory of the source text, sometimes reinforcing it, sometimes revising it. An adapted play may also clarify meaning in the source text or suggest new meanings to the audience. And we must recall that the theatre, as Hazlitt described it, was an arena for social interaction, a place in which strangers or neighbors could meet and come away with shared experiences and ideas. Surely social interactions at performances of dramas adapted from literature would have included discussions concerning how the stories and themes were communicated differently in each medium.

Insofar as the adapters examined in this thesis demonstrate a sensitivity to the formal elements of their source material (that is to say, the language of literature) and successfully translate them to the conventions of theatre, the act of adapting constitutes a dialogue in another vein. This dialogue would likely be more profound for the adapter, but spectators are also invited by the adaptive choices (whether consciously made or not) to ponder how each medium affects the way in which the story is told.

A formal analysis of these two theatrical adaptations shows that, while the dramatists and directors may not have always been thinking about translating the source

literature into the language of the stage, the formal conventions of nineteenth-century popular literature have parallel methods of communicating their stories. The failure of these dramatists to produce scripts more closely linked in their modes of communication to their source texts can be explained in part by their haste to capitalize on the popularity of the original authors. This is especially true for Barnett – the difference between the seven months it took for Morton’s adaptation to appear after *The Lady of the Lake* was published and the seven weeks it took for Barnett’s adaptation to appear on stage would appear to be haste in place of judgment.

The importance of contextualizing the reception of literature is acknowledged by Patrice Pavis, who, in quoting Jauss, gives us reason to reflect that the society surrounding such literary works by Scott and Dickens was defined in large measure by the theatrical culture. Jauss writes,

Even at that instant when it first appears, a literary work does not surface as a complete novelty flowering forth in an informational desert; its public is predisposed to a certain mode of reception by an interplay of messages, signals—manifest or latent—of implicit references and of characteristics which are already familiar. It evokes what has already been read, gets the reader into one or another emotional disposition and, from the outset, creates a certain expectation of what “will follow” and of “the ending,” an expectation which can, as one’s reading advances, be maintained, modulated, reorientated [sic] or broken by irony. (quoted in Pavis 74)

The popularity of Scott and Dickens as writers is remarkable. Bolton reports that the first plays adapted from Scott appeared in 1810, and continued to show up abundantly

while Scott was alive, and into the Victorian era, before slowing after the turn of the century (*Scott Dramatized* vii). John O. Jordan notes that the effect of copious stagings of Dickens's works is that he "has become a staple of the national culture" in Britain (xix). But this popularity cannot be fully understood without consideration of the "mode of reception" which was so heavily influenced in theatre, both in terms of the extension of their reading audiences' interaction with their works on stage and in the way theatrical conventions influenced writing styles, a phenomenon especially apparent in Dickens.

Adaptations depended upon and reinforced the literary canon of the nineteenth century. There is a reciprocal relationship in which adapters look for popular works to use as source texts and in turn reinforce the popularity of the texts they work from by virtue of displaying the stories before a seemingly insatiable audience of the theatre. As Sanders points out, many adapters choose to create explicit links between their works and their literary antecedents in order to capitalize on love of the audience for the popular literature (22). The links Sanders is thinking of are works that take the same titles as the literary works they are based on, but there are many ways in which adapters make the attempt. For example, the unsuccessful effort of C.Z. Barnett to keep the language of Dickens's narrator precisely the same – to the end that dramatic irony is destroyed and characterizations are altered – is an attempt to make a very clear connection to Dickens's story. Although his effort undermined the aesthetic integrity of his drama, Barnett's strategy did play a role in cementing Dickens's text as one of the best-known works of popular fiction in the past several hundred years. "It is of course, in this way," Sanders writes, "that adaptations and appropriations prove complicit in activating and reactivating



the canonical status of certain texts and writers.” She references Derek Attridge’s argument that

The required ‘reading alongside’ of source and adaptation, the signifiers respectively of ‘tradition’ and ‘individual talent’ in Eliot’s terminology, demands a knowledge on the part of the reader (or spectator) of the source when encountering the derivative or responsive text. In this respect, adaptation becomes a veritable marker of canonical status; citation infers authority. (quoted in Sanders 8-9).

The significance of canon formation is that culturally favored works document the preferred thematic content of literature and drama, and perhaps the preferred processes of transmission as well. In short, the symbiotic relationship of literature and theatre in canon formation works to prolong the “pleasure connected to memory,” to quote John Ellis. (quoted in Sanders 24).

In sum, adaptation was a valuable activity for theatres of the nineteenth century to be engaged in. It is a practice that encourages thinking and rethinking texts. Just as popular film culture today can generate discussions about the novels on which they are based for mass audiences, popular theatre culture in the nineteenth century extended the opportunities for the public to engage with the well-known narrative literature of the day. In offering this kind of intellectual exercise for dramatists and audiences, adaptation redeems theatre that might otherwise be considered of little worth because it is of inferior aesthetic or intellectual content.

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