



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**WAIKATO**  
*Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato*

Research Commons

<http://researchcommons.waikato.ac.nz/>

## Research Commons at the University of Waikato

### Copyright Statement:

The digital copy of this thesis is protected by the Copyright Act 1994 (New Zealand).

The thesis may be consulted by you, provided you comply with the provisions of the Act and the following conditions of use:

- Any use you make of these documents or images must be for research or private study purposes only, and you may not make them available to any other person.
- Authors control the copyright of their thesis. You will recognise the author's right to be identified as the author of the thesis, and due acknowledgement will be made to the author where appropriate.
- You will obtain the author's permission before publishing any material from the thesis.

**‘We turned it into a play’:  
Transmedial adaptations in contemporary theatre**

A thesis  
submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree  
of  
**Master of Arts in English**  
at  
**The University of Waikato**  
by  
**DAVID EDWARD JOHN SIMES**



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**WAIKATO**  
*Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato*

2022

## **Abstract**

Adaptation is an ever-expanding field of study, with new trends and terms established in response to the proliferation of media. This thesis investigates how theatrical adaptation fits into emerging adaptation discourses, particularly the idea of transmediality. Although theatre is often side-lined in adaptation studies, this thesis argues that theatrical adaptation embodies various historical and contemporary adaptation trends. This thesis also contends that, in line with current understandings of media specific qualities, and media theory, adapting from any form of media to the stage is inherently transmedial. Investigating contemporary theatrical adaptation adapted from differing forms of media (novel, picturebook, comic), this thesis will highlight the processes of adaptation, in both creation, and reception. Focusing on the narrative in three adaptive stages – the original text, the script adaptation, and then the productions of that script – this thesis will highlight the key adaptation concepts utilised in three adaptations. Mark Haddon’s novel *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (2003) forms the basis of Simon Stephens’ play of the same name (2012), which in turn resulted in productions directed by Marianne Elliott and Sara Brodie. Kit Williams’ picturebook *Masquerade* (1979) is expanded and reworked by Kate Mulvany in her play *Masquerade* (2015), which was given life on the stage in a production directed by Lee Lewis and Sam Armstrong. Mulvany interweaves song into her script, and this awareness of the musicality of theatre is amplified in Lisa Kron and Jeanine Tesori’s libretto *Fun Home* (2015), an adaptation of Alison Bechdel’s graphic memoir *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (2006). By considering the play text, and each individual production, as an adaptation in its own right, the research presented here aims to foreground the place of theatrical adaptation in adaptation studies.

## **Acknowledgements**

It would be farcical for me to claim that I did this all on my own. Yes, I wrote the words, and made the footnotes, and agonised over the punctuation, but I did so with the help, love, and support of many. To anyone who asked about my thesis and had the good grace to listen, I thank you. Missy, thanks for reading it and liking it.

This thesis was born in a lecture by Gaye Poole. I thank her not only for this, but for five years of guidance, knowledge, donated play texts, performances, and friendship.

Thank you to Anne Ferrier-Watson for the referencing help, and Maria McGuire for interloaning every strange request I put to her. Thank you to The University of Waikato for the funding, and to the English Programme for their constant inspiration, knowledge, and passion to teach bookworms like me. Thanks to David Spicer, and the Sydney Theatre Company for archival material.

To my friends, especially Matthew, Isaac, Bilenda, and Keegan, for putting up with the soundtracks, conversations, and persistent requests to walk with me to the library, but most importantly, for being by my side.

To my mother, Vanessa, my father, Mark, and my sister, Nancy, for always supporting me, listening to the rambling, the trips to the library, for never letting me give up on my dreams, and for all those damn books.

To Kirstine Moffat, the most elegant kind of swan. Not only has your supervision illuminated this thesis, but your kindness, elegance, and friendship has forever warmed my soul.

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	i
Acknowledgements.....	ii
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: Curiouser and Curiouser: Adapting <i>The Curious Incident</i> for the Stage.....	26
Chapter 2: Picture This: <i>Masquerade</i> on Page and Stage.....	63
Chapter 3: What a Queer Medium: Adapting <i>Fun Home</i> for the Stage.....	100
Conclusion.....	135
Bibliography.....	139

## Introduction

When I was four years old, my parents took me, along with my sister and my grandparents, to see the pantomime version of *Aladdin* (2003) at Thameside Theatre in Grays, Essex, as a Boxing Day treat. Even though this was almost two decades ago, I distinctly remember the strange amalgamation of pop culture references, fairy tales, folklore, and bawdy jokes that did not make me laugh, but got hearty belly laughs from my parents. I winced with fear as the villain, dressed as Darth Maul from *Star Wars*, crept around the auditorium, snarling at children. I was mystified when the Genie seemed to appear from a lamp no bigger than my hand. I laughed and shouted as Damian Williams, the esteemed “Panto Dame” as Widow Twankey, seemed oblivious to the danger behind them. To this day, I remain just as puzzled as to how two characters, dressed as Shaggy and Scooby-Doo, were put through a mangle, and came out as flattened pieces of cardboard. In the following years we saw *Dick Whittington* and *Babes in the Woods*, but when we moved to New Zealand in 2006, we discovered that while this pantomime tradition is deeply rooted in England, it is not a popular stage spectacle in Aotearoa. Pantomime in this form disappeared from my life. I did, however, perform as the “kiwi” Dick Whittington, dubbed “Tricky Ricky”, in a show of the same name at Mount Maunganui Primary School. In December 2020, our tradition was revived, for a moment, as the National Theatre of Great Britain streamed its COVID restricted production of *Dick Whittington*. My family, sans grandparents, sat and joked as we relived a time we had almost forgotten.

One of the best, and one of the most frustrating, elements about theatre, particularly live theatre, is its ephemeral nature. I love the shared experience, unable to ever be repeated. You can see the show again, with the same cast, but a different

seat, a different audience, or the mood of a cast member can change the entire show. I often think back to my first play experience in New Zealand, seeing *A Servant to Two Masters* (1999) at Circa Theatre in Wellington, in May of 2015. My drama class had been studying *commedia dell'arte*, and as we were travelling to Wellington for a Shakespeare festival, it made sense to see the form in action. Adapted from Carlo Goldoni's *Il Servitore de Due Padroni* (1743), Lee Hall's script was akin to the pantomimes I had seen all those years ago: stock characters, risqué jokes, gender bending, silly soliloquies. I was excited. From the very first scene I had tears rolling down my face, struggling to catch my breath before the next moment of hilarity. But what struck me most about this adaptation was not the way in which Goldoni was modernised by Hall, but rather, how Hall's script was adapted by director Ross Jolly, the cast, and the creative team. Set design, lighting, performance, and costuming all helped illuminate the words on the page and made it much more dynamic and entertaining for the audience.<sup>1</sup> This was the moment I realised that adaptation was layered, with the process of transforming the script to the stage just as important as the initial act of adapting a work from its original medium to a play. The ephemeral nature of performance made it even more exciting.

This thesis is born out of my desire to ensure that the theatre is not lost in the world of adaptation studies. It is no easy feat to create art, especially art designed, in its very nature to disappear, to be remembered but not repeated. In investigating theatre adaptations in three stages, from the original source material to the written script, to its staging, I hope to shed light on the everchanging adaptability that can come only from the live experience, from the tactile and the ephemeral. The

---

<sup>1</sup> See: John Smythe, 'Highly Entertaining With Just Enough Character Complexity And Social Commentary Bite', *Theatreview*, 3 May 2015, <<https://www.theatreview.org.nz/reviews/review.php?id=8100>> [accessed 3 October 2021].

adaptations at the centre of this thesis show the versatility and potential possible for page to stage adaptation, transforming well-known, as well as avant-garde pieces into memorable and unique versions, to be enjoyed by an entirely new audience.

The sheer sense of elation I feel in the theatre is unmatched, whether I am on stage or in the audience. I have been so lucky with my theatrical experiences. Resting on the edge of the stage during Emma Rice's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at Shakespeare's Globe (2016). Seeing *Come From Away* (2017) with an audience so enthralled, so invested, that our collective gasps did not seem arbitrary. Grasping my partner's hand as a horse was shot in *War Horse* (2011). These experiences, all theatrical adaptations, have shaped me, and inspired my exploration of how adaptation studies relates to theatre.

I illustrate my arguments about theatre and adaptation through a nuanced discussion of three storyworlds which began life as printed media before they were adapted for the stage. Mark Haddon's novel *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (2003) forms the basis of Simon Stephens' play of the same name (2012), which in turn resulted in productions directed by Marianne Elliott and Sara Brodie. Kit Williams' picturebook *Masquerade* (1979) is expanded and reworked by Kate Mulvany in her play *Masquerade* (2015), which was given life on the stage in a production directed by Lee Lewis and Sam Armstrong. Mulvany interweaves song into her script, and this awareness of the musicality of theatre is amplified in Lisa Kron and Jeanine Tesori's libretto *Fun Home* (2015), an adaptation of Alison Bechdel's graphic memoir *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (2006). This musical is the most widely staged of the three, with productions in New York, London, The Philippines, and Australia. Each of the subsequent chapters focuses on the adaptation journey of one of these storyworlds and each discussion follows a three-part

structure, focusing firstly on the original text, then the adapted theatrical script, and finally selected productions of that script. Throughout, this focus on the adaptation process seeks to illuminate texts and media in a new way, honouring the original texts, as well as giving them distinctly new voices.

Before turning to these compelling examples of the dynamic way texts morph and evolve, a clear understanding of the underpinning theoretical field of adaptation studies is vital, and the remainder of this Introduction charts this territory. While the primary focus of this thesis is on theatrical adaptation, it is necessary to first canvas the wider field of adaptation studies to have a sense of the scope and complexity of the field, before turning to stage-specific theory. Due to the intricacies of the field and the growing body of theoretical work within it, this thesis will draw extensively on the words and ideas of a range of theorists to arrive at a working definition of adaptation. Stage adaptation is a rather neglected area of the wider field, and this thesis argues that relevant theories from the more widely discussed areas of filmed media need to be appropriated as the stage takes its rightful place in the discourse.

### **Adaptation Studies: Questions of Fidelity**

Adaptation is a difficult term to define, as it is so encompassing and context specific. Writing about adaptation poses many difficult questions, the most pressing being, what is an adaptation? In the introduction to *Expanding Adaptation Networks: From Illustration to Novelization*, Kate Newell provides a comprehensive survey of the different modes of adaptation and their related theorists that is worth quoting in full because of its range and precision:

Adaptation has been defined as a product – a “filmed novel,” or a film based on a play or short story (Bluestone 1957, viii; Harrison 2005) – and as a relationship between two or three products, generally literature and film (Richardson 1969; Beja 1979; Corrigan 1999; Cartmell 2010), or literature, film, and theatre (Bevington et al. 2006; Skal 2004) [...] Those uncomfortable with thinking about adaptation as a product define it as a process by which texts are put into conversation and made to signify in new ways (Andrew 1984; McFarlane 1996). Others prefer to think of adaptation as a manifestation of intertextuality, a demonstration of textual relationships, references, allusions, and the like (Stam 2005). Still others prefer not to choose between definitions but to have it all – to recognise adaptation as a thing, a process, and an intertextual phenomenon all at once (Hutcheon 2006; Sanders 2006).<sup>2</sup>

Adaptation studies was born from the rise of film and new media assuming the roles previously filled by novels and short stories in the public sphere, with audiences flocking to the cinema as opposed to the bookshop.<sup>3</sup> Traditionally, adaptation studies has been preoccupied with the issue of “fidelity” to a ‘precursor text as a means to understand an adaptation’s scope and worth’.<sup>4</sup> In their introduction to *Adaptation Studies: New Approaches*, Christa Albrecht-Crane and Dennis Cutchins contend that adaptation theory has ‘progressed very little since the 1950s’.<sup>5</sup> They posit that George Bluestone’s 1957 *Novels into Film* still dominates the way in

---

<sup>2</sup> Kate Newell, *Expanding Adaptation Networks: From Illustration to Novelization* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Christa Albrecht-Crane and Dennis Cutchins, ‘Introduction: New Beginnings for Adaptation Studies’, in *Adaptation Studies: New Approaches*, ed. by Christa Albrecht-Crane & Dennis Cutchins (Madison, New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2010), pp. 11-22 (p. 11).

<sup>4</sup> Albrecht-Crane and Cutchins, p. 12.

<sup>5</sup> Albrecht-Crane and Cutchins, p. 12.

which adaptations are understood, with its emphasis on a ‘uni-directional analysis of literature and cinema’s essential nature’.<sup>6</sup> The assumption here is that the film adaptation should be able to capture the “essence” of the fiction. Albrecht-Crane and Cutchins argue that this ‘stubborn insistence on fidelity certainly has kept adaptation theory from maturing’, but another critical reason for this lack of maturity is its ‘unwillingness to allow the term “adaptation” to broaden and expand’.<sup>7</sup>

The aim of adaptation studies in recent years has been to move away from issues of fidelity in adaptation, focusing instead on adaptations *as* adaptations, rather than as an (un)faithful refiguration in a new medium. Although I agree with Brian McFarlane’s notion that ‘fidelity is obviously very desirable in marriage; but with [...] adaptations I suspect playing around is more effective’,<sup>8</sup> fidelity often plays an important part in an adaptation’s creation and reception and is thus worth discussing before moving on to more contemporary theories of adaptation. Fidelity criticism, in which the success of an adaptation is measured against the meaning and value of the original, ‘is as much a stalwart companion of adaptation studies as it is an embarrassment for it’.<sup>9</sup> As film adaptations of novels began to become more popular, so too did the association between the product and its original work. Rainer Emig’s overview of ‘Adaptation and the concept of the original’ in *The Routledge Companion to Adaptation* (2020) draws on film critic André Bazin’s statement from 1971, where he posited that fidelity ‘meant respect for the spirit of the novel, but is

---

<sup>6</sup> Albrecht-Crane and Cutchins, p. 12.

<sup>7</sup> Albrecht-Crane and Cutchins, p. 12.

<sup>8</sup> Brian McFarlane, ‘It Wasn’t Like That in the Book...’, in *The Literature/Film Reader: Issues of Adaptation*, ed. by James M. Welsh & Peter Lev (Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2007), pp. 3-14 (p. 6).

<sup>9</sup> Rainer Emig, ‘Adaptation and the concept of the original’, in *The Routledge Companion to Adaptation*, ed. by Dennis Cutchins, Katja Krebs & Eckart Voigts (London: Routledge, 2020) <<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315690254>> pp. 28-39 (p. 28).

also meant a search for necessary equivalents'.<sup>10</sup> This approach leads to the 'problem of differentiating between equivalence and difference, between the translation of material from one code and medium to another', implying loss rather than the possibility of gain.<sup>11</sup> Imelda Whelehan argues that for many audiences, fidelity comparisons between the original text and its adaptation result in an 'almost unconscious prioritizing of the fictional origin over the resulting' adaptation.<sup>12</sup>

Fidelity is not without merit, however, as arguments can certainly be made for its ongoing utility. As pointed out by Sharon Brownlee, 'Casie Hermansson makes a compelling case, arguing that "the rejection of fidelity may lead to an overvaluation of *infidelity* which [...] is merely the other side of the fidelity coin"<sup>13</sup>. If the focus remains on whether a text has remained faithful to its progenitor, the danger is that adaptations that are perceived as unfaithful will be rejected solely because they are perceived as being too "pretentious", even although they may be telling the same story in a different way. A pertinent example is the stage adaptation of *War Horse*. A "faithful" adaptation of Michael Morpurgo's novel of the same name would have many issues in being placed on stage, the main issue being having horses that can convey the story, emote when needed, and, practically, fit in the theatre. The stage puppetry used in the adaptation solves the 'technical challenges of representing an equine character in the theatre, but also brilliantly exploits the role of sentimentality in representations of non-human subjects.'<sup>14</sup> It would be futile to

---

<sup>10</sup> André Bazin, *What Is Cinema? Vol II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), p. 141, as quoted in Emig, p. 36.

<sup>11</sup> Emig, p. 36.

<sup>12</sup> Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan, *Adaptations: From Text to Screen, Screen to Text* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Shannon Brownlee, 'Fidelity, Medium Specificity, (In)determediacy: Identities that Matter', in *The Routledge Companion to Adaptation*, ed. by Dennis Cutchins, Katja Krebs & Eckart Voigts (London: Routledge, 2020) <<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315690254>> pp. 157-168 (p. 157). Emphasis in original.

<sup>14</sup> Brownlee, p. 157.

judge this adaptation's success on whether it has remained "faithful" to the original written text, as the differing media require, on a basic level, different ways of communicating the story.

Conversations about fidelity may be considered tedious and even outdated by some, but many scholars insist on its ongoing importance. While fidelity discourse is traditionally aligned with elitist perceptions that literature is somehow superior to "mass media", adaptation studies should not ignore or seal itself off from its implications. The best way for fidelity to serve adaptation studies, in its current state, is to act through signification. Fidelity is usually framed in relation to the "letter" or the "spirit" of the adapted text. Fidelity to the "letter" 'implies that elements such as lines of dialogue can be mechanically transferred from one medium to another, prioritising content and deprioritising materials of expression'.<sup>15</sup> Fidelity to the "spirit" predicates larger storytelling blocks and key components, such as key plot points or central characters, whilst not focusing so intently on minutiae.

This literature review surveying adaptation scholarship draws extensively on Sarah Cardwell's 2020 chapter 'Pause, Rewind, Replay: Adaptation, intertextuality and (re)defining adaptation studies' which provides a lucid and comprehensive overview of several decades of theorising about adaptation. Cardwell contends that adaptation studies today is a 'massively expanded and proliferating field. From medium-specific versus comparative approaches, to intertextuality and metatextuality, onwards to intermediality and transmediality', and that 'twenty-first-century adaptation studies has broadened its original scope from literary/theatrical adaptations on screen to innumerable permutations and degrees of adaptation and

---

<sup>15</sup> Brownlee, p. 159.

related practises'.<sup>16</sup> She argues that in rejecting the 'prejudices and hierarchies of pre-1980s adaptation studies', and by 'embracing and asserting pluralism, today's scholars positively celebrate adaptation as a diverse cultural practise'.<sup>17</sup> The notion of adaptation has been extended 'ostensibly in response to contemporary, real-world creative developments, exhibiting openness to many forms of "adaptiveness", but the field's current relativistic pluralism also conforms to dominant scholarly, theoretical trends'.<sup>18</sup> The two, as Cardwell notes, seem to 'coincide and drive the field into the future, rejecting older conceptions in adaptation (based mostly on literature-screen examples)',<sup>19</sup> in favour of what Simone Murray terms an 'inclusivist conception of adaptation as a freewheeling cultural process: flagrantly transgressing cultural and media hierarchies, wilfully cross-cultural, and more weblike than straightforwardly linear in its creative dynamic'.<sup>20</sup>

Much like fidelity discourse, these new theories in adaptation studies bring forward their own set of issues and potential problems. Cardwell warns that the 'eclecticism and openness constitute a breadth that belies a lack of depth'.<sup>21</sup> Her analysis in 'Pause, Rewind, Replay' is one of the most persuasive and comprehensive overviews of current thinking. She draws attention to the fact that topics lie neglected, 'questions [...] remain buried and unanswered, and alternative approaches [are] not yet adopted',<sup>22</sup> concluding that these are 'the unforeseen

---

<sup>16</sup> Sarah Cardwell, 'Pause, Rewind, Replay: Adaptation, intertextuality and (re)defining adaptation studies', in *The Routledge Companion to Adaptation*, ed. by Dennis Cutchins, Katja Krebs & Eckart Voigts (London: Routledge, 2020) <<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315690254>> pp. 7-17 (p. 7).

<sup>17</sup> Cardwell, p. 7.

<sup>18</sup> Cardwell, p. 7.

<sup>19</sup> Cardwell, p. 7.

<sup>20</sup> Simone Murray, *The Adaptation Industry: The Cultural Economy of Contemporary Literary Adaptation* (London: Routledge, 2012), p. 2, as quoted in Cardwell, p. 7.

<sup>21</sup> Cardwell, p. 7.

<sup>22</sup> Cardwell, p. 7.

drawbacks of the particular nature of the expansion the field has undergone since the late 1990s'.<sup>23</sup> This thesis aims to contribute to some of these issues, by investigating neglected media and their adaptations, as well as amalgamating adaptation practises and discourse to cast a wider net of research. The 'notion of what (an) adaptation is, has been radically amended, with a greater recognition of its connectedness with other cultural practices, such as borrowing, remaking, and translating'.<sup>24</sup> As Cardwell writes the 'relationship and differences between adaptation and related forms of interconnectivity are increasing complex, and the focused conceptual work required to elaborate' on these connections is sparse.<sup>25</sup>

### **Adaptation Studies: New Trends**

Cardwell argues that adaptation studies was transformed by the 'inexorable rise of intertextuality', something that has always been attended to, 'whether under that label or not, as the study of textual influence and referentiality, for the practice is ubiquitous and inevitable in art'.<sup>26</sup> In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the 'striking, special links between intertextuality and adaptation were brought to centre stage'.<sup>27</sup> Brian McFarlane's important monograph of comparative studies argued that modern 'critical notions of intertextuality represent a more sophisticated approach [than fidelity criticism] in relation to adaptation'.<sup>28</sup> For McFarlane, the 'source text is only one of an adaptation's intertexts, and not always the most salient'.<sup>29</sup> Intertextuality,

---

<sup>23</sup> Cardwell, p. 7.

<sup>24</sup> Cardwell, p. 7.

<sup>25</sup> Cardwell, p. 7.

<sup>26</sup> Cardwell, p. 8.

<sup>27</sup> Cardwell, p. 8.

<sup>28</sup> Brian McFarlane, *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 10, as quoted in Cardwell, p. 8.

<sup>29</sup> Cardwell, p. 8.

according to Cardwell, ‘augmented and enhanced an adaptation, and was part of its artistic integrity. Therefore, a recognition of intertextuality [...] was crucial to fair, sensitive criticism and interpretation’.<sup>30</sup> This approach gained traction in 2005 when Robert Stam placed intertextuality at the centre of his project on adaptation, having been strongly influenced by cultural studies and its fascination with 1970s’ and 1980s’ literary and critical theory.<sup>31</sup> Stam expanded the broader ‘context of intertextuality as a theoretical construct’, moving adaptation studies away from literary and cinema studies and further into cultural studies.<sup>32</sup> Intertextuality began to ‘threaten the previously distinct and coherent identity of adaptation studies itself, as it challenged the very existence of the category of adaptation’.<sup>33</sup> As Cardwell writes, ‘Stam acknowledged, following Barthes (1981), [that] intertextuality is the “condition of any text whatsoever”’.<sup>34</sup> Consequently, as the study of adaptation ‘mutates into the study of intertextuality, the range of texts available for our attention increases dramatically – indeed it is logically unlimited’.<sup>35</sup>

Cardwell warns that while

intertextuality is a crucial defining feature of adaptation [...] it has become hard to see what adaptation is but a special instance of intertextuality. And such a characterisation is uncomfortable, for it contradicts the ideological drive in adaptation studies away from special – or privileged – texts and the hierarchy it implies.<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> Cardwell, p. 9.

<sup>31</sup> Cardwell, p. 9.

<sup>32</sup> Cardwell, p. 9.

<sup>33</sup> Cardwell, p. 9.

<sup>34</sup> Cardwell, p. 9.

<sup>35</sup> Cardwell, p. 9.

<sup>36</sup> Cardwell, p. 9.

As a result of this discomfort, adaptation scholars tend to avoid the fraught task of defining an adaptation and how it differs to intertextuality, as well as how it might be delineated from the field of adaptation studies itself. There is an anxiety that intertextuality has made adaptation studies redundant, placing adaptation studies instead as ‘part of the larger phenomenon of rewriting and a theory of intertextuality’.<sup>37</sup>

For Cardwell, the continued existence ‘and vitality of the specific field of adaptation studies depends upon establishing a persuasive [...] distinction between intertextuality and adaptation. This would conceptually underpin separate and complementary fields of adaptation studies and support a breadth of approaches to adapted texts’.<sup>38</sup> Intertextuality can, however, be a source of pleasure for both creators and consumers, allowing them to seek ‘joy in the specific and privileged connectedness between one text and another, in reliving and repeating the memory of one cherished work via a new work’.<sup>39</sup> Theatre, in performance, is certainly intertextual, as production choices are more often than not influenced by previous renditions on stage.

The main criticism of intertextuality as a theoretical frame is the need to distinguish it from adaptation, which can often be difficult. The first distinction that is required, really, is that intertextuality is a ‘necessary but not sufficient condition for adaptation. That is, an adaptation is necessarily intertextual, but a text’s being

---

<sup>37</sup> Mireia Aragay and Gemma Lopez, ‘Inf(1)ecting *Pride and Prejudice*: Dialogism, Intertextuality, and Adaptation’, in *Books in Motion: Adaptation, Intertextuality, Authorship*, ed. by Mireia Aragay (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), pp. 201-222 (p. 203), as quoted in Cardwell, p. 9.

<sup>38</sup> Cardwell, p. 9.

<sup>39</sup> Cardwell, p. 10.

intertextual does not mean that it is necessarily an adaptation'.<sup>40</sup> Intertextuality is a much larger category that includes the smaller subset of adaptation.

The recent focus on intertextuality has been complemented by a focus on intermediality and transmediality. This development reveals and acknowledges a strength of adaptation studies, that is the 'appreciation of the complexities of movement from one medium (art form) to another'.<sup>41</sup> The 'renewed emphasis on mediality is promising for delimiting adaptation studies', suggesting further ways to distinguish adaptation, from similar practices, such as translation and remaking.<sup>42</sup>

Bruhn, Gjølvik and Hanssen's engaging collection of essays, *Adaptation Studies: New Challenges, New Directions* (2013) acknowledges greater need for precision surrounding how academics explore adaptation as an intermedial practice. Regina Schober's chapter on transmediality is another key resource that this literature review draws on for its comprehensive and insightful overview of pertinent scholarship in this field. Schober highlights the "problem" of transmediality, which tends to flatten differences between media, and fails to recognise medial boundaries and the qualities that make each form of media distinctive. Schober believes that adaptation is the process through which connections are 'established between two different modes of representation'.<sup>43</sup> These connections can be 'explicit or implicit, total or partial, and can be formed by different agents', either the author or creator of a specific medial expression, or the recipient of the medium itself, 'by implicitly or partially drawing on and adapting elements of another medium'.<sup>44</sup> As soon as media

---

<sup>40</sup> Cardwell, p. 12.

<sup>41</sup> Cardwell, p. 13.

<sup>42</sup> Cardwell, p. 13.

<sup>43</sup> Regina Schober, 'Adaptation as connection – Transmediality reconsidered', in *Adaptation Studies: New Challenges, New Directions*, ed. by Jorgen Bruhn, Anne Gjølvik & Eirik Frisvold Hanssen (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 89-112 (p. 89).

<sup>44</sup> Schober, p. 89.

transformation is spoken of, there has already been a connection established, ‘creating an inherent relationship between two medial expressions, whether the adaptation is “intended” or a more covert appropriation of transmedial or modal constituents’.<sup>45</sup>

Schober’s essay notes that scholar Irina Rajewsky ‘defines transmediality as “media unspecific phenomena that can be employed in various media”, suggesting that media can share certain fundamental elements, such as rhythm, sound, and temporality’.<sup>46</sup> This is crucial to grasp how adaptation processes ‘take place, how different media relate to each other, and to compare different media at all’.<sup>47</sup>

The notion of a “transmedia adaptation” has caused controversy between adaptation scholars and transmedia scholars alike, creating an atmosphere of exclusion. Henry Jenkins has long argued against transmedia adaptation, stating that it is not true transmedia storytelling, but rather way of creating works ‘that are redundant’.<sup>48</sup> He goes on to claim that transmedia, as it is understood currently, ‘burns up fan interest and causes franchises to fail’,<sup>49</sup> allowing for ‘no new character background or plot development’.<sup>50</sup> Later on, he notes that a ‘simple adaptation may be “transmedia” but it is not “transmedia storytelling” because it is simply re-presenting an existing story rather than expanding and annotating the fictional world’.<sup>51</sup> Geoffrey Long continues this delineation, stating that ‘retelling a story in a

---

<sup>45</sup> Schober, p. 89.

<sup>46</sup> Schober, p. 89.

<sup>47</sup> Schober, p. 92.

<sup>48</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), p. 105.

<sup>49</sup> Jenkins, p. 96.

<sup>50</sup> Jenkins, p. 105.

<sup>51</sup> Henry Jenkins, ‘The Revenge of the Origami Unicorn: Seven Principles of Transmedia Storytelling’, *Confessions of an Aca-Fan* (December 12, 2009) <[http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2009/12/the\\_revenge\\_of\\_the\\_origami\\_uni.html](http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2009/12/the_revenge_of_the_origami_uni.html)> [accessed 17 April 2021].

different media type is an *adaptation*, while using multiple media types to craft a single story is *transmediation*'.<sup>52</sup>

Through no fault of its own, transmedia has become a tarnished term, contaminated by franchises, remakes and spin-offs, forcing canons, alternate universes, and paraphernalia to be included in a story's representation and reception. The idea of a "single story" in mass media is 'becoming more and more of an anomaly for both financial and cultural reasons' as producers 'harness the stability offered by pre-loved formats and audiences [who seek] the pleasures of repeated consumption' of narratives in various forms across numerous platforms.<sup>53</sup> This has resulted in a conflation of the term, bringing many scholars to disregard the usefulness of the term. Even though its relationship to franchises has made for scholarship on anything other than video games or rollercoasters hard to come by, transmediality remains an important term for discussing contemporary adaptations, as it juxtaposes binaries surrounding medium specificity and hierarchies.

Like criticism surrounding fidelity, theories of transmediality should not be ignored due to its divisive discourse. Rather, it should be celebrated for breaking away from traditional understandings of medium specificity. Medium specificity theorists such as Kamilla Elliot argue that 'certain forms are better [for] representing certain subjects, and that each medium should be restricted to representing subjects

---

<sup>52</sup> Geoffrey Long, 'Transmedia Storytelling: Business, Aesthetics and Production at the Jim Henson Company' (Master's Thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2007), in *DSpace@MIT* <<https://www.dspace.mit.edu/handle/1721.1/39152>> [accessed 17 April 2021], p. 22. Emphasis in original.

<sup>53</sup> Yvonne Griggs, 'Reconfiguring the Nordic Noir brand: Nordic Noir TV crime drama as remake', in *The Routledge Companion to Adaptation*, ed. by Dennis Cutchins, Katja Krebs & Eckart Voigts (London: Routledge, 2020) <<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315690254>> pp. 278-286 (p. 279).

best suited to its form'.<sup>54</sup> Since transmedial adaptations 'cross media forms and seek to represent subject matter represented by other media, they are doubly prone to being condemned as theoretically and aesthetically bad'.<sup>55</sup> Although not every transmedial adaptation is enriching the cultural landscape, there is still much to be said about the ways in which such adaptations draw attention to various media, helping to expand the way adaptation is investigated, and to move away from the primacy of adaptation as a uni-directional transfiguration.

Media, writes Lars Elleström, 'may be understood as communicative tools [...] intermediate entities that make [connections] between two or more minds possible'.<sup>56</sup> All media are 'multimodal and intermedial' in the sense that they are composed of 'multiple basic features and are fully understood only in relation to other kinds of media, with which they share basic features'.<sup>57</sup> Intermediality is the study of the specific relationships among 'dissimilar media products and general relations among different media types'.<sup>58</sup> Werner Wolf, a leading intermediality researcher, defines intermediality as a relation between 'conventionally distinct media of expression or communication: this relation consists in a verifiable, or at least convincingly identifiable, direct or indirect participation of two or more media in the signification of a human artefact'.<sup>59</sup> I prefer Elleström's simplified definition, where intermediality is described as an 'approach that highlights media differences –

---

<sup>54</sup> Kamilla Elliot, 'The theory of *badaptation*', in *The Routledge Companion to Adaptation*, ed. by Dennis Cutchins, Katja Krebs & Eckart Voigts (London: Routledge, 2020) <<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315690254>> pp. 18-27 (p. 20).

<sup>55</sup> Elliot, p. 20.

<sup>56</sup> Lars Elleström, 'Adaptation and Intermediality', in *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies*, ed. by Thomas Leitch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 509-525 <<https://dx.doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199331000.013.29>> (p. 510).

<sup>57</sup> Elleström, p. 510.

<sup>58</sup> Elleström, p. 510.

<sup>59</sup> Werner Wolf, *The Musicalization of Fiction: A Study in the Theory and History of Intermediality* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999), p. 37.

and hence media similarities – and their constitutive role for meaning-making within communication’.<sup>60</sup>

Differing forms of media can hold similar characteristics, such as structuring, stories, rhythm, and characters. These can be represented by a medium, and are, according to Elleström, more or less ‘transmedial, meaning they can be [...] successfully transferred among different kinds of media’.<sup>61</sup> Intermediality within adaptation is concerned with how as a means of ‘expression and exchange, different media refer to and depend on one another, both explicitly and implicitly’.<sup>62</sup> The term intermediality denotes ‘communication through several discourses at once, including through combinations of different sensory modalities of interaction, for instance music and moving images’.<sup>63</sup> There is no “pure” media, as each medium is intermedial. Each medium is directly or indirectly in contact with other media, and are influenced, as well as changed by them. As well as this, each medium is also itself a blend of several media.

Intermediality, in other words, is not only the general term that defines the relationships between autonomous ideas, but also the term that identifies the internal plurality of each medium. When it comes to theatrical adaptations, or theatre in general for that matter, it is easy to see the intermedial nature of the medium. An example of this is Marianne Elliott and Tom Moriss’ production of *War Horse*. The production utilises several different media in order to effectively tell the story. Folk music is used to evoke the farm setting of the beginning of the story, and puppetry is

---

<sup>60</sup> Elleström, p. 510.

<sup>61</sup> Elleström, p. 510.

<sup>62</sup> Klaus Bruhn Jensen, ‘Intermediality’, in *The International Encyclopedia of Communication Theory and Philosophy*, ed. by Klaus Bruhn Jensen & Robert T. Craig (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2016), pp. 1-12 <<https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118766804.wbiect170>> (p. 1).

<sup>63</sup> Jensen, p. 1.

used throughout for the animals, for both practicality and anthropomorphisation. The best example, however, is how scenes transition into each other. The production uses a large Perspex screen, designed to resemble a ripped notebook page, where drawings of landscapes and battles are sketched to show the audience elements of the world that it would be impossible to stage. The theatre makes use of different media to make the story more accessible and enjoyable, ensuring that audiences can understand every facet of the story in a dynamic and striking way.

These new trends are crucial to understanding how adaptation studies has evolved and continues to evolve. While these new ideas present relationships between texts and their adaptations, and how differing media can integrate to tell stories, they are not without their critics and challenges. Like fidelity discourse, these new trends are still inherently useful to understanding how adaptations are perceived in different spheres, be it academic, or by paying audiences. For the purposes of this thesis, the field of adaptation studies will be viewed as a whole, taking the key and crucial points from both old and new theories of adaptation, and applying them to contemporary theatrical adaptations, and the medium of the theatre in general. I am a strong advocate of intertextuality and intermediality as tools of analysis, as I believe that texts are inherently intertextual, especially those staged in the theatre. I concur with Thomas Leitch's contention that, in the process of adaptation, media 'demonstrably draw on other sources than their putative source texts'.<sup>64</sup> I also agree with Albrecht-Crane and Cutchins' claim that adaptation studies should adopt 'a poststructuralist lens' based on a richer notion of intertextuality, thus acknowledging

---

<sup>64</sup> Thomas Leitch, 'Review Article: Adaptation Studies at a Crossroads', *Adaptation*, 1.1 (2008), 63-77 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/adaptation/apm005>> (p. 67).

that all ‘adaptations are intertextual by definition, multivocal by necessity, and adaptive by their nature’.<sup>65</sup>

### **Adapting for the Stage**

The field of adaptation studies, as evident here, has been primarily focused on filmed adaptation, predominantly written texts adapted into either films or television series. This domination of the field for such a significant period, has meant that other media have often been side-lined and ignored. Adaptation from “page to stage” is frequently mentioned as a common adaptive process, but scholarship on the subject is significantly limited. The term ‘page to stage’ is often used to describe the adaptive process of Shakespeare plays,<sup>66</sup> the relationship between stage adaptations and their cinematic counterparts (such as the 2011 production of *Frankenstein* directed by Danny Boyle and the 1931 film directed by James Whale),<sup>67</sup> or indeed as a guidebook for how theatre makers should approach creating their own adaptation.<sup>68</sup> A primary reason for this lack of scholarship is due to accessibility. As theatre is traditionally a live experience, often performed for a limited time, and unavailable to be watched again, writing about theatre can be very difficult. However, accessing archival documents, as well as the playscript itself, can diminish the ephemeral nature of the medium.

---

<sup>65</sup> Albrecht-Crane and Cutchins, p. 19.

<sup>66</sup> See: Felicity Brown, ‘Review of Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night* (directed by Emma Rice) at Shakespeare’s Globe, 24 May 2017’, *Shakespeare*, 13.4 (2017), 359-361 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/17450918.2017.1352511>>

<sup>67</sup> See: Jude Wright, ‘Listening to the Monster: Eliding and restoring the creature’s voice in adaptations of *Frankenstein*’, *Journal of Adaptation in Film & Performance*, 8.3 (2015), 249-266 <[https://doi.org/10.1380/jafp.8.3.249\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1380/jafp.8.3.249_1)>

<sup>68</sup> See: Vincent Murphy, *Page to Stage: The Craft of Adaptation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013) and *Contemporary Approaches to Adaptation in Theatre*, ed. by Kara Reilly (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

Linda Hutcheon, one of the few scholars who includes the theatre in her analysis of adaptation, writes that the ‘shift from looking at black marks on the white page to perceiving a direct representation on the stage [...] is a fraught move’.<sup>69</sup> In a discussion ranging from play production, to opera, to musicals, she states that it takes a ‘significantly longer time to sing than to speak, much less read a line of text’, meaning that musicals and other theatrical works must necessarily distil, often radically, the narrative of a novel.<sup>70</sup> This ‘necessary compression means the trimming of expansive plot lines, the removal of much psychological analysis, and the loss of stylistic texture’.<sup>71</sup> Characters and events are omitted for the sake of time, and for a less convoluted plot. With literature, the audience begins in the realm of imagination – which is ‘simultaneously controlled by the selected, directing worlds of the text and unconstrained by the limits of the visual or the aural’.<sup>72</sup> Reading can be stopped at any time, you can reread or skip ahead, hold the book in your hands and see how much of the story is left. With theatre, however, the audience is caught in an ‘unrelenting, forward driving story’, where they have moved from the ‘imagination to the realm of direct perception, with its infinite detail and broad focus’.<sup>73</sup> Hutcheon also recognizes the way in which theatrical adaptation can enhance a story, by utilising language, ‘sound, music, and visual images’ to convey ‘a once purely verbal narrative in a new way’.<sup>74</sup> Each medium has its own specificity used to its advantage to tell stories. No medium is ‘inherently good at doing one

---

<sup>69</sup> Linda Hutcheon, ‘On the Art of Adaptation’, *Daedalus*, 133.2 (2004), 108-111  
 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20027920>> [accessed 4 July 2021] (p. 110).

<sup>70</sup> Hutcheon, p. 110.

<sup>71</sup> Hutcheon, p. 110.

<sup>72</sup> Hutcheon, p. 110.

<sup>73</sup> Hutcheon, p. 110.

<sup>74</sup> Linda Hutcheon, ‘From Page to Stage to Screen: The Age of Adaptation’, in *Great Minds at the University of Toronto: The University Professor Lecture Series 2002-2003*, ed. by Michael Goldberg (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), pp. 37-54 (p. 42).

thing and not another; but each medium (like each genre) has different means of expression' and can therefore achieve certain things better than others.<sup>75</sup>

Although many definitions of "adaptation" are problematic, they all describe 'to some extent the dramaturgical processes inherent in all text-based theatre'.<sup>76</sup> Whether we take, as Katja Krebs suggests, 'Hutcheon's open definition of adaptation as "repetition with variation"',<sup>77</sup> or 'Julie Sanders' comprehensive list of what an adaptation can be – a transpositional practice, an act of re-vision, an editorial practice, an amplification procedure, a re-interpretation and re-location – both might as well be descriptions of theatre's relationship with text'.<sup>78</sup> In addition to this, Krebs states that due to the very nature of the adaptation process, adaptors 'occupy a liminal space: either rendered invisible or deemed not-quite-writer, not-quite-director, they nonetheless remain intrinsically linked to the dramaturgical process'.<sup>79</sup> Adaptors are 'unavoidably and inherently dramaturgical in the acts they commit on the words of another'.<sup>80</sup>

Krebs also provides significant detail about the new ways in which modern theatrical adaptations are approached, especially pertaining to the 'hierarchical relationship between source and adaptation [...being] replaced by thinking about an adaptation, and its source being in a lateral relationship rather than a vertical one'.<sup>81</sup> This relationship must also be dialectical and dramaturgical, meaning that the reception of the adaptation in performance depends on how an audience accesses this

---

<sup>75</sup> Hutcheon, p. 43.

<sup>76</sup> Katja Krebs, 'Ghosts We Have Seen Before: Trends in Adaptation in Contemporary Performance', *Theatre Journal*, 66.4 (2014), 581-590 <<https://doi.org/10.1353/tj.2014.0125>> (p. 582).

<sup>77</sup> Krebs, p. 582.

<sup>78</sup> Krebs, p. 582.

<sup>79</sup> Krebs, p. 582.

<sup>80</sup> Mark O'Thomas, 'Translation, Theatre Practice and the Jazz Metaphor', *Journal of Adaptation in Film and Performance*, 6.1 (2013), 55-64 <[https://doi.org/10.1386/jafp.6.1.55\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/jafp.6.1.55_1)> (p. 62).

<sup>81</sup> Krebs, p. 582.

relationship: an audience ‘with knowledge of the source will enter the dialectical relationship at a different point than an audience who has no knowledge of the source’.<sup>82</sup> As Hutcheon argues, if audiences are ‘not familiar with the particular work that it [the adaptation] adapts, [the audience] simply experience the adaptation as [they] would any other work’.<sup>83</sup> To experience the work as an adaptation, however, it needs to be recognized as such and be known as an adapted text, ‘thus allowing the [work] to oscillate’ in the memories of what the audience is experiencing.<sup>84</sup>

This dialectic relationship between a source and its adaptation is similar to the relationship between a play and its own production history. This phenomenon is identified by Marvin Carlson as one of the ‘universals of performance [...] its ghostliness, its sense of return’, whilst at the same time engendering ‘continual adjustment and modification as the memory is recalled in new circumstances and contexts’.<sup>85</sup> Krebs states that any text-based performance ‘exists within a reception history as well as a performance history’, so too does an ‘adaptation exist within a reception history either of the source alone or the source alongside numerous other adaptations of it’.<sup>86</sup>

To write comprehensibly about stage adaptation, this thesis will employ methods used by Kareesha Naidoo and Hermann Wittenberg, and the analysis will be ‘alert to the performativity of the works, and attention will be given to the non-dialogue elements as indicated by stage directions and other aspects of didascalia’.<sup>87</sup>

---

<sup>82</sup> Krebs, p. 582.

<sup>83</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 169.

<sup>84</sup> Hutcheon, p. 121.

<sup>85</sup> Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), p. 1.

<sup>86</sup> Krebs, p. 583.

<sup>87</sup> Kareesha Naidoo and Hermann Wittenberg, ‘Between text and stage: the theatrical adaptations of J.M. Coetzee’s *Foe*’, *South African Theatre Journal*, 30.1-3 (2017), 30-45 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/10137548.2017.1327257>> (p. 31).

Didascalía, as Marisa Keuris describes, refers to ‘everything in the play which is not dialogue, in other words, the title, character list, foreword, prologue, epilogue, stage directions and so on’,<sup>88</sup> key aspects which allow insight into the nature of the performance. Language, conveyed mostly through dialogue and speaking on stage, is crucial for these theatrical performances. But in the theatre, ‘language is also complimented by a range of other non-verbal ways of transmitting meaning’.<sup>89</sup> Mark Fleishman argues that the ‘physical body forms part of the meaning-making process of almost all theatre where human performers appear live in front of an audience’.<sup>90</sup> Any reading of a script needs to take into account the possibility of performance that arises when the written text is ‘given life when it is raised from the page and set inside the body of the actor’.<sup>91</sup> As well as this, other devices of the theatre, such as lighting, stage design, costuming, and music can allow insight into the original text that may not be accessible in any other way.<sup>92</sup>

The stage adaptations of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, *Masquerade*, and *Fun Home* each allow for media analysis and a reflection on current adaptation discourse. All three adaptations preserve the titles of their source material and retain plot and character. This makes them identifiable as adaptations, announced retellings of the original. However, they each utilise the stage adaptation to take the storyworld of the text in a different direction, giving it new meaning and life on stage. As well as this, each of these adaptations highlight the media specific qualities their original medium shares with the theatre. The theatrical medium in

---

<sup>88</sup> Marisa Keuris, *The Play: a manual* (Pretoria: Van Schaik, 1996), p. 4.

<sup>89</sup> Naidoo and Wittenberg, p. 32.

<sup>90</sup> Mark Fleishman, ‘Physical images in South African theatre’, *South African Theatre Journal*, 11 (1997), 199-214 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/10137548.1997.9688204>> (p. 201).

<sup>91</sup> Fleishman, p. 201.

<sup>92</sup> Naidoo and Wittenberg, p. 32.

various forms (play, play with music, musical) enhances the source material, and re-presents the storyworld for a new addition, and in a new context. Using adaptation scholarship that focuses on reception, creation, and adaptation as a process, as well as current understandings of transmedia and transmedial adaptations, the following chapters will contextualise contemporary theatrical adaptations as inherently transmedial.

Chapter 1 will outline the ways in which elements of Mark Haddon's novel, such as perspective and performativity, are drawn out by Simon Stephens' adaptation of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, as well as how the adaptation uses transposition discourse to re-present the story of Haddon's novel on stage. The chapter will then detail the ways selected productions of the play enhance the theatricality of the text, heightening it through the adaptative process of performance. Chapter 2 will explore how Kit Williams' picturebook *Masquerade* is adapted and expanded on stage by Kate Mulvany. Utilising Williams' words and images, but adding details from her own life, Mulvany's adaptation brings the world of the picturebook into the "real world" and exemplifies how picturebooks are inherently performative. The final chapter engages with a current debate about whether the musical adaptation of *Fun Home* is transmedial. The chapter argues that by utilising the media specific qualities shared by comics and theatre, as well as narrative expansion through song, *Fun Home: The Musical* is the first *true* transmedial adaptation of a comic on stage.

These very different narratives and forms of media are connected by a preoccupation with growing up and coming of age. The protagonists of each of these storyworlds must leave the safety and innocence of childhood to confront difficult "adult" issues, such as dysfunctional family relationships, illness, and death. Family

likewise forges a link between texts, providing comfort and love for some, and triggering loss and trauma for others. These thematic preoccupations are handled very differently by the original authors and their adaptors, highlighting the ever-evolving capacity of stories to be made new.

## **Chapter 1: Curiouser and Curiouser: Adapting *The Curious Incident* for the Stage**

My favourite novel is Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (2003). I remember my mother taking me to Whitcoulls in Bayfair Shopping Centre in Tauranga and telling me I could get any book I wanted, due to having an excellent school report. I was struck by Haddon's book, as I saw it on both the young adult and adult fiction shelves. It seemed to sit on the edge, both childlike and adult. The cover was an azure blue, marked with shiny foil stars, a crescent moon buried in a cocoa-brown cloud. The title was scrawled in a mixture of fonts. In the middle of the cover, lays a cartoon dog, front legs limp, and with a pitchfork in its stomach. *Hairy Maclary* this was not. Sitting down to read the book, I was instantly captivated. I read the book in a single night, quite literally unable to put it down. The narrator, Christopher, had me hooked. Every revelation he discovered, every twist and turn, I was right there with him.

When my family took a trip to England in 2014, I was determined to see the stage adaptation of Haddon's novel on the West End. The adaptation, written by Simon Stephens, had been well-received, but I had questions. How could a novel so intricate, that leaps back and forth between the mind of the protagonist, and several bustling locations and time periods, be adapted to the stage? I was not the only person who thought the novel was "unadaptable".<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, our one day in London did not allow time to see the show. I could go in and buy a programme, and a copy of the script, but that was it. I was heartbroken, convinced my chance to see

---

<sup>1</sup> See: Jeff Lunden, 'The Unadaptable *Curious Incident* Gets a Stage Adaptation', *NPR*, October 7, 2014, <<https://www.npr.org/2014/10/07/354139148/the-unadaptable-curious-incident-gets-a-stage-adaptation>> [accessed 19 March 2021].

the play (which had already had to transfer theatres) had disappeared.<sup>2</sup> Fortunately, in 2016, I had the opportunity to travel to London as part of the Young Shakespeare Company of New Zealand and perform at Shakespeare's Globe. The play was still on at the Gielgud, so I skipped dinner on Monday July 18<sup>th</sup>, and with 4 of my friends travelled on the Underground to the theatre. We sat in the back row of the stalls with a perfect view of the proscenium arch. The lights came down. Wellington, the murdered dog who starts the story emerged through a trapdoor. I was transported. For those few hours, nothing else mattered, nothing else existed, except the world of the play.

At first, I did not think that I would write about *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* in this thesis, wondering whether subjecting a storyworld I love to academic analysis would tarnish my experience of both novel and play.<sup>3</sup> But I kept returning to it. Haddon's novel, Stephens' script, and the productions directed by Elliott and Brodie encapsulate the potential of transmedial adaptation, what it requires, and what makes it a unique literary phenomenon, and therefore exemplify the core preoccupations and questions of this discussion. The novel and its adaptation on stage provide the perfect starting point for this analysis of transmediality.

Martin Puncher argues that for a written piece of theatre, a certain model needs to be understood. Not one where the writer 'reign[s] supreme', or where the

---

<sup>2</sup> This was immediately following the production's re-opening at the Gielgud Theatre, after the theatre it previously transferred to from the National Theatre, the Apollo Theatre, had its ceiling collapse during a production, injuring more than 80 audience members. The new venue was assumed to be for a shortened West End run. See: Conal Urquhart and Rachel Williams, 'Apollo theatre collapse injures more than 80 people in London's West End', *The Guardian*, 19 December 2013, <<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2013/dec/19/apollo-theatre-london-balcony>> [accessed 30 September 2021].

<sup>3</sup> The title will be referred to from this point on as *The Curious Incident*.

dramatic text is an ‘incomplete artwork, a work with gaps that actors, designers, and directors must fill’.<sup>4</sup> Rather, one that presumes that the ‘dramatic text is complete, a finished object that can be read like any other piece of literature’.<sup>5</sup> In this model, performing a text is not the ‘process of carrying out instructions, nor [...] filling in gaps’, but as ‘one of transformation and adaptation’.<sup>6</sup> The text is taken and ‘transposed into a different medium, namely, that of the stage apparatus’.<sup>7</sup> There is no need to work out what is fixed and what is not, as the text is complete, and will be adapted in its entirety. How this adaptation is subsequently achieved depends on a variety of factors. There is nothing in the text, although it is complete, that gives definitive instructions. The agency of ‘adaptation, in other words, resides with the adaptor, even though this adaptation occurs within a set of constraints’.<sup>8</sup> These come from the text, the context of the adaptation, the conditions of the production, ‘the nature of the actors, the [theatrical] space, the ideas about [theatre] circulating in a given culture or subculture, and finally the nature of the two media – text, performance – between which the adaptation occurs’.<sup>9</sup> This chapter begins with a consideration of Haddon’s novel, before turning to Stephens’ adaptation, an adaptation that is both “faithful” to its source material, but innovative in its execution. In performance, the distinctive theatrical possibilities of the script are given voice and visual form. The same story is reworked and made new as it is told through a variety of media, each with their own unique characteristics.

---

<sup>4</sup> Martin Puncher, ‘Drama and Performance: Toward a Theory of Adaptation’, *Common Knowledge*, 17.2 (2011), 292-305 <<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/431157>> [accessed 10 March 2021] (p. 295).

<sup>5</sup> Puncher, p. 295.

<sup>6</sup> Puncher, p. 295.

<sup>7</sup> Puncher, p. 296.

<sup>8</sup> Puncher, p. 296.

<sup>9</sup> Puncher, p. 296.

## Evaluating Haddon's Novel

The novel is, without a doubt, the most adapted form of media considered in this thesis. Although some may argue that the ‘real knowledge about life and living’ are embedded in the ‘great epics of bygone eras [or] intensely private lyric poems’,<sup>10</sup> there is no denying the novel’s domination in literary circles, bookshops, or indeed in screen adaptations. Novels run “very deep” in social conscious, and according to Eric Bulson, ‘part of [this] depth comes from the fact that the term “the novel” [is] ironically rooted in the Latin word for new (*novum*)’, when it is in fact a rather old term.<sup>11</sup> By some accounts it goes back 4,000 years to the ‘narrative fictions of ancient Egypt, with examples appearing subsequently as far afield as Hellenistic Greece, the histories and romances of medieval China and France, and the subgenres of modern England, Russia, Brazil, Nigeria, Japan, and the United States’.<sup>12</sup> Bulson writes that the novel is ‘one of the few places [...] that human beings can go to find other voices, other stories, other locations that help them contemplate who, what, and where they are’.<sup>13</sup> All of this happens ‘with plots and characters that are fictional, in places real and imagined, and they exist in our minds long after the last page has been turned’.<sup>14</sup>

Novels give authors and readers ‘this incredible opportunity to access the “great themes of existence” without reducing them to cliché’.<sup>15</sup> Novels have the

---

<sup>10</sup> Eric Bulson, ‘Introduction’, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Novel*, ed. by Eric Bulson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 1-20, <<https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316659694.002>> (p. 1).

<sup>11</sup> Bulson, p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Bulson, p. 1.

<sup>13</sup> Bulson, p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> Bulson, p. 1.

<sup>15</sup> Bulson, p. 1.

power, as Walter Benjamin observed, to give ‘evidence for the profound perplexity of the living’.<sup>16</sup> E.M. Forster puts it beautifully:

The intensely, stifling human quality of the novel is not to be avoided: the novel is sogged in humanity [...] We may hate humanity, but if it is exorcised, or even purified the novel wilts; little is left but a bunch of words.<sup>17</sup>

While there is considerable consensus that the novel is embedded in the human experience, the precise nature of its form is often difficult to accurately describe. Questions of length, format, and perspective are all issues raised when discussing what the label of “a novel” encompasses. Vilashini Cooppan writes that perhaps a better question to ask is ‘what *isn't* a novel?’.<sup>18</sup> For Cooppan, the novel has a cannibalistic ‘capacity to ingest a wide range of literary genres, modes, and forms’, making this ‘generic monster a veritable Polyphemus, a one-eyed giant towering over literary studies’.<sup>19</sup> Although Cooppan defines “novel” as a genre, I contend it is also a form of media. This thesis argues in subsequent chapters that graphic narratives and picturebooks are media in their own right, so it is therefore a disservice to the novel to simply define it as a genre of fiction. The novel is a medium that is then used a means of telling stories from different genres.

The novel has had a long history with theatrical adaptation, as well as with being tangled with fidelity discourse. Clayton Mackenzie writes that although adaptations as ‘diverse as *Nicholas Nickleby*, *The Thirty Nine Steps*, *The Mousetrap*

---

<sup>16</sup> Walter Benjamin, ‘The Storyteller’, in *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zohn, ed. by Hannah Arendt (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970), pp. 83-109 (p. 87).

<sup>17</sup> E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1954), p. 24.

<sup>18</sup> Vilashini Cooppan, ‘The Novel as Genre’, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Novel*, ed. by Eric Bulson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 23-42, <<https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316659694>> (p. 23). Emphasis in original.

<sup>19</sup> Cooppan, p. 23.

and *The Woman in Black* all testify to an artistic penchant for staging fiction [...] the matter of adaptation [raises] some interesting controversies and curious caveats'.<sup>20</sup>

Due to their 'length or complexity some novels have been deemed unsuitable for stage adaptation'.<sup>21</sup> John Patterson argues that there should be a 'ten year, worldwide moratorium on adapting novels',<sup>22</sup> his reasoning being that too many novels nowadays are 'written and marketed with a stage or cinematic eye that works to the detriment of great novelistic writing'.<sup>23</sup>

Adaptations of novels are often scrutinized for their inability to fully display the entire contents of the book, due to time constraints. As films and theatre both usually run for under three hours, it is not feasible for the novel to be presented without omissions. Rather, these adaptations should be seen as distillations, taking what the adaptive team deems the most crucial elements of the story, and filtering out sub-plots, amalgamating characters, and condensing the time covered. Moira Arthurs argues that 'any dramatist has to condense [...] drama [has] to capture the essence of the novel',<sup>24</sup> but this does not mean that they are reductive of its content. Adaptations, in many cases, illuminate the novel through a new lens, and often revitalise interest in the medium as a whole. The persistence of fidelity discourse surrounding adaptations of novels is highly detrimental, as it creates a false hierarchy that privileges the written form over the adaptative medium.

---

<sup>20</sup> Clayton Mackenzie, 'Adapting Novels For The Stage: New Clothes Or New Emperors?', *Studia Universitatis Petru Maior. Philologia*, 11 (2011), 154-160  
<<https://www.proquest.com/docview/1038159914/fulltextPDF/77044514C170484CPQ/1?accountid=17287>> [accessed 6 October 2021] (p. 154)

<sup>21</sup> Mackenzie, p. 154.

<sup>22</sup> John Patterson, 'By the book', *The Guardian*, 15 March 2008,  
<<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2008/mar/15/fiction>> [accessed 7 October 2021].

<sup>23</sup> Mackenzie, p. 154.

<sup>24</sup> Mackenzie, p. 157.

Perspective is important to the medium of the novel, not only in the way it presents narrative perspective from its characters, but a wider sociological one. The novel is a ‘product of particular historical circumstances and a society that reduces the social aspect of life to the mere co-existence of individuals’.<sup>25</sup> The novel is also a ‘symbolic form of representation closely related to a specific type of society’.<sup>26</sup> As such, the novel is a medium rich in the ability to display unique perspectives with great specificity, immersing the audience in the thought process of imagined individuals.

*The Curious Incident* is presented in the first-person, and the audience is explicitly told that Christopher is writing the book that we are reading, and that it will be a book he would want to read himself.<sup>27</sup> The novel reads like a journal, with Christopher divulging information about his interpersonal relationships, and his opinions of other people. Crucially, the first-person perspective of the novel gives a sense of immediacy, as if the audience is on a path of discovery at the same rate as Christopher, but it also shows his innate subjectivity. The events and opinions in the novel come from a single source, from a protagonist who finds ‘people confusing’.<sup>28</sup> Christopher is very matter of fact in his statements, saying things like, ‘I do not tell lies. Mother used to say that this was because I was a good person. But it is not because I am a good person. It is because I can’t tell lies’.<sup>29</sup> This example encapsulates Christopher’s tone and perspective, which is direct and unmediated by social conventions. Haddon’s premise is that even though it is a work of fiction,

---

<sup>25</sup> Daniel Just, ‘The Modern Novel from a Sociological Perspective: Towards a Strategic Use of the Notion of Genres’, *Journal of Narrative Theory*, 38.3 (2008), 378-397, <<https://doi.org/10.1353/jnt.0.0015>> (p. 378).

<sup>26</sup> Just, p. 378.

<sup>27</sup> Mark Haddon, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (London: Vintage, 2004), p. 5.

<sup>28</sup> Haddon, p. 19.

<sup>29</sup> Haddon, p. 24.

everything within this book will be “true”, because it is told through Christopher’s lens.

Much of the scholarship focusing on Haddon’s novel revolves around an attempt to diagnose Christopher.<sup>30</sup> Within *The Curious Incident*, Christopher sits somewhere on the autism spectrum, with the blurb of the novel stating that he has Asperger’s Syndrome. This is something that Haddon came to deeply regret. In the programme of the play adaptation, he states that he has ‘always regretted that the phrase “Asperger Syndrome” appeared on the cover of *Curious Incident* when it was first published’ as this is not a ‘phrase [Christopher] uses. In the book he refers to himself only as “someone who has Behavioural Problems”’.<sup>31</sup> Haddon likes this term, as it

gently mocks diagnostic medical language [...] the way it includes all of us (who doesn’t have behavioural problems?). But [...] most of all because it is Christopher’s own phrase. Labels tell us very little about the person who has been labelled and a lot about the people doing the labelling.<sup>32</sup>

Regardless of Haddon’s assertions, *The Curious Incident* cannot escape this labelling, or debate about autism spectrum disorder in literature.<sup>33</sup> Sonya Freeman Loftis writes that Christopher is ‘externally obvious’ as an autistic character, stating that Christopher’s character is a ‘conglomeration of stereotypes, presenting autism as

---

<sup>30</sup> See: Anne Whitehead, *Medicine and Empathy in Contemporary British Fiction: A Critical Intervention in Medical Humanities* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017) and Sonya Freeman Loftis, *Imagining Autism: Fiction and Stereotypes on the Spectrum* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015).

<sup>31</sup> Mark Haddon, *The Curious Incident’s Origins*, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* Programme, Gielgud Theatre (London: Delfont Mackintosh, 2012), pp. 17-18 (p. 17).

<sup>32</sup> Haddon, p. 17.

<sup>33</sup> Henceforth, autism spectrum disorder will be referred to simply as ‘autism’, keeping in line with research by Caroline E. Robertson and Simon Baron-Cohen. See: Caroline E. Robertson and Simon Baron-Cohen, ‘Sensory Perception in Autism’, *Nature Reviews. Neuroscience*, 18.11 (2017), pp. 671-684.

the public eye would imagine it to be'.<sup>34</sup> Loftis also contends that his character is 'more consistent in sticking to general perceptions of the spectrum than any real individual person could be, resulting in a figure who is overdrawn to the point of potential caricature'.<sup>35</sup>

Other critical responses have praised Haddon's ability to accurately portray the nuances of autism, and the ways in which Christopher lacks certain abilities, while others are heightened. A prime example of this, is Christopher's weakness in decoding 'facial expressions and subtle verbal and non-verbal elements that facilitate social interaction'.<sup>36</sup> It is easier for Christopher to understand the emotions of a dog, as opposed to a human, as 'you always know what a dog is thinking. It has four moods. Happy, sad, cross, and concentrating'.<sup>37</sup> This 'limited mood repertoire is in contrast with the complex human behaviour and emotional nuances a person is capable of experiencing and expressing',<sup>38</sup> so Christopher finds this easy to comprehend, as there is always a "right" answer. Robertson and Baron-Cohen state that within autistic individuals, there are delays in the development of the ability to reflect on personal thoughts and emotions, and those of others. These 'alterations [...] are accompanied by a very special perceptual experience of the world', with as many as '90% of autistic individuals [...] affect[ing] every sensory modality: taste, touch, audition, smell and vision'.<sup>39</sup> For Christopher, it is these alterations which

---

<sup>34</sup> Loftis, p. 124.

<sup>35</sup> Loftis, pp. 124-125.

<sup>36</sup> Evangelia Lambidoni, 'Life Viewed through the Eyes of a Child with Autism', *The Journal of Education*, 188.1 (2007), 93-109 <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/42744124>> [accessed 24 November 2021] (p. 94).

<sup>37</sup> Haddon, p. 4.

<sup>38</sup> Lambidoni, p. 94.

<sup>39</sup> Robertson and Baron-Cohen, p. 671.

allow him the view the world from a specific point of perception, and allow him to remember, collate, and investigation information.

Christopher's personality and perspective place him as both a 'narrator characteristic of children's fiction, and a fictional child in whom adults are particularly invested'.<sup>40</sup> Christopher 'narrates in plain, straightforward language which presents few difficulties for the younger reader',<sup>41</sup> for example, the matter of fact opening of the novel, which begins, 'It was 7 minutes after midnight. The dog was lying on the grass in the middle of the lawn in front of Mrs Shears' house. Its eyes were closed'.<sup>42</sup> However, this does not exclude adult audiences, who are conscious of the layers and complexities of the narrative in a way that child readers may not. While the child reader follows Christopher's thought processes and investigative nature to discover who killed Wellington, the adult reader may have already started the process of diagnosis canvassed above. As Rachel Falconer writes, as far as the 'flat style of narration is concerned, one could point to a host of "inadequate narrators" like Christopher in adult fiction: Camus's *L'Étranger*, Hemmingway's short stories, or novels by William Faulkner or Kurt Vonnegut'.<sup>43</sup>

A novel positioned for the dual audience of children and adults is known as "crossover" literature. In children's literature scholarship, "crossover" refers to 'literature that transcends the traditional boundaries between child and adult readers'.<sup>44</sup> Although made popular by the success of the likes of the *Harry Potter* novels (1997-2007), Philip Pullman's *Northern Lights* (1995), crossover literature

---

<sup>40</sup> Rachel Falconer, *The Crossover Novel: Contemporary Children's Fiction and Its Adult Readership* (New York: Routledge, 2008) <<https://www.doi.org/10.4324/9780203892176>> (p. 97).

<sup>41</sup> Falconer, p. 97.

<sup>42</sup> Haddon, p. 1.

<sup>43</sup> Falconer, p. 97.

<sup>44</sup> Sandra L. Beckett, 'Crossover Picturebooks', in *The Routledge Companion to Picturebooks*, ed. by Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 209-219 (p. 209).

has existed for centuries, and has a long and rich history best illustrated by folk and fairy tales. This “crossover” in literature will be further discussed in Chapter 2, in relation to picturebooks, but *The Curious Incident* must be acknowledged as an important crossover text, as it was ‘this novel that brought home the point that realist fiction for children could cross over into adult readers’ as easily as fantasy novels.<sup>45</sup>

Although the majority of the scholarship surrounding *The Curious Incident* focuses on Christopher’s autism, much needs to be said about his position as a detective. *The Curious Incident* is primarily a detective novel, and the plot and characters function within the genre. Casey Cothran and Mercy Cannon write that ‘detective fiction addresses the human struggle to make sense of the fragmentary past, the uncertain present, and the unknowable future’.<sup>46</sup> As readers follow ‘the adventures of questing sleuths, they are provided with mysteries, gaps, dislocations’ and finally with ‘answers to many of their questions’.<sup>47</sup> As a ‘consequence of its structure, one which first obscures and then clarifies’, the detective genre ‘demands and cultivates a special sought of cognition, pushing readers to consider both that which is unknown and that which is unknowable’.<sup>48</sup>

John Scaggs writes that ‘crime narratives that are structured around the investigation of a crime are, by default, metanarratives’.<sup>49</sup> Detective stories are ‘narratives about narratives, or stories about reconstructing and reinterpreting the story of a crime’.<sup>50</sup> It is this ‘metanarrative self-awareness that [...] creates the

---

<sup>45</sup> Falconer, p. 95.

<sup>46</sup> Casey A. Cothran and Mercy Cannon, ‘Introduction: Embarking on a New Investigation’, in *New Perspectives on Detective Fiction: Mystery Magnified*, ed. by Casey A. Cothran and Mercy Cannon (New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 1-12 (p. 1).

<sup>47</sup> Cothran and Cannon, p. 1.

<sup>48</sup> Cothran and Cannon, p. 1.

<sup>49</sup> John Scaggs, *Crime Fiction: The New Critical Idiom* (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 142.

<sup>50</sup> Scaggs, p. 142.

perfect framework within which the genre can endlessly question and reinvent itself'.<sup>51</sup>

Tzvetan Todorov's *The Poetics of Prose* inspired the direction that modern academic discourse has taken in seriously addressing the detective genre. In his chapter 'The Typography of Detective Fiction', Todorov explores the dual nature of detective fiction, stating that these stories contain 'not one but two stories: the story of the crime and the story of the investigation'.<sup>52</sup> Todorov writes that 'the first – the story of the crime – tells "what really happened," whereas the second – the story of the investigation – explains "how the reader (or the narrator) has come to know about it"'.<sup>53</sup> Existing within the gaps between these two stories, the fictional characters 'do not act, they learn'.<sup>54</sup>

Todorov's chapter also details eight following points to create a work of detective fiction, building on S. S. Van Dine's twenty rules from 1928. These eight points are:

1. The novel must have at most one detective and one criminal, and at least one victim (a corpse).
2. The culprit must not be a professional criminal, must not be the detective, must kill for personal reasons.
3. Love has no place in detective fiction.
4. The culprit must have certain importance:
  - (a) in life: not be a butler or a chambermaid

---

<sup>51</sup> Scaggs, p. 143.

<sup>52</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, *The Poetics of Prose*, trans. by Richard Howard (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977), p. 44.

<sup>53</sup> Todorov, p. 45.

<sup>54</sup> Todorov, p. 44.

- (b) in the book: must be one of the main characters.
5. Everything must be explained rationally; the fantastic is not admitted.
  6. There is no place for descriptions nor for psychological analyses.
  7. With regard to information about the story, the following homology must be observed: “author : reader = criminal : detective.”
  8. Banal situations and solutions must be avoided (Van Dine lists ten).<sup>55</sup>

*The Curious Incident* not only conforms to all these points, but Haddon uses Christopher as the catalyst for them. Christopher is the sole detective in the novel, investigating the death of Wellington the dog. The culprit is not a professional criminal, nor the detective, and kills for a personal reason. Love is of no importance to Christopher, and the murder is an act of jealousy. The murderer is of importance, as he is the father of the detective, and is never a suspect. What is most pertinent about *The Curious Incident* in relation to these points, is how Haddon places Christopher’s “behavioural problems” as the catalyst for the events in the novel to occur. Due to Christopher’s inability to identify certain characteristics and nuances of people or situations, everything is delivered in a matter-of-fact way. Furthermore, this same inability means that he does not analyse people or their intentions, as he cannot comprehend them, nor does he explain situations with any information he would deem irrelevant. Finally, the very nature of the way the novel is written, that being from a first-person perspective in the form of a “self-written” book, means that the reader learns information at the same rate as the detective.

Autistic and detective discourse intersect in analysis of the novel, with many comparisons made between Christopher and his hero, Sherlock Holmes. Loftis

---

<sup>55</sup> Todorov, p. 49.

writes that Christopher's 'charming narrative voice is simultaneously childlike and complex, rhetorically embodying the seemingly paradoxical "splinter skills" of some autistic [people]'.<sup>56</sup> Although *The Curious Incident* builds on 'autism stereotypes, it does so in a complex and multi-layered way, harking back to current cultural readings of Sherlock Holmes as autistic, inverting and parodying the autistic detective tradition'.<sup>57</sup> Christopher's self-association with Sherlock Holmes places him within the autistic detective tradition, implying that Christopher sees Holmes as an autistic hero.<sup>58</sup> With the popular culture interpretation of Holmes as autistic becoming increasingly prevalent, Christopher is 'growing up in a world in which Holmes represents a particular kind of stereotypical autistic identity'.<sup>59</sup> Christopher compares himself to Holmes, assuming that their 'differences in sensory perception, attention, and memory' means that he can "claim" the character as a way of taking pride in his autistic characteristics.<sup>60</sup> According to Loftis, in Christopher's mind 'to be recognized as a good detective is one potential way to be successful as an autistic person [...] Christopher is aware of the autistic detective stereotype: it is a fictional role he is attempting to emulate'.<sup>61</sup> As Christopher affirms when explaining why he loves *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, 'I like Sherlock Holmes and I think that if I were a proper detective he is the kind of detective I would be'.<sup>62</sup>

---

<sup>56</sup> Loftis, p. 125.

<sup>57</sup> Loftis, p. 125.

<sup>58</sup> Loftis, p. 125.

<sup>59</sup> Loftis, p. 125.

<sup>60</sup> Loftis, p. 125. The title of the novel is also a direct reference to a line from the Sherlock Holmes story 'The Adventure of Silver Blaze' (1892).

<sup>61</sup> Loftis, p. 125.

<sup>62</sup> Haddon, p. 92.

### ***The Curious Incident* as Transmedial Adaptation**

When Simon Stephens adapted *The Curious Incident* for the stage, this emulation of Sherlock Holmes was something that he considered. In 2005, Stephens was writing a play called *Motortown*, where he had an ‘instinctive sense that at the heart of [the play] there [would] be a relationship between a boy and his brother and the brother was going to be autistic’.<sup>63</sup> As such, he read *The Curious Incident* to ‘investigate the phenomena of autism’, and admired the ‘extraordinary compassion and clarity with which [Haddon] had written Christopher’s voice’.<sup>64</sup> Christopher was a ‘character with a palpable and extraordinary heart and written with a real sense of truthfulness and detail’ and Stephens found this ‘massively engaging’.<sup>65</sup> Both Stephens and Haddon were working at the National Theatre in 2006, and established a rapport, in part due to living fairly similar lives. A ‘year or so after that’ Haddon emailed Stephens asking if he would consider adapting the novel for the stage.<sup>66</sup> Although Stephens found the task ‘extraordinarily daunting and [...] generous’, it was slightly frightening for him to be adapting the “nation’s favourite novel”, especially since he had never adapted a novel before.<sup>67</sup> Stephens was drawn to the offer, stating that he ‘would do it as long as [he] didn’t take a commission for it. As long as [he reserved] within it the right to fail’.<sup>68</sup> Stephens felt trusted by Haddon to ‘do whatever [he wanted] to do’ and to be ‘as radical as [he wanted] to be’,<sup>69</sup> and ultimately created an adaptation that is faithful to its source material but is able to soar on stage.

---

<sup>63</sup> Tom Ue, ‘Adapting *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*: A Conversation with Simon Stephens’, *Journal of Adaptation in Film & Performance*, 7.1 (2014), 113-120 <[https://dx.doi.org/10.1386/jafp.7.113\\_7](https://dx.doi.org/10.1386/jafp.7.113_7)> (p. 114).

<sup>64</sup> Ue, p. 114.

<sup>65</sup> Ue, p. 114.

<sup>66</sup> Ue, p. 114.

<sup>67</sup> Ue, p. 114.

<sup>68</sup> Ue, p. 114.

<sup>69</sup> Ue, p. 114.

Although Stephens has long been an established and well-respected playwright in Britain and Germany,<sup>70</sup> prior to *The Curious Incident* he was well-known for writing gritty, frequently violent, “ear-to-the-ground” plays about life in Britain, often in a very experimental way, with the likes of *Bluebird* (1998), *Pornography* (2007), and *Punk Rock* (2009). It was surprising to many then, that a crossover novel was being adapted by Stephens. Haddon himself initially believed it was a ‘preposterous idea’ to adapt a novel ‘set entirely in the head of a single character’ and questioned whether it ‘could be translated into a radically third-person medium without it doing irreparable damage’.<sup>71</sup> However, Haddon knew Stephens ‘would be a joy to work with’, and was ‘fairly confident that his bleak nihilism and fascination with random violence would steer him round the obvious pitfall of sentimentality’.<sup>72</sup>

In terms of adaptation studies, the theatrical adaptation of *The Curious Incident* fits with what Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan define as ‘transposition’, which sticks ‘close to the literary source, [with] minimum interference [to the story]’.<sup>73</sup> The adaptation keeps the same plot points and narrative arc, while also retaining characters, both major and minor. Stephens also uses Haddon’s dialogue throughout, meaning that he is literally bringing the novel to life on stage. Although the core story of *The Curious Incident* may not be “expanded” in terms of plot, I argue that the theatrical adaptation heightens Haddon’s novel and

---

<sup>70</sup> Stephens, along with Martin Crimp and Dennis Kelly, is one of the most produced and translated playwrights in Germany and is very popular both commercially and in schools.

<sup>71</sup> Mark Haddon, ‘Mark Haddon on *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* – Guardian book club’, *The Guardian*, 13 April 2013, <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/apr/13/mark-haddon-curious-incident-book-club>> [accessed 22 November 2021].

<sup>72</sup> Haddon.

<sup>73</sup> Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan, *Screen Adaptation: Impure Cinema* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 5.

gives it *new* meaning. By transferring the keys aspects of *The Curious Incident* and placing them in a different medium, nothing is lost. It is not then just a transposition, but a re-presenting.

Stephens' adaptation of the novel is quite straightforward in its intention to tell the same story, just in a different medium. It is not one that is obsessed with fidelity, but rather one that has a deep respect for the original text. Aside from the 'necessary shift from the subjective "first-person" viewpoint of the novel to the objective "third-person" viewpoint of the stage', the adaptation is 'extremely faithful to the narrative, characters and environments' as described in the novel.<sup>74</sup> Although the action of the novel is condensed, Christopher remains the central protagonist and, just as in Haddon's text, the play is created from the book Christopher writes. For Stephens, the 'guiding idea was to make sure that everything [in the play text] was behavioural, to make sure everything was active'.<sup>75</sup> This is a 'key tenet' of Stephens' playwrighting practise, with him stating in an interview with Jacqueline Bolton that

Theatre is a behavioural medium, it deals not with what people feel or think or remember or say but with what people *do* [...] You can't put what Christopher "sees" or "thinks" onstage. It just doesn't work, because "thinking" is undramatic. So the really hard thing was extricating the play from Christopher's mind. I needed to locate the drama and in order to locate the drama I needed to look at the things that people *do* to each other.<sup>76</sup>

The creation of the adaptation was a two-step process. First, Stephens simply 'listed all the events that happen in the book', and then 'typed out all the direct

---

<sup>74</sup> Jacqueline Bolton, *Theatre of Simon Stephens* (London: Methuen, 2020), p. 114.

<sup>75</sup> Bolton, p. 114.

<sup>76</sup> Bolton, p. 114. Emphasis in original.

speech into the form of a script'.<sup>77</sup> Stephens observed that 'like a playwright', Haddon 'only has people talk to one another out loud [...] when they're trying to affect each other quite directly'.<sup>78</sup> The play text came from these two documents, but there was still the "problem" of Christopher's voice. As Stephens states, 'you've got to have Christopher's voice [from the novel] in [the script] because otherwise you miss it. So how do you get Christopher's voice *out*'?<sup>79</sup> As such, two devices – 'one literary, the other theatrical – were mobilized to solve this problem: the introduction of a narrator in the form of Siobhan, Christopher's schoolteacher; and an ensemble who would work as a company to manifest, visually and physically, Christopher's imagination'.<sup>80</sup> While the action of the novel has been condensed for the sake of convenience, the character of Siobhan and the inclusion of an ensemble are both acts of expansion.

Siobhan is a minor character in Haddon's novel, the catalyst for Christopher to write the novel, its editor – 'Siobhan said that she would help with the spelling and the grammar and the footnotes'<sup>81</sup> – as well as Christopher's school teacher. Siobhan is the person who best "understands" Christopher and can help him navigate social cues and conventions. She acts as a soundboard for Christopher, someone he can confide in about his detective work. In the play, however, Siobhan has a much more crucial role. Rather than simply reading and editing Christopher's text, she has the active part as the narrator. In the very first scene of the play, Siobhan '*open's Christopher's book. She reads from it*', before stating 'it was seven minutes after midnight. The dog was lying on the grass in front of Mrs Shears' house', the very

---

<sup>77</sup> Bolton, p. 114.

<sup>78</sup> Bolton, p. 114.

<sup>79</sup> Bolton, p. 114. Emphasis in original.

<sup>80</sup> Bolton, p. 114.

<sup>81</sup> Haddon, p. 34.

first line of Haddon's novel.<sup>82</sup> Passages of Christopher's thoughts are read aloud by Siobhan, moving the narrative forward. The intimacy of the novel's first-person narration is lost, but it is replaced by the intimacy and immediacy of the theatrical device, and the shift into third person is inherently transmedial. It is through Siobhan's narration that Stephens acknowledges the unique qualities of both media, showing how effective alteration can enhance elements for theatrical adaptation. Stephens uses Siobhan to help the audience enter and navigate Christopher's complex thought patterns, and her narration allows for Christopher's physical movements to come alive, without the actor being burdened by delivering constant monologues. By shifting to the third person, Stephens situates the audience, frees Christopher from the cage of narration, and displays his investment in "doing" rather than "thinking".

Siobhan's lines of narration are directly lifted from Haddon's novel, allowing 'its knowing audience, an interpretive doubling, a conceptual flipping back and forth between the work we know and the work we are experiencing'.<sup>83</sup> Having Siobhan state 'My name is Christopher John Francis Boone. I know all the countries of the world and the capital cities. And every prime number up to 7507',<sup>84</sup> while Christopher interacts with other characters, establishes her position as a character both inside and outside of the action. Siobhan even questions Christopher on occasion,

**Siobhan** [...] I never said that.

**Christopher** Yes you did.

---

<sup>82</sup> Simon Stephens, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (London: Methuen, 2015), p. 3.

<sup>83</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 139.

<sup>84</sup> Stephens, p. 4.

**Siobhan** I didn't use those words Christopher.

**Christopher** You did on 12 September last year. At first break.<sup>85</sup>

Siobhan crucially exists to create artifice in the play too, just as she does in the novel. This artifice is key to understanding Stephens' adaptation, as it is the way in which the novel becomes theatre, *within* the adaptation.

Stephens' adaptation has the potential for Siobhan's narration to be read in several ways. After all, a script is malleable, designed to be interpreted differently by each reader and by each production. By having Siobhan take on the active role of narrator, Christopher can be seen as occupying a more passive state, potentially holding less authority in his own story. Having the immediacy of his voice refracted through an adult could impact the way in which the audience sympathises with Christopher. However, I argue that Siobhan's narration heightens Christopher's voice, as it is a role that Christopher assigns to her. He values Siobhan and trusts her more so than other adults, so he knows that his thoughts will be delivered authentically by her. The conceit is set up in such a way that we see Siobhan as an extension of Christopher's mind, trusting her with moving the play along, and with his voice.

Throughout the novel, the act of writing is constantly referred to, with the reader acutely aware of the book's existence as a construct written by Christopher for the readers that he hopes will follow his journey. Likewise, in the adaptation, the act of performance is referred to, with Siobhan asking Christopher if he would like to adapt his book into a play, as it could 'be really good fun'.<sup>86</sup> She thinks that 'a lot of people would be interested in what would happen if people took [his] book and

---

<sup>85</sup> Stephens, p. 6.

<sup>86</sup> Stephens, p. 50.

started acting bits out of it'.<sup>87</sup> Towards the end of the play, Christopher even “re-directs” a scene that he believes is unfaithful to his book:

[Roger] *gives Christopher a strawberry milkshake.*

**Judy** Roger. That’s enough. You can stay as long as you want to stay.

**Christopher** It was Mother who gave me the milkshake.

*They look at him.*

It was Mother who gave me the milkshake not you.

**Judy** *picks the milkshake up.*

**Christopher** You need to shout more loudly at him. Like you’re really angry with him not just being nice.

**Judy** *looks at him. Nods.*

**Judy** OK.

*She puts the milkshake down. She’s much angrier.*

Roger. That’s enough. You can stay as long as you want to stay.

*She looks at Christopher examining his response. Expecting more feedback.*<sup>88</sup>

In a moment of metatextual brilliance, Stephens has not only adapted a novel into a play, but, within that adaptation, he also adapts the same novel into a play. This expands the popular stage convention of the play within the play, with audiences of Shakespeare, in particular, familiar with moments such as Bottom explaining ‘Thisbe’s cue’ to Theseus in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (1595) which deliberately draws attention to both the form and functionality of the “play” on stage.<sup>89</sup> While

---

<sup>87</sup> Stephens, p. 50.

<sup>88</sup> Stephens, p. 82.

<sup>89</sup> William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, ed. by Stanley Wells (London: Penguin, 2005), 5.1.182.

this is clearly a divergence from Haddon's work, Stephens believes that it is 'in the spirit of the novel',<sup>90</sup> allowing Christopher's investigation to fit the new context of the stage.

The ending of the play sets it up very clearly as an adaptation, deliberately exploiting the theatrical medium. The novel ends with Christopher writing:

And I know I can do this because I went to London on my own, and because I solved the mystery of who killed Wellington? and I found my mother and I was brave and I wrote a book and that means I can do anything.<sup>91</sup>

Here, Christopher's adventures and actions, particularly the act of writing, give him a sense of self and empowerment. However, in the play, this becomes a conversation between Christopher and Siobhan:

**Christopher** I can because I went to London on my own.

*She looks at him.*

I solved the mystery of Who Killed Wellington.

*She looks at him.*

I found my mother. I was brave.

**Siobhan** You were.

**Christopher** And I wrote a book.

**Siobhan** I know. I read it. We turned it into a play.

**Christopher** Yes. Does that mean I can do anything do you think?

Does that mean I can do anything Siobhan?

---

<sup>90</sup> Simon Stephens and Duška Radosavljević, 'Theatre as an Intellectual Concertina: Simon Stephens in Conversation with Duška Radosavljević', *Theatre and Adaptation: Return, Rewrite, Repeat*, ed. by Margherita Laera (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2014), pp. 255-268 <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781472526533.ch-017>> (p. 259).

<sup>91</sup> Haddon, p. 268.

Does that mean I can do anything?

*The two look at each other for a while.*

*Lights black.*<sup>92</sup>

Stephens deliberately removes much of the optimism at the end of the novel, because he does not believe that Christopher, or anyone for that matter, can do “anything”.<sup>93</sup> Just because Christopher ‘can’t do anything doesn’t mean that his future is one of fear or pessimism or both [...] life isn’t about the capacity to do “anything”. It’s quite the opposite’.<sup>94</sup> For Stephens, life is about the ‘capacity to negotiate our inabilities, rather than to engage with our abilities and tries on our abilities’, and as such, he ‘wanted to create an ending to the play which demanded the audience to engage with that question’.<sup>95</sup> The triple repetition of the line reinforces this uncertainty for the future, removing a certain layer of the ambiguity. Siobhan occupies an almost partner-like role in the creation and execution of the play, but she is also Christopher’s greatest confidant. By deliberately choosing to leave his question unanswered, she creates doubt in the mind of Christopher and the reader, but most importantly, she remains the adult figure in his life who does not lie to him.

Conversely, Christopher’s abilities are on full display in the “second ending” of the play in the form of the “maths appendix”. Just as the novel does, the play text ends with an appendix detailing Christopher’s favourite question from his Maths A Level. In the novel, the equation solution simply resides at the end of the book, as ‘Siobhan said it wasn’t very interesting [...] and she said people wouldn’t want to read the answers’, so Christopher writes it as an appendix.<sup>96</sup> For the script, Stephens

---

<sup>92</sup> Stephens, p. 99.

<sup>93</sup> Ue, p. 117.

<sup>94</sup> Ue, pp. 117-118.

<sup>95</sup> Ue, p. 118.

<sup>96</sup> Haddon, p. 260.

keeps that same idea, placing the scene ‘*after the curtain call*’.<sup>97</sup> Stephens wanted to show an ‘unmediated celebration of the brilliant of Christopher’s mathematical mind’, but to also ensure that it is steeped in theatricality.<sup>98</sup>

The stage directions for the appendix are as follows:

*After the curtain call **Christopher** returns to the stage. He gets the attention of anybody still in the audience. Even if it is just one person.*

*He thanks them for staying.*

*Using as much theatricality as we can throw at it, using music, lights, sound, lasers, the boxes, the train tracks, the rest of the company, the orchestra, the fucking ushers for Christ’s sake, using dance, song, bells, whistles, the works, he proves by means of a counter-example that when a triangle with sides that can be written in the form of  $n$  squared plus one,  $n$  squared minus one and two  $n$  (where  $n$  is greater than one) is right angled.<sup>99</sup>*

Here, Stephens is consciously aware of the ways in which the theatrical medium enhances a moment in the novel. This is a post-show showstopper, highlighting the capability not only of Christopher’s mind, but of the medium too. It also harks back to Hutcheon’s idea of “doubling”,<sup>100</sup> as an audience member aware of the original text will anticipate the appendix being staged.

When I saw the play in the Gielgud Theatre, very few audience members stayed for the appendix, and this was always Stephens’ intention. He wanted to create a ‘little gift that was unique’ to those who stayed.<sup>101</sup> Stephens wished to highlight the unique heterotopic conventions of the theatre, that the play exists as

---

<sup>97</sup> Stephens, p. 99.

<sup>98</sup> Ue, p. 118.

<sup>99</sup> Stephens, pp. 99-100.

<sup>100</sup> Hutcheon, p. 139.

<sup>101</sup> Ue, p. 119.

long as the space is occupied, and to ensure each audience member left with their own individual experience of the play. Stephens states that ‘every theatrical performance, unlike any other art form, is completely unique’,<sup>102</sup> and Christopher speaking to empty seats helps enrich this uniqueness.

Stephens’ adaptation also utilises an ensemble cast to play the various characters that Christopher meets and interacts with. Stephens wanted a ‘dead simple script’ that lent itself towards movement, rather than large production elements or elaborate choreography, so ‘you don’t need to be fucking Complicité to do a version’ of the play.<sup>103</sup> The script prescribes a cast of ten, with four actors playing single characters (Christopher, Siobhan, Ed, and Judy), with the other actors playing a variety of both named and unnamed characters. In many ways, having a small cast play a myriad of characters is useful in terms of casting, as a small ensemble is easier to work with. However, this also has an effect in the way the text is read, as it means that minor characters in Christopher’s life are blended, indistinguishable from each other, and hard to process. These characters deeply reinforce the “play within a play”, as it becomes evident that all of these characters are Christopher, or his refraction of them. Every interaction, line of dialogue, or situation is presented through Christopher’s lens. This is perhaps best highlighted when Christopher is arrested, and as he empties the contents of his pockets, various voices detail that he is carrying

**Voice Four** A piece of string.

**Voice Five** A piece of a wooden puzzle.

**Voice Six** Three pellets of rat food for Toby, my pet rat [...] <sup>104</sup>

---

<sup>102</sup> Ue, p. 119.

<sup>103</sup> Stephens and Radosavljević, p. 258.

<sup>104</sup> Stephens, p. 7.

By detailing Christopher's actions, the voices act, like Siobhan, as passive and active characters, spectators in Christopher's mind, and participants in his adventures.

The play was also written, however, specifically 'with the work of Frantic Assembly in mind'.<sup>105</sup> Founded in 1994, the theatre company Frantic Assembly creates 'performer-led ensemble work, often commissioning and working with writers and composers in ways that encourage a collaborative approach to writing, music, choreography and movement'.<sup>106</sup> Stephens was committed to Frantic Assembly's involvement in the development of the play, and wrote the script so that 'movement, dance and the ensemble ethos of a company of actors would be integral to the play's realization'.<sup>107</sup> As such, stage directions are sparse in the adaptation, and typically provide little information to how a particular scene or transition will occur, the likes of '[Christopher] *leaves the house. **The Company makes Swindon town centre***'.<sup>108</sup> As Stephens observes, *The Curious Incident* has 'hardly any stage directions. What *Curious Incident* has is problems: it has a series of problems to solve'.<sup>109</sup> These problems are solved through the driving force of many of Stephens' productions, and that is collaboration. This aspect of the adaptation is best illustrated in the following section, which explores various productions and their collaborative processes.

---

<sup>105</sup> Bolton, p. 115.

<sup>106</sup> Bolton, p. 115.

<sup>107</sup> Bolton, p. 115.

<sup>108</sup> Stephens, p. 53.

<sup>109</sup> Bolton, p. 115.

### ***The Curious Incident: Productions as Adaptation***

The original production of *The Curious Incident* was directed by Marianne Elliott, for the National Theatre in 2012. Elliott, fresh off the success of *War Horse*, first worked with Stephens in 2002, directing his play *Port*. Stephens describes her as ‘the most elegant kind of swan [...] she creates this illusion she’s not working at all, but underneath the water she’s working harder than any director I’ve dealt with’.<sup>110</sup> Known for her ‘visual ingenuity, often using puppetry, choreographed movement, and technological wizardry’ to underscore human behaviour, Elliott was Stephens’ only choice for direction.<sup>111</sup>

Although the adaptation was written with simplicity in mind, Elliott’s production was typically elaborate, and collaborative. From the very beginning, the rehearsal room was filled with specialist designers. As Stephens states, Elliott would have the ‘set designer and the lighting designer and the sound designer and the composer and the video designer’, and Stephens would ‘sit with them [...and think]: “Yeah, I’m just the language designer here! That’s what I am”’.<sup>112</sup>

Jacqueline Bolton writes that Elliott’s production is ‘an unexpected example of Regietheater’,<sup>113</sup> a style of directing that involves ‘choosing a direction, an orientation, an interpretation’, while still ‘taking as a starting point the text’s givens as unalterable’.<sup>114</sup> Peter Boenisch identifies this practise as an approach in which play texts seek to transform the drama of the written text ‘into an experimental

---

<sup>110</sup> Michael Schulman, ‘*Angels in America Rises Again*’, *The New Yorker*, March 19 2018, <<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/03/26/angels-in-america-rises-again>> [accessed October 14 2021].

<sup>111</sup> Schulman.

<sup>112</sup> Stephens and Radosavljević, p. 259.

<sup>113</sup> Bolton, p. 113.

<sup>114</sup> Peter Boenisch, *Directing Scenes and Senses: The Thinking of Regie* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), p. 3.

economy generated through physicalization, spatialization and rhythmalization'.<sup>115</sup>

Regietheater seeks to find the “essence” of a play text in order to transpose ‘it onto other layers of theatrical presentation: space, rhythm, and bodies’.<sup>116</sup>

Upon receiving Stephens’ script, ‘Elliott was clear that – however the show was to be made – it was to be a visual manifestation of Christopher’s interiority’.<sup>117</sup> Elliott’s work on the production was to ‘fill in the visuals with the way that [Christopher’s] brain might work [...] and try to get the audience to feel what he feels, emotionally’.<sup>118</sup> As such, the creative decisions of the play were governed by the idea of “Christopher Boone” – his point of view, his encounters in the play, and the expanse of his imagination.

Adrian Sutton, composer of the music for Elliott’s production, revealed to Bolton that the sound, lighting, images, choreography – ‘literally everything, every element of the stagecraft of the play’ – was ‘lined up like iron fillings in that direction: [Elliott’s] principle concern was that everything had to be played’ from Christopher’s point of view.<sup>119</sup> Responding to the “givens” of Stephens’ script, and taking a different “orientation” from it, Elliott’s production drew out Christopher, and made him the production’s “essence” from which all ideas emanated. In this way, ‘the production was *born of* the text, not *dictated by* it’.<sup>120</sup> Elliott, as with all her work, is not afraid of change. It is evident that she sees her productions *as*

---

<sup>115</sup> Peter Boenisch, ‘Exposing the Classics: Michael Thalheimer’s *Regie* Beyond the Text’, *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 18.1 (2008), 30-43  
<<https://doi.org/10.1080/10486800701741477>> (p. 42).

<sup>116</sup> Boenisch, p. 39.

<sup>117</sup> Bolton, p. 113.

<sup>118</sup> Bolton, p. 114.

<sup>119</sup> Bolton, p. 114.

<sup>120</sup> Bolton, p. 114. Emphasis in original.

adaptations, which require change. The production is not bound by fidelity discourse, but rather influenced by the text, respecting it, but not limited by it.

Elliott's production of *The Curious Incident* premiered at the Cottesloe Theatre, the National Theatre's smallest venue.<sup>121</sup> The Cottesloe's unique attribute is that it can be manipulated for performance in any stage convention. The production was staged in-the-round, with the set designed by Bunny Christie. An in-the-round stage, writes David Ward, 'is an exciting cockpit, a place where people meet and talk with added intimacy. On the good nights, it prompts greater concentration from an audience that is far closer to the action than it would be in a proscenium arch'.<sup>122</sup> But perhaps, most striking, is the intimacy the audience feels with each other. Initially, Christie envisioned the play as being set in a school gymnasium, but then realised she wanted 'the set to be magical [...] it had to be a magic box and out of this magic box must come wonderful things. They're hidden, but [Christopher] thinks of them and, because he thinks of them, they're there'.<sup>123</sup>

The audience were seated on four edges of a squared playing space, with the floor designed to resemble mathematical graph paper. The floor was made of blackboard material, onto which 'Christopher could chalk emoticons and diagrams', as he tried to solve the mystery of Wellington's death.<sup>124</sup> The performance space becomes a 'virtual map of Christopher's mind, revealing his inner life through lighting and video projections of whirling algebraic equations, galaxies of stars and

---

<sup>121</sup> This theatre is now known as the Dorfman Theatre.

<sup>122</sup> David Ward, 'Conquering theatre in the round', *The Guardian*, 7 October 2008, <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2008/oct/07/theatre>> [accessed 21 June 2021].

<sup>123</sup> Bolton, p. 118.

<sup>124</sup> Bolton, p. 118.

cascading numbers and letters'.<sup>125</sup> Within this, there are various trap doors, from which 'props were conjured like thoughts from his fevered imagination', and into which hundreds of LED lights were fitted, which formed 'patterns like [the] neural pathways' of Christopher's brain.<sup>126</sup> The stage becomes a versatile, imaginative space, where Christopher can 'magic or conjure the image that he wants [...] and then change it straight away'.<sup>127</sup>

Props, costuming, and music are all also utilised in Elliott's production to enhance the story, and its theatricality. The props were designed specifically with Christopher in mind, but also a clear "theatrical" vision. The props were set around the edge of the stage, clearly labelled, and visible to the audience. For Elliott, this was to 'declare everything' so the audience were 'not going to see major acts of illusion or great big sets chugging on, it's just these people telling a story'.<sup>128</sup> Katy Rudd, an associate director on the production, thought Christopher 'would love that'.<sup>129</sup> The props are also usually bright colours, as Christopher would often fixate on these objects, rather than maintain eye contact, and also as something identifiable of that character. As Elliott explains, it was important 'that was the only thing [of significance] that could be in the scene', and it was a 'very bright colour because for [Christopher] this prop is of heightened importance, it's what he's fixating on'.<sup>130</sup>

---

<sup>125</sup> Patrick Marmion, 'The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time review', *Daily Mail*, 10 August 2012, <<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-2186265/The-Curious-Incident-Dog-Night-Time-theatre-review-Curious-tale-worth-telling>> [accessed 13 December 2021].

<sup>126</sup> Laura Thompson, 'The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time review', *Daily Telegraph*, 4 August 2012, <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-reviews/9450156/The-Curious-Incident-of-the-Dog-in-the-Night-Time-adapted-by-Simon-Stephens-Cottesloe-Theatre-review.html>> [accessed 13 December 2021].

<sup>127</sup> Bolton, p. 118.

<sup>128</sup> Bolton, p. 118.

<sup>129</sup> Bolton, p. 118.

<sup>130</sup> Bolton, p. 118.

The costumes in the production are all fairly monotonous, usually a hue of grey or brown, with most actors wearing these costumes across characters. When a new character is introduced, the actor puts on ‘something that is often quite neon and harsh’ which is ‘how Christopher sees those things’.<sup>131</sup> Elliott’s reasoning behind this is that Christopher has a ‘hypersensitivity to noise, and colour’ and these characters, these ‘strangers he meets in the street, are very loud and garish and strange and frightening’ and this is reflected in the costuming.<sup>132</sup>

Adrian Sutton’s music is electronic, a cacophony of chaos, an aural sensory overload for both Christopher and the audience. Sutton states that he was always ‘working in the service of what it is like to Christopher [...] it’s a crashing overload of “I can’t cope with this, I can’t cope with all these people, all this movement all these lights, and sounds”’.<sup>133</sup> The music, then, had to evoke his feeling of terror. Sutton’s music was inspired by Christopher’s obsession with prime numbers, his love of ordering things, computers, and of course, mathematics. The music heightens scenes of chaos in Christopher’s mind, such as the scene in the Underground, or moments when his imagination soars. In these moments, the audience gets a better understanding of what it is like to be Christopher, to hear how he processes the world around him. When he is in an unfamiliar place, the music is blaring, but when he is pondering the cosmos, it is soft, and Christopher is comfortable.

Performance relies on the physical body to act as a vessel for the words, and Elliott’s production had a fantastic cast to bring Stephens’ script to life. Luke Treadaway, who first worked with Elliott as the lead in *War Horse*, gave a stunning

---

<sup>131</sup> Bolton, p. 118.

<sup>132</sup> Bolton, p. 118.

<sup>133</sup> Bolton, p. 119.

performance as Christopher. Treadaway ‘powers himself into another acting realm’ as Christopher, with his ‘concentrated face and flailing limbs, he is steadily intelligent but physically shaken, mentally agile and emotionally inflexible’.<sup>134</sup> Peter Brown of *London Theatre* called Treadaway’s performance ‘truly mesmerising’, portraying the character with ‘dignity which we readily respect, if not admire’.<sup>135</sup>

Critics praised the production for Elliott’s direction, the production design, performances, and Stephens’ script as adaptation. Susannah Clapp wrote that the ‘protean Simon Stephens has produced an exemplary adaptation [...] the true wonder is that the intimacy of the book – the first-hand knowledge of Christopher’s mind – is given real theatrical life’.<sup>136</sup> Michael Billington called the production a ‘highly skilful adaptation’, with Stephens’ adaptive choices solving ‘the problem confronting any adaptor’.<sup>137</sup> Matt Wolf of *The New York Times*, however, thought that Stephens’ script is ‘often sketchy’, and that palls ‘next to the playfulness and ingenuity of a staging that seats the audience on all sides’.<sup>138</sup>

Michael Schulman writes that Elliott’s production is an ‘abstract piece of ballet’, that ‘immersed the audience in Christopher’s mind’ and ‘externalised his sensory overload’.<sup>139</sup> What Elliott’s production does so brilliantly, is breathe life into

---

<sup>134</sup> Susannah Clapp, ‘*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time; Philadelphia, Here I Come!: Playing the Games: Taking Part/After the Party* – review’, *The Guardian*, 5 August 2012, <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2012/aug/05/curious-incident-dog-night-review>> [accessed 11 December 2021].

<sup>135</sup> Peter Brown, ‘*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* Review 2013’, *London Theatre*, 12 March 2013, <<https://www.londontheatre.co.uk/reviews/the-curious-incident-of-the-dog-in-the-night-time-review-2013>> [accessed 11 December 2021].

<sup>136</sup> Clapp.

<sup>137</sup> Michael Billington, ‘*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* – review’, *The Guardian*, 3 August 2012, <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2012/aug/03/curious-incident-dog-review>> [accessed 11 December 2021].

<sup>138</sup> Matt Wolf, ‘National Theatre Hits Its Mark’, *The New York Times*, August 7 2012, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/08/arts/08iht-lon08.html>> [accessed 11 December 2021].

<sup>139</sup> Schulman.

Stephens' script, taking it into the realm of the tactile and the tangible. Her collaborative nature nurtures the best out of her productions, enriching the script she works from. The specific qualities of the theatrical medium have enriched Stephens' script, adding new layers of meaning. Specifically, by drawing constant inspiration from the idea of "Christopher", and the intention he would have when devising his play, Elliott has utilised elements that can only be provided by the live art of performance. The production has transferred to London's West End, Broadway, and several world tours. It has been seen by an estimated five million audience members and continues to find success on its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary tour of the UK. When I saw the production, I was blown away, but not overwhelmed, by the spectacle of it. Elliott's direction ensured that the many facets of the production worked cohesively, to represent Christopher's mind. Although the Gielgud Theatre moved the play from in-the-round to a proscenium arch, the potential of the set to become anything imaginable remained the same.

Elliott's production has been so successful, that there have only been four professional productions performed globally *not* directed by her. South Africa, Singapore, and Mexico have each staged productions, as has New Zealand. As I live in New Zealand, it was practical to investigate the production emanating from here, as I was able to access databases, reviews, and first-hand accounts. The Auckland Theatre Company production of *The Curious Incident* premiered in 2016, directed by Sara Brodie, and provides a useful opportunity to explore both the way in which previous productions can haunt and shape those that come after them, and the quest of directors to their adaptation as its own distinct version. Brodie states that she was 'very pleased not to have seen the now iconic staging of the original production', allowing her production to 'purposefully [find its] own path through this play within

a play'.<sup>140</sup> However, this production evoked a sense of “haunting” from other adaptations, as many reviewers and theatregoers of Brodie’s production had seen the National Theatre’s live broadcast of Elliott’s production. This links back to the dominance of fidelity discourse, forcing adaptations to form a lineage with other adaptations to tell a “true” version of the original, proving detrimental to all parties.

Nathan Joe, in his review for *Theatre Scenes*, writes that the ‘elephant in the room with this production’ is that it is ‘coloured by [his] previous experience with the NT Live production’.<sup>141</sup> For Joe, the two productions ‘share more than a passing similarity’, but Brodie ‘does a wonderful job [of] creating a production that more [than] succeeds in its own merits, even if it invites inevitable comparisons’.<sup>142</sup>

Brodie’s production was performed in the Rangatira space at Q Theatre in Auckland. The Rangatira is much like the Cottesloe, in that it is a versatile space that can be altered for different configurations. Much like Elliott’s production, Brodie’s adaptation is performed in-the-round, with the staging similar to the original design by Christie. The stage itself was ‘arranged into a [geometric] outline of white squares, with additional white cubes hanging from the ceiling’, which produce refracted images of ‘galaxies, ticking numbers and Pythagorean formulae’.<sup>143</sup> Brodie states that she ‘kept the actual stage space quite simple’, giving the designer John Verryt, the ‘idea of a puzzle’ as a starting point.<sup>144</sup> Inspired by the computer games

---

<sup>140</sup> Sara Brodie, ‘Director’s Note’, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* programme (Auckland: Auckland Theatre Company, 2016), <[atc.co.nz/media/4254/atc-curious-programme-vweb2.pdf](http://atc.co.nz/media/4254/atc-curious-programme-vweb2.pdf)> [accessed 11 December 2021] (p. 2).

<sup>141</sup> Nathan Joe, ‘Review: *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (Auckland Theatre Company), *Theatre Scenes*, July 28 2016, <<https://www.theatrescenes.co.nz/review-the-curious-incident-of-the-dog-in-the-night-time-auckland-theatre-company/>> [accessed 11 December 2021].

<sup>142</sup> Joe.

<sup>143</sup> Joe.

<sup>144</sup> Jack Van Beynen, ‘*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*: a unique mind on stage’, *Stuff*, July 12 2016, <<https://www.stuff.co.nz/entertainment/stage-and-theatre/81984487/the->

*Minesweeper* and *Tetris*, Verryt's design also took direct inspiration from the multi-modal elements in Haddon's novel, harking back to Hutcheon's idea of a conscious "doubling".

The highlight for most critics, similar to Elliott's production, was the actor playing Christopher. In Brodie's production, Christopher was played by Tim Earl, then a recent graduate of Toi Whakaari. Critics called Earl's performance 'superb' in its ability to capture 'the profound strangeness of Asperger's whole also expressing the pathos of a boy's inability to process emotion'.<sup>145</sup> Earl 'steals the show [...] he nails all aspects of the performance, running the full gamut of outright unpleasantness through to unexpected hilarity and human warmth'.<sup>146</sup> Nathan Joe gives 'the best praise [he] can offer is [that he] can't recall anything that made his predecessor [Treadaway] in the role superior'.<sup>147</sup>

Joe writes that 'even without having read the novel [he] can say [that] Stephens' text is [a] masterclass in adaptation', one which lends the 'show a first-person perspective that is clearly rooted in the source material without sacrificing any sense of theatricality'.<sup>148</sup> I would add to this, saying that both Elliott and Brodie exemplify this same "masterclass", bringing the play text to life, and presentable to the public. Although comparisons between Elliott's production, seen through screen media, may shape expectations of Brodie's production, it is still a valid adaptation of Stephens' text that brings something new to the script. As Katja Krebs outlines, any

---

curious-incident-of-the-dog-in-the-night-time-a-unique-mind-on-stage> [accessed 11 December 2021].

<sup>145</sup> Paul Sime-Barton, 'Review: Talented cast deliver humour and heartbreak', *The New Zealand Herald*, 25 July 2016, <[https://www.nzherald.co.nz/entertainment/review-talented-cast-deliver-humour-and-heartbreak/16PKBT4HKTQYRCDBTCIEPNAMY/?c\\_id=1502967&objectid=11680571](https://www.nzherald.co.nz/entertainment/review-talented-cast-deliver-humour-and-heartbreak/16PKBT4HKTQYRCDBTCIEPNAMY/?c_id=1502967&objectid=11680571)> [accessed 11 December 2021].

<sup>146</sup> Joe.

<sup>147</sup> Joe.

<sup>148</sup> Joe.

performances of *The Curious Incident* will be received ‘alongside numerous other adaptations of it’, doomed to be perpetually compared.<sup>149</sup> This can lead to a decline in productions, as companies with smaller budget constraints will forgo performing certain plays to avoid comparisons. For me, this a lost opportunity. The uniqueness of the space, its links to Haddon’s ideas from the novels, and Earl’s performance, differentiates Brodie’s version from Elliott’s production. The same words are being performed, but the vessel in which they travel are distinct.

\*\*\*

Stephens’ adaptation of *The Curious Incident* has a clear and deep respect for the original text. While Stephens’ adaptation is very straight-forward in terms of its adaptation to the stage, it is wholly unique in its ability to adapt its source material *within* the adaptation. Highlighting the inherent theatricality of Haddon’s novel, as well as the power of the medium Stephens is working in, *The Curious Incident’s* adaptation leaps off the page and onto the stage, with its vivid imagery and striking humanity.

Re-reading the play, even with its sparse stage directions, I am struck by how much of Elliott’s production has remained with me. The whirr of Sutton’s music, the explosion of confetti in the epilogue, Thomas Dennis (Christopher in the performance I saw) being carried by the ensemble as if he were floating around the universe. These moments have lingered for half a decade since I first saw them.

Each time I come back to Haddon’s novel, I still find the joy experienced when I was eleven, that giddy feeling of reading a novel that changes your life. I still

---

<sup>149</sup> Katja Krebs, ‘Ghosts We Have Seen Before: Trends in Adaptation in Contemporary Performance’, *Theatre Journal*, 66.4 (2014), 581-590 <<https://doi.org/10.1353/tj.2014.0125>> (p. 583).

gasp at Father's revelation that he killed Wellington, and I still ache for Mother as she finds out that Christopher thought she was dead. Every now and then, Christopher's voice begins to sound as if it were through a microphone, and I am transported to the back of the Gielgud. The novel, the script, and the productions, all feel like moving parts in the same machine, with the lineage of Christopher's story evident throughout them. From page, to script, to stage, Christopher has been *The Curious Incident's* through line. His story, regardless of the mode of presentation, remains entirely *his*, and to appropriate a line from Rudd, I think Christopher would love that.

## Chapter 2: Picture This: *Masquerade* on Page and Stage

I encountered Kate Mulvany's play *Masquerade* (2015) completely by chance, and at exactly the right time. While performing Dorothy Hewett's *The Chapel Perilous* (1972) as part of my undergraduate degree, I became fascinated with Australian theatre. A library copy of *Masquerade* caught my eye, with its deep blue cover and the orange font that blazed along the spine. Reading it was like meeting up with a childhood friend for the first time in years. It was unpredictable, hilarious, poignant, and importantly, it was fun. I read it three times and had to share it with someone. I gave it to my crush, as a way of making conversation, and because it reminded me of her. She loved it too. If it was this fun to read, imagine how fun it would be to stage. A year later, on our one-year anniversary, I found the play, tucked between a volume of Brecht and a volume of Ibsen at Unity Books in Auckland, and snapped it up.

I was struck by the fact that I had never heard of the picturebook it was based on, *Masquerade* (1979), nor its author Kit Williams.<sup>1</sup> How could a book that led to *genuine* buried treasure be lost to time? I tried and tried, but could not find a copy of the book, or even a library in Aotearoa willing to loan it. At Christmas in 2019, tucked beneath the tree was a thin, flat present from my partner. She had found a copy, in great condition, from a second-hand bookshop in London. I was ecstatic. I felt a bit like Jack Hare in the story; I had been entrusted to keep this treasure safe. The inscription on the front page addressed to a previous owner suggested that others had shared my sense of wonder: 'let me know when you're going to dig up the jewel

---

<sup>1</sup> "Picturebook", as opposed to picture book or picture-book, is the preferred term among scholars in the field, keeping in line with Lewis' need to 'reflect the compound nature of the artifact itself', and will therefore be used in this thesis. See: David Lewis, *Reading Contemporary Picturebooks: Picturing text* (New York: Routledge, 2001), p. xiv.

– I’ll come. Love, 83’. Seeing Williams’ paintings, feeling the gloss of the paper, searching for the clues whilst the sun was setting is a memory I hold dear.

Reading the picturebook in conjunction with the play and seeing the way in which it extended the world of the story, absolutely fascinated me. I knew that when I was thinking about adaptation, especially theatrical adaptation, *Masquerade* would be vital to my research. Mulvany has both salvaged a wonderful and joyous text and amplified it by incorporating aspects of her own life, making a story beloved by her accessible to all. Questions surrounding the picturebook on stage, scale of adaptation, and familiarity with the source material rolled around in my head. Williams’ story is magical, transporting adults and children alike to a world of wonder, and a world of love.

There has been little scholarly investigation of either the picturebook or the stage adaptation. Since its release in 1979, Williams’ book has received very little critical attention, resulting in a total of twenty-five sentences penned in forty years.<sup>2</sup> Mulvany’s adaptation has followed a similar path, with reviews of the play and academic resources created by theatre companies for schools making up all its secondary material. In contrast to the other texts considered in this thesis, there is thus a complete research lacuna for me to fill. Before turning my attention to first the picturebook and then the play and its various stage incarnations, it is necessary to

---

<sup>2</sup> Two of these articles simply make reference to the fact that *Masquerade* was a picturebook, and that featured clues ‘intentionally hidden in the text and illustrations’. See: Dee C. Storey, ‘Reading Comprehension, Visual Literacy and Picture Book Illustrations’, *Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts*, 25.1 (1984), 54-59 <[https://www.scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading\\_horizons/vol25/iss1/10/](https://www.scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons/vol25/iss1/10/)> [accessed 14 June 2021]. A 2020 work describes *Masquerade*’s intricacies and the scandal surrounding the amulet. See: Edward Brooke-Hitching, *The Madman’s Library: The Strangest Books, Manuscripts and Other Literary Curiosities From History* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2020), pp. 82-84.

frame my discussion around a consideration of children's literature, picturebooks, and the process of adapting these visual and verbal narratives.

### **Contextualising Williams' Picturebook**

Peter Hunt writes that children's literature sounds 'like an enticing study; because children's books have been largely beneath the notice of intellectual and cultural gurus' they are apparently 'blissfully free of the "oughts"', what ought to be thought of, and said about them.<sup>3</sup> More than that, to many readers, 'children's books are a matter of private delight', meaning that perhaps they are '*real* literature – if "literature" consists of texts which engage, change, and provoke intense responses in readers'.<sup>4</sup> Children's literature clearly occupies a distinct space from adults' books, as they are written for an entirely separate audience, with 'different skills, different needs, and different ways of reading'.<sup>5</sup> Thus, if children's literature is judged 'by the same value systems' as used for adult books, where they 'are *bound by definition* to emerge as *lesser*', scholars can encounter unnecessary problems.<sup>6</sup>

Picturebooks, a medium often utilised in children's literature, are frequently seen as "lesser", something to grow out of as literacy develops. Picturebooks are 'profusely illustrated books in which the illustrations are, to varying degrees, essential to the enjoyment and understanding of the story'.<sup>7</sup> As such, the illustrations in picturebooks are said to be 'integral to the story. The illustrations in

---

<sup>3</sup> Peter Hunt, 'Introduction: The World of Children's Literature Studies', in *Understanding Children's Literature*, ed. by Peter Hunt (London; New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 1-14 (p. 1).

<sup>4</sup> Hunt, p. 1. Emphasis in original.

<sup>5</sup> Hunt, p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> Hunt, p. 4. Emphasis in original.

<sup>7</sup> Carl M. Tomlinson and Carol Lynch Brown, *Essentials of Children's Literature*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2002), p. 73.

[picturebooks] provide actual plot or concept information as well as clues to character traits, settings, and moods.’<sup>8</sup> Without the illustrations, these books would be diminished, and in several cases, the story would make no sense, or would be non-existent.<sup>9</sup> Maurice Sendak describes the picturebook as a ‘juxtaposition of picture and word, a counterpoint. Words are left out and the picture says it. Pictures are left out and the word says it’.<sup>10</sup>

Picturebooks have a ‘unique format that is defined by words and illustrations rather than genre’.<sup>11</sup> Kenneth Marantz expands on this point, declaring that a picturebook, ‘unlike an illustrated book, is primarily conceived of as a unit, a totality that integrates all the designated parts in a sequence in which the relationships among them – the cover, endpapers, typography, pictures – are crucial to understanding the book’.<sup>12</sup>

Picturebooks occupy a space similar to comics, a medium that will be discussed in Chapter 3, as their mixture of visual and verbal narratives are frequently marginalised as being childish. Picturebooks ‘seem like a transitory phase, suitable for a sleepy bedtime read-aloud or the shushed classroom break of a storytime, but hardly worthy of consideration on their own’.<sup>13</sup> Picturebooks are a symbol of childhood, and childhood is ‘after all, a state we grow away from’.<sup>14</sup> However childish picturebooks are perceived as being, there is no doubt in their versatility and

---

<sup>8</sup> Tomlinson and Lynch, p. 73.

<sup>9</sup> Tomlinson and Lynch, p. 73.

<sup>10</sup> Selma Lanes, *The Art of Maurice Sendak* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1980), p. 110.

<sup>11</sup> Denise Johnson, *The Joy of Children’s Literature*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2012), p. 72.

<sup>12</sup> Kenneth Marantz, ‘Introduction’, in *The Art of Children’s Picture Books: A Selective Reference Guide*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., ed. by Sylvia S. Marantz & Kenneth A. Marantz (New York: Garland, 1995), pp. xi-xvii (p. xiv).

<sup>13</sup> Pamela Paul, ‘Your Kids Aren’t Too Old for Picture Books, and Neither Are You’, *The New York Times*, 20 February 2021 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/20/opinion/sunday/picture-books-reading.html>> [accessed 17 July 2021].

<sup>14</sup> Hunt, p. 1.

possibility to tell a story. Picturebooks can exist in many forms, shapes, and sizes, and encompass all manner of subject matter. Some picturebooks contain ‘stories of fiction – realistic, historical, and fantasy. Others consist of poetry and folktales, and some present biographies, information, and concepts’.<sup>15</sup> As such, the picturebook has limitless potential in its storytelling ability, and its adaptability.

Theatrical adaptations of children’s books ‘offer an interesting perspective not only with regards to the various points of entry, in terms of age, afforded by a very broad audience, but also to the experience of adaptation’s spectrality’, that is the spirit of the source material.<sup>16</sup> Illustrations that accompany children’s literature not only ‘take on their own canonical status’, but they also ‘already contain if not theatricality within them, then certainly a horizon of expectation with regard to the physical manifestation of the characters’.<sup>17</sup> The picturebook is thus ‘peculiarly different from other types of literary sources of adaptation’, as it is not only meant to be read aloud, but unlike non-illustrated literature, ‘very specific imagery is already contained within it’.<sup>18</sup> Katja Krebs writes that the ‘inherent spectacle of the act of being read to while losing oneself in the accompanying images’, as well as the ‘act of performance inherent in reading aloud, means that this type of literature is already a collaborative encounter. This encounter is related to, yet not identical with, a theatrical one’.<sup>19</sup> The picturebook as a form is ‘at once theatrical and literal, and as such, is an alluring source for theatrical adaptation’.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> Johnson, p. 73.

<sup>16</sup> Katja Krebs, ‘Ghosts We Have Seen Before: Trends in Adaptation in Contemporary Performance’, *Theatre Journal*, 66.4 (2014), 581-590 <<https://doi.org/10.1353/tj.2014.0125>> (p. 583).

<sup>17</sup> Krebs, p. 584.

<sup>18</sup> Krebs, p. 584.

<sup>19</sup> Krebs, p. 584.

<sup>20</sup> Krebs, p. 585.

Before turning to the theatrical adaptation of Kit Williams' *Masquerade*, it is necessary to understand the picturebook source and its creation. *Masquerade* came into being by chance. Tom Maschler, former Chairman of Jonathan Cape, spotted Williams' work in an art gallery and suggested that he create a picturebook. Initially hesitant about venturing into the world of books, as in his mind, picturebooks were uninteresting and repetitive, Williams was persuaded when Maschler told him that 'could do something that could really shake the world'.<sup>21</sup> Williams decided that he would create a treasure hunt book and spent three years painting the book and creating the story. *Masquerade* consists of fifteen detailed paintings that illustrate the story of a hare, named Jack Hare, who is tasked with carrying a treasure from the Moon to the Sun, to display her love. Upon reaching the Sun, Jack realizes that he has lost the treasure, which the reader is challenged to discover. Williams' paintings contain information pertaining to the whereabouts of the treasure, through hidden clues.

Although Williams claimed that the puzzle embedded in his story was 'simple but unique', *Masquerade*'s puzzle is elaborate.<sup>22</sup> Bamber Gascoigne's *The Quest for the Golden Hare* is the definitive reference guide for the solution of Williams' puzzle.<sup>23</sup> The appendix to this book, written by Mike Barker and John Rosseau, has been described by Williams as "perfect". Here I provide a succinct summary of their extensive solution: In each painting, a line must be drawn from each figure's left eye through the longest finger (or claw) on its left hand, and out to the letters in the border of that page. This is repeated with the left eye through the longest toe (or claw) on the left foot, and the same is done for the right side. When

---

<sup>21</sup> *The Man Behind the Masquerade*, dir. by Julian Carey (BBC Four, 2009) [on iPlayer].

<sup>22</sup> *The Man Behind the Masquerade*.

<sup>23</sup> See: Bamber Gascoigne, *The Quest for the Golden Hare* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1983).

done correctly, the letters revealed form words, and if treated as anagrams, or if one applies the sequence of animals and digits suggested by the “Isaac Newton painting”,<sup>24</sup> fifteen words or short phrases are revealed, together creating a nineteen-word message:

**CATHERINE’S LONG FINGER OVER SHADOWS EARTH BURIED  
YELLOW AMULET MIDDAY POINTS THE HOUR IN LIGHT OF  
EQUINOX LOOK YOU**

The acrostic of this reads ‘CLOSEBYAMPHILL’, and when interpreted correctly, points the reader to Ampthill Park in Bedfordshire, near the park’s cross-shaped monument to Catherine of Aragon, at the exact point touched by the tip of the monument’s shadow at midday on either the date of the spring or autumn equinox.<sup>25</sup> This is confirmed by various clues throughout the book, such as the painting of the Sun and the Moon dancing around the Earth, where their clasped hands point to March 21<sup>st</sup>, the spring equinox.<sup>26</sup>

Here, Williams buried an 18-carat gold pendant, in the shape of a hare, of his own creation. This was sealed in a small ceramic case to both protect the pendant from soil, and to stop searchers using a metal detector to find the treasure. The casket was inscribed with the phrase ‘I am the keeper of the jewel of Masquerade, which lies waiting safe inside me for you or eternity’.<sup>27</sup> The book was a success and

---

<sup>24</sup> Kit Williams, *Masquerade* (New York: Schocken Press, 1979), p. 24.

<sup>25</sup> Mike Barker and John Rousseau, ‘Appendix: The Perfect Solution’, in Bamber Gascoigne, *The Quest for the Golden Hare* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1983), pp. 205-224. Barker and Rousseau are accredited by Williams as the first true solvers of the puzzle.

<sup>26</sup> Williams, p. 4. For an excellent podcast on the hunt, see: ‘*Masquerade*’, *Criminal*, 16 July 2021, podcast, Criminal Podcast, <<https://www.thisiscriminal.com/episode-169-masquerade-7-16-21/>> [accessed 4 October 2021].

<sup>27</sup> Ross Davies, ‘Business Diary: Reckless hunt the necklace’, *The Times*, 31 July 1981, *The Times Digital Archive*, <<https://www.link-gale-com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/apps/doc/CS319129855/TTDA?u=waikato&sid=bookmark-TTDA&xid=e1212a3f>> [accessed 21 July 2021] (p. 19).

spawned a genre of picturebooks later known as “armchair treasure hunts”,<sup>28</sup> paving the way for the likes of Mike Wilks,<sup>29</sup> the *I-Spy* books (1992-) and Graeme Base’s *The Eleventh Hour* (1988).<sup>30</sup>

Kit Williams has a very distinct style to his artwork,<sup>31</sup> something that Stephen Calloway, former curator at the Victoria and Albert Museum has described as being in the ‘English eccentric tradition of William Blake’, working away ‘with an absolute obsessive vision’.<sup>32</sup> Williams’ work captures a unique sense of rural England, a sense of whimsy and mysticism deeply rooted in the countryside which bears the imprint of classic English illustrated children’s narratives such as Beatrix Potter’s *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (1902), and Kenneth Grahame’s *The Wind in the Willows* (1908), illustrated by E.H. Shephard. The illustrations in *Masquerade* share with these prior texts a delight in English animal life and landscape but combine this with the mythological and fantastical. Williams’ illustrations both evoke Edwardian realist botanical studies and verge on the surrealist. This is evident in the first double-page spread of the book. The realist animal and plant life, such as the pastel rosehip flower, the furled dandelion buds, and the small, brown fieldmouse, is

---

<sup>28</sup> Williams went on to write a book about bees, where the title of the book was hidden within it, with the title of the book hidden in a hand carved mahogany box. It was later revealed to be entitled *The Bee on the Comb*. See: Kit Williams, *The Bee on the Comb* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1984).

<sup>29</sup> My grandfather and I spent many afternoons looking through Mike Wilks’ *The Annotated Ultimate Alphabet* (London: Pavilion Books, 1988), an armchair treasure hunt where everything in the 26 images starts with a corresponding letter of the alphabet, with £10,000 for anyone who could identify each of the words painted in the images, as well as the hidden location of the author in each image. This was the partially solved solution to the original work, *The Ultimate Alphabet*.

<sup>30</sup> Base directly credits Williams as an inspiration to his work, and the two are close friends. Base visited Williams during the height of *Masquerade*’s popularity. See: Julie Watts, *The Art of Graeme Base* (Camberwell: Viking, 2008), p. 83. *The Eleventh Hour* uses a cryptic system similar to *Masquerade*, with many of the intricacies mirroring Williams’. See: Graeme Base, *The Eleventh Hour* (Camberwell: Viking, 1988).

<sup>31</sup> See: Kit Williams, *Out of One Eye: The Art of Kit Williams* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1986) and Kit Williams, *Engines of Ingenuity* (Corte Madeira, CA: Ginko Press, 2001).

<sup>32</sup> *The Man Behind the Masquerade*.

reminiscent the detailed botanical accuracy and vibrancy of Edith Holden's *The Country Diary of an Edwardian Lady* (1977).<sup>33</sup> However, the hare that takes up the majority of the spread is out of proportion to the human who appears underneath it, combining the accuracy of the hare's physique and proportions with the fantastical element of its giant size.

The "zoological pudding" image midway through the book highlights Williams at his most absurd, with animals overlapping with each other to create new animals, floating against a naturalistic countryside background.<sup>34</sup> It features a 'cat, a corse, a horse, a hog (saddle-back of course), a dog, a dow, a cow, a care, a hare, a ham, a ram and a rat'.<sup>35</sup> These 12 animals float mid-air around a sun which creates the effect of a zodiac, perhaps inspired by Salvador Dali's *Twelve Signs of the Zodiac* (1967). The page juxtaposes in the one image opposite times of the day, with the daylight scene and smiling sun that first catch the eye inverted when the book is turned upside down to reveal a sleeping village, starlight, and a sad sun. By contrasting the realistic with the absurd, Williams displays his unique ability to ground the fantastic in the realistic, and to mesmerise with his attention to detail and unique imagination. The resulting creation is a cohesive, yet unconventional, picturebook.

Perry Nodelman writes that in picturebooks, 'pictures, as iconic signs, do in some way actually resemble what they depict', inviting audiences to see 'objects *as* the pictures depict them – to see the actual in terms of the fictional visualisation of

---

<sup>33</sup> Williams, pp. 11-12.

<sup>34</sup> Williams, p. 16.

<sup>35</sup> Williams, p. 15.

it'.<sup>36</sup> Pictures illustrate the texts, that is, 'they purport to show us what is meant by the words, so that we come to understand the objects and actions the words refer to in terms of the qualities of the images that accompany them', the world outside of the book, and the visual images it contains.<sup>37</sup> In persuading an audience that they 'do represent the actual world in a simple and obvious fashion', picturebooks are 'particularly powerful deceivers'.<sup>38</sup> In *Masquerade*, Williams' illustrations allow the reader to understand the absurdity of the story through literal and realist images. The realistic images reinforce not only the legitimacy of the buried treasure, but also the storyworld of the picturebook, demonstrating Nodelman's contention.

As well as being an armchair treasure hunt, *Masquerade* also operates as a "crossover" picturebook. Chapter 1 foregrounded crossover literature as it relates to *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, a novel that appeals to both children and adults. Picturebooks were largely ignored in the initial years of the "crossover phenomenon", with the 'notion of dual readership' being barely discussed in regard to the medium.<sup>39</sup> Yet, picturebooks offer 'so many possibilities for ironic interplay and multiple construction of meaning that it inevitably crosses boundaries between younger and older readers, between children's fiction and adult fiction'.<sup>40</sup> Sandra L. Beckett writes that more than any other medium, 'picturebooks can genuinely be books for all ages', as the unique interplay of text and image make picturebooks one of the most exciting and innovative contemporary forms of

---

<sup>36</sup> Perry Nodelman, 'Illustration and Picture Books', in *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*, ed. by Peter Hunt (London; New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 113-124 (p. 116). Emphasis in original.

<sup>37</sup> Nodelman, p. 116.

<sup>38</sup> Nodelman, p. 116.

<sup>39</sup> Clare Bradford, 'The Picture Book: Some Postmodern Tensions', *Papers: Explorations into Children's Literature*, 4.3 (1993), 10-14 (p. 13).

<sup>40</sup> Bradford, p. 13.

literature.<sup>41</sup> Picturebooks offer children and adults a ‘unique opportunity for collaborative reading, since they empower the two audiences more equally than any other narrative form’.<sup>42</sup> Crossover picturebooks ‘challenge adults as well as children, promoting decoding skills and encouraging critical thinking in both readerships’, allowing for a shared reading experience that also brings in their own perspectives and interpretations.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, crossover picturebooks are multilevel, suitable for all ages because they invite ‘different forms of reading depending on the age and experience of the reader’.<sup>44</sup>

When Kate Mulvany first encountered *Masquerade*, this crossover was apparent. Born in Australia in 1978, Mulvany was diagnosed at age three with a rare childhood cancer, the result of her father’s exposure to Agent Orange in the Vietnam War. Kate spent years in hospital being treated for the cancer, and was gifted *Masquerade* by her godmother, Tess. Immediately, she ‘was transported out of her pain, sickness [...] and medication into the world of Kit Williams’.<sup>45</sup> When the story was read aloud to her, Mulvany was transported out of the ‘stark, clinical world’ of the hospital, into a world of ‘intricate art, hidden clues and magical characters’.<sup>46</sup> She was determined to find the lost amulet, but of course would not find it in Perth. Mulvany writes that it ‘didn’t matter. *Masquerade* gave [her] more than an elusive jewel. It gave [her] an imagination’.<sup>47</sup> Filled with ‘magic and science, fantasy and

---

<sup>41</sup> Sandra L. Beckett, ‘Crossover Picturebooks’, in *The Routledge Companion to Picturebooks*, ed. by Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 209-219 (p. 209).

<sup>42</sup> Beckett, p. 210.

<sup>43</sup> Beckett, p. 210.

<sup>44</sup> Beckett, p. 210.

<sup>45</sup> Robyn Brookes, *Study Guide: Masquerade* (Adelaide: State Theatre Company, 2017) <<https://www.statetheatrecompany.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Study-Guide-Masquerade-FINAL.pdf>> [accessed 4 April 2021] (p. 6.).

<sup>46</sup> Kate Mulvany, ‘*Masquerade*: How Kate Mulvany unlocked the secrets of Kit Williams’ classic tale’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 December 2014, <<https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/theatre/masquerade-how-kate-mulvany-unlocked-the-secrets-of-kit-williams-classic-tale-20141219-12aj1k.html>> [accessed 3 August 2021].

<sup>47</sup> Mulvany.

philosophy’, *Masquerade* taught Mulvany ‘more about the universe and its inhabitants than anything [she has] read since’.<sup>48</sup> Decades later, when Mulvany was an established playwright and actor, she was asked to write a play ‘for families – a much-ignored demographic in theatre – [and] *Masquerade* was the only option’.<sup>49</sup>

Needing the permission of Kit Williams, Mulvany travelled to his home in Gloucestershire, where Williams agreed that she could adapt his book into a play on two conditions: that the play be for ‘nine to 90-year-olds’ and that it included Mulvany’s own life story.<sup>50</sup> Mulvany pulled ‘apart the *Masquerade* riddles, mining its metaphors, breathing new life into its famous storyline’, with support from the Sydney-based Griffin Theatre Company.<sup>51</sup> Mulvany’s adaptation premiered to mixed reviews in early 2015, with much of the criticism centring on the extension crucial to the stage reimagining. Maxim Boon writes in his review of *Masquerade* for *Limelight* that the play ‘sticks to the narrative of Williams’ fable’, offering ‘an engaging and friendly introduction to this well-loved story’.<sup>52</sup> Had this been ‘the full scope of the production’, a colourful and ‘charming piece of children’s theatre packed with vivid characters and brain-teasing riddles’, Boon would have been satisfied.<sup>53</sup> However, he believes that Mulvany has ‘attempted to shoehorn in the starkly incongruous story of a terminally ill child’.<sup>54</sup> Boon’s comments about Mulvany’s adaptation are reductive, prioritising fidelity discourse over reinterpretation. His argument that perhaps he is ‘asking too much of this production,

---

<sup>48</sup> Mulvany.

<sup>49</sup> Mulvany.

<sup>50</sup> Mulvany.

<sup>51</sup> Mulvany.

<sup>52</sup> See: Maxim Boon, ‘Review: *Masquerade* (Sydney Festival)’, *Limelight*, 11 January 2015, <<https://www.limelightmagazine.com.au/reviews/review-masquerade-sydney-festival/>> [accessed 9 August 2021].

<sup>53</sup> Boon.

<sup>54</sup> Boon.

after all it is an adaptation of a children's book' is as reductive,<sup>55</sup> devaluing the intended audience, Mulvany's life story, and the adaptation process.

While Boon's review is the most critical, others echoed some of his sentiments, with Cassie Tongue insisting that the addition, whilst having a 'smart narrative structure', is 'difficult to connect with everything in the first act, [which] is more broadly for children than the second', with everything feeling 'just slightly more wan than it has any right to be'.<sup>56</sup> Diana Simmonds writes, however, that *Masquerade* 'reached its opening night carrying enough pre-publicity and hype to sink a lesser work on the shoals of impossible expectations'.<sup>57</sup> This did not happen with *Masquerade*, 'partially due to the most exacting condition imposed on [Mulvany] by [Williams]: that she include a version of her own childhood story in the play'.<sup>58</sup>

### **Mulvany's *Masquerade* as Transmedia**

Some critics may have criticised the stage adaptation of *Masquerade* for its additions to the source material, but Mulvany's adaptation is embedded in Linda Hutcheon's key principles of adaptation, reinterpreting, recreating, and salvaging an almost lost classic.<sup>59</sup> The story first presented by Williams is faithfully adapted in the first part of the play, interwoven with the story of Joe, a young unwell boy, and Tess, his

---

<sup>55</sup> Boon.

<sup>56</sup> Cassie Tongue, 'Review: *Masquerade* – Sydney Festival', *AussieTheatre*, 12 January 2015, <<https://www.aussietheatre.com.au/reviews/review-masquerade-sydney-festival>> [accessed 20 August 2021].

<sup>57</sup> Diana Simmonds, '*Masquerade* – Sydney Festival 2015', *StageNoise*, 10 January 2015, <<https://www.stagenoise.com/review/2015/masquerade-sydney-festival-2015>> [accessed 20 August 2021].

<sup>58</sup> Simmonds.

<sup>59</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 8.

loving mother, while the second act consists completely of scenes created by Mulvany. Dissatisfied with *Masquerade*'s sudden and unresolved ending, Tessa and Joe set out into the magical world of the book to save Jack Hare and discover the jewel, all before Joe succumbs to his cancer. Additions such as this add freshness and originality to the adaptation, as it allows for the original text to be respected, but also affords the adaptor and opportunity to amplify and extend the narrative, giving it their own stamp.

Mulvany's adaptation is based firmly in rejuvenating an original source that had been out of print for almost forty years, recontextualising it as a storyworld presented within another story, utilising the frame of the text within a text made famous by Shakespeare in *Hamlet* (1599) and Harold Pinter's film script adaptation of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1981).

Although adaptations of children's literature are usually embedded in fidelity discourse, Mulvany's additions to the story of *Masquerade* are evocative of Angela Carter's contention of 'putting new wine in old bottles, especially if the pressure of the new wine makes the bottles explode'.<sup>60</sup> Mulvany's adaptation is a faithful reimagining of Williams' picturebook, but the fantastical elements of the story need to be grounded in a sense of reality, which is achieved through the secondary plot in the hospital. Applying fidelity discourse to a story like *Masquerade* is counterintuitive, as an adaptation that simply transposes a picturebook to the stage would be short, as well as limited by the confines of the "armchair treasure hunt" nature of the book.

---

<sup>60</sup> Angela Carter, 'Notes from the Front Line', in *Gender and Writing*, ed. by Michelene Wandor (London: Pandora Press, 1983), pp. 69-77 (p. 70).

Malcolm Cook and Max Sexton write that in ‘adapting works between media, producers must negotiate between fidelity to the source and perceived specificities of the chosen technological medium’, as it is the ‘relationship between source and target media that makes a work an adaptation, distinct from other terms used to describe commensurate production processes’.<sup>61</sup> Sarah Cardwell writes that to ‘call something an adaptation of another text is to highlight the conscious, complex process of implementing changes necessary to re-present the source text under new conditions’.<sup>62</sup> Change is inherent to adaptation, and critical engagement with adaptations ‘must therefore necessarily adopt a position on the idea of medium specificity’.<sup>63</sup> The technological ‘basis of media and the idea of medium specificity may thus be seen as central to both adaptation as a process and to critical engagement with adaptations as texts’.<sup>64</sup> Noël Carroll defines this as the idea that ‘each art form has its own domain of expression and exploration [...] determined by the nature of the medium’.<sup>65</sup> Carroll also debunks the idea of medium specificity on the basis of comparison between other forms of media. What a medium does best in comparison to others is not always the things it does best.<sup>66</sup> In addition to this, what a medium does uniquely in comparison to others is not necessarily the best way to determine its value.<sup>67</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup> Malcolm Cook and Max Sexton, ‘Adaptation as a function of technology and its role in the definition of medium specificity’, in *The Routledge Companion to Adaptation*, ed. by Dennis Cutchins, Katja Krebs & Eckart Voigts (London: Routledge, 2020) <<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315690254>> pp. 361-371 (p. 361).

<sup>62</sup> Sarah Cardwell, *Adaptation Revisited: Television and the Classic Novel* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 21.

<sup>63</sup> Cook and Sexton, p. 361.

<sup>64</sup> Cook and Sexton, p. 362.

<sup>65</sup> Noël Carroll, ‘The Specificity of Media in the Arts’, *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 19.4 (1985), 5-20 <<http://www.jstor.com/stable/3332295>> [accessed 26 August 2021] (p. 6).

<sup>66</sup> Noël Carroll, ‘Medium specificity arguments and self-consciously invented arts: Film, video, and photography’, *Millennium Film Journal*, 14/15 (1984), 127-153 (p. 143).

<sup>67</sup> Carroll, p. 145.

Kamilla Elliot theorises that regardless of the continuous work in the field of adaptation, there is a dysfunctional relationship between theories of adaptation and the processes that create them. Elliot writes that ‘adaptation and theorization are rival, overlapping processes, each seeking to rework cultural products and each other in its image’, each resisting the reworking of the other.<sup>68</sup> She argues that adaptations have rarely been theorized as adaptations, but instead as ‘books, films, art, music, theatre [...] as rhetoric, translation, or narrative; as vehicles of historical, political, cultural, national, and philosophical ideologies; as manifestations of industry or mind [...] viewed in existential, psychoanalytic, phenomenological, and cognitive terms’.<sup>69</sup> While these theories ‘indubitably illuminate adaptation, none theorizes it on its own terms – as adaptation’.<sup>70</sup>

In thinking about Mulvany’s *Masquerade*, it is important to view it as a product, a transmedial adaptation, rather than *just* a transposition of Williams’ picturebook. Marie-Laure Ryan writes that the broad definition of transmedia covers both ‘adaptation as the retelling of known stories in different media’,<sup>71</sup> as well as a process that Richard Saint-Gelais calls ‘transfictionality: the sharing of elements, mostly characters, but also imaginary locations, events, and entire fictional worlds, by two or more works of fiction’.<sup>72</sup> Transfictionality is particularly popular in postmodern literature, as it involves ‘an implicit reflection on the nature of

---

<sup>68</sup> Kamilla Elliot, ‘The theory of *badaptation*’, in *The Routledge Companion to Adaptation*, ed. by Dennis Cutchins, Katja Krebs & Eckart Voigts (London: Routledge, 2020) <<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315690254>> pp. 18-27 (p. 19).

<sup>69</sup> Elliot, p. 19.

<sup>70</sup> Elliot, p. 19.

<sup>71</sup> Marie-Laure Ryan, ‘Transmedia Storytelling as Narrative Practice’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies*, ed. by Thomas Leitch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 527-541 <<https://dx.doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199331000.013.30>> (p. 528).

<sup>72</sup> Ryan, p. 528.

fictionality'.<sup>73</sup> Ryan writes that transfictionality relies on 'three fundamental operations':

1. extension, which adds new stories to the fictional world while respecting the facts established in the original
2. modification, which changes the plot of the original narrative, for instance by giving it a different ending
3. transposition, which 'preserves the design and the main story [...] but locates it in a different or temporal setting'.<sup>74</sup>

If adaptation is to be regarded as a 'change of milieu that forces an organism, a person, or a story to adapt to new circumstances', as Marie-Laure Ryan states 'then the third of these operations presents some similarity to the retelling of a story in a different medium'.<sup>75</sup> Transposition therefore represents the 'intersectionality of adaptation and transfictionality'.<sup>76</sup> The first two operations, expansion and modification, 'do not involve any kind of adaptation. Whereas adaptation tries to preserve the story but sometimes changes the world, transfictionality tends to preserve the world, either in part or in whole, but to change the story, or to add more stories to the world'.<sup>77</sup> As such, Mulvany's *Masquerade* fits this definition of a transmedial text, as it meets all the requirements laid out by Ryan. Through extension, modification, and transposition, *Masquerade* becomes its own story with its own worth, not needing constant comparison to Williams' original picturebook.

---

<sup>73</sup> Ryan, p. 528.

<sup>74</sup> Ryan, p. 528. The quote imbedded in the third 'fundamental operation' comes from Lubomír Doležel, *Heterocosmica: Fiction and Possible Worlds* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1988), p. 206.

<sup>75</sup> Ryan, p. 528.

<sup>76</sup> Ryan, p. 528.

<sup>77</sup> Ryan, p. 528.

Hutcheon and O’Flynn write that adaptations should now be understood as an expansive term that includes ‘recreations, remakes, remediations, revisions, parodies, reinventions, reinterpretations, expansions, and extensions’.<sup>78</sup> Mulvany’s *Masquerade* does what Ryan describes as ‘adding new stories to the fictional world’ while ‘respecting the facts established’ in the original.<sup>79</sup> The established facts of the world that Mulvany extends upon are introducing Williams’ world as a piece of fiction; something that Tessa reads to Joe in order for them to escape the hospital’s clinical walls. The play begins with Tessa, appearing onstage, ‘*suddenly [trying] to catch her breath*’, before ‘*out of nowhere, a book drops from the sky*’.<sup>80</sup> Tessa begins to read the book, a little confused:

‘Within the pages of this book there is a story told  
Of love, adventures, fortunes lost, and a jewel of solid gold.  
To solve the hidden riddle, you must use your eyes,  
And find the hare in every picture that may point you to the prize...’  
Huh.<sup>81</sup>

This is the inscription on the title page of Williams’ picturebook, and from here, Tessa begins to read the story in the darkness of the stage. As she reads the narrative, the fictional world of *Masquerade* materialises. Tessa reads word for word the opening pages of *Masquerade*, before this is interrupted by a ‘*sudden lighting change*’, when a ‘*stern nurse opens a curtain. The celestial world is gone and we are in a cold, white hospital*’.<sup>82</sup> From the outset of the play, the script establishes the

---

<sup>78</sup> Linda Hutcheon and Siobhan O’Flynn, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (Oxon: Routledge, 2013), p. 181.

<sup>79</sup> Ryan, p. 528.

<sup>80</sup> Kate Mulvany, *Masquerade* (Sydney: Currency Press, 2015), p. 3.

<sup>81</sup> Mulvany, p. 3.

<sup>82</sup> Mulvany, p. 5.

fictional world of Williams' picturebook working in conjunction with Mulvany's additions to the story, extending the world of *Masquerade* into the "real", metafictional world of Tessa and Joe.

Transposition is fundamental to Mulvany's adaptation of *Masquerade*, although not just the act of transposition as defined by Geoffrey Wagner, and later used by Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan, wherein transposition is seen as a version that 'sticks closely to the literary source, with a minimum [amount] of interference'.<sup>83</sup> David Lane writes that adaptation of 'existing narrative sources is a habit of dramatic literature from the Ancient Greek tragedies, involving the transposition of a story from one medium to another'.<sup>84</sup> Transposition of a source text to 'another context can occur through different processes: changing the context of the medium [...] changing the context of the story world in which the characters are placed by updating the time frame; or by altering the source text completely'.<sup>85</sup> For Lane, the 'act of adaptation does not necessarily rely on a writer',<sup>86</sup> rather adaptations encourage a "double-reading" for an audience, as [they] interpret the new, adaptive text in its own right, and its relationship to the source text as well'.<sup>87</sup>

Alexander Burry states that transpositions function quite differently to other forms of adaptations. In some respects, 'their potential is even greater', as the likes of films, theatre, and opera 'do not merely retell narratives with variations, but also superimpose new media onto their source texts'.<sup>88</sup> At the same time, however,

---

<sup>83</sup> Geoffrey Wagner, *The Novel and the Cinema* (Rutherford, New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1975), p. 222., as referenced in Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan, *Screen Adaptation: Impure Cinema* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 5.

<sup>84</sup> David Lane, *Contemporary British Drama* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 182.

<sup>85</sup> Lane, p. 182.

<sup>86</sup> Lane, p. 182.

<sup>87</sup> Lane, p. 183.

<sup>88</sup> Alexander Burry, *Multi-Mediated Dostoevsky: Transposing Novels into Opera, Film, and Drama* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2011), p. 17.

transpositions bear certain burdens that other adaptations do not. The primary ‘expectation of multimedia transpositions of literature is to convey the same narrative in a different format’.<sup>89</sup> Many transpositions seem to ‘comment on a [text] by altering a plot event, character, or other element, or by putting it in a radically new context’ and becoming ‘vulnerable to attacks for departing from the “original”’.<sup>90</sup> This is particularly true since transpositions often, as in the case of *Masquerade*, keep the title of the original source text.<sup>91</sup> In the case of Mulvany’s *Masquerade*, it is crucial to view transposition from Ryan’s viewpoint, where the original story is preserved, and located in a different space.

Ben Neutze writes that Mulvany ‘builds on Williams’ narrative, creating a kind of sequel’.<sup>92</sup> I disagree with Neutze here, as Mulvany’s *Masquerade* establishes the story of Williams’ picturebook as a story *within* a story. At the very beginning of the play, the physical book of *Masquerade* ‘drops from the sky’, into the world of the play.<sup>93</sup> The “real world” of the play relocates the picturebook from the outset but preserves Williams’ story entirely. Throughout the first act of the play, the audience is presented, in its entirety, Williams’ story, acted out as Tessa reads the story to Joe. However, this is not a straightforward, fidelity-based approach to the picturebook. Apart from the opening inscription, first two pages, and riddles, Mulvany creates dialogue and songs in keeping with the spirit and plot of Williams’ work, without directly transposing the specific language of the picturebook to the stage. There is often the expectation that an adapted story with the same title will keep the precise

---

<sup>89</sup> Burry, p. 17.

<sup>90</sup> Burry, p. 17.

<sup>91</sup> Burry, p. 17.

<sup>92</sup> Ben Neutze, ‘Sydney Festival: *Masquerade* review’, *Daily Review*, 11 January 2015  
<<https://www.dailyreview.com.au/sydney-festival-masquerade-review/>> [accessed 9 September 2021].

<sup>93</sup> Mulvany, p. 3.

language of the text, which in this case, would flounder on stage due to its descriptive language and lack of theatricality. Mulvany's ability to keep Williams' story in its entirety is testament to her adaptive ability, as even with the expansion and modification prolific in the text, the picturebook she adores appears faithfully adapted on stage in carefully considered and practical language.

A striking example of Mulvany's reworking of the original material for the new medium of the stage is the first scene with Jack Hare and the Moon. In the picturebook, Jack is entrusted with the amulet, and told to deliver it to the Sun,<sup>94</sup> but in Mulvany's adaptation, Jack's personality is developed, and he engages in quirky dialogue with the Moon, and there is evidently more of a relationship between the two of them. When the Moon calls out for Jack to undertake his errand, Jack hides, scared that the Moon will cut off his paws:

JACK: Please don't be chopping me paws off, mistress. I need 'em for so many things.

MOON: Jack, I have an errand for / you.

JACK: [*to the audience*] I pass the salt with them, I put me favourite records on with them, I scratch me bum with / them -

MOON: Jack.

JACK: [*to the audience*] I simply don't know what I'd do without me paws.

MOON: Jack!

*She takes his paws and caresses them gently.*

I need you to run an errand.

JACK: Yes, mistress Moon. As is my honourable duty.<sup>95</sup>

---

<sup>94</sup> Williams, p. 5.

<sup>95</sup> Mulvany, p. 6.

Here, Mulvany has anthropomorphised Jack, presenting him as a sensitive, funny, if not slightly inept servant. Through the words of Mulvany, Jack is no longer a simple brown hare with great artistic detail, as he is in Williams' picturebook, but rather, a protagonist in his own right, that the audience can be charmed by and relate to.

The most crucial adaptation device used by Mulvany in her rendition of *Masquerade* is modification. Gary Bortolotti and Linda Hutcheon argue that a source of adaptation, an origin text, could 'perhaps be more productively viewed as the "ancestor" from which adaptations derive directly by descent'.<sup>96</sup> Just as 'in biological evolution, descent with modification is essential' when adapting a text.<sup>97</sup> Joanne Tompkins writes that one of the attractions to the art of adaptation is its elasticity and versatility in incorporating 'cultural translation and exchange [...] as well as the structural modifications that multimedia are increasingly making to the [theatrical] form'.<sup>98</sup>

Kate Mulvany's adaptation of *Masquerade* uses song as a way of modifying Williams' story, enhancing the theatricality and musicality of the riddles embedded in his picturebook. The first, and only known, adaptation of *Masquerade*, before Mulvany's, is a 1994 filk song by Talis Kimberley entitled 'Jack Hare'. Filk is a 'form of folk music unique to the science fiction/fantasy community'.<sup>99</sup> It is largely 'inspired by books, movies, television shows, and comics. Mirroring its broad speculative sources, the styles range from original work to parody to ballads to

---

<sup>96</sup> Gary R. Bortolotti and Linda Hutcheon, 'On the Origin of Adaptations: Rethinking Fidelity Discourse and "Success": Biologically', *New Literary History*, 38.3 (2007), 443-458 <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/20058017>> [accessed 25 March 2021] (p. 446).

<sup>97</sup> Bortolotti and Hutcheon, p. 446.

<sup>98</sup> Joanne Tompkins, 'Editorial Comment: Theatre and Adaptation', *Theatre Journal*, 66.4 (2014), ix-xi <<https://doi.org/10.1353/tj.2014.0133>> (p. x).

<sup>99</sup> Doug Crane, 'Story as Song: Filking Children's Literature', *The Looking Glass: New Perspectives on Children's Literature*, 2.3 (1998), 20-21 <<https://www.ojs.latrobe.edu.au/ojs/index.php/tlg/article/view/1012>> [accessed June 26 2021] (p. 20).

parody of parody'.<sup>100</sup> Named after Williams' main character, Kimberley's song begins:

I am born of the Moon and her I serve  
I am her earthly messenger  
I run in the shadow of her and by her will  
I run to the sound of a drum, over land, under hill.  
Jack Hare, Jack Hare, there's an errand to be run  
Take this jewel to the Lord of the Sun  
'Cos I know you're swift and I know you're cunning  
And I need you, Jack Hare, to do the running.<sup>101</sup>

The 'quick musical beat' of the song, maintained in performance by the rhythmic chords on the acoustic guitar, 'emphasizes the frantic pace of the story, as Jack Hare races all day to catch the Sun'.<sup>102</sup> Kimberley, as Doug Crane writes, captures the 'wonder and mystery of the book' whilst acknowledging the puzzles embedded in the work.<sup>103</sup> She adapts the journey of Jack Hare presented throughout the picturebook into a distilled moment focusing on Jack Hare as questing protagonist and co-opts the "folksy" atmosphere of some of the images into her chosen musical genre, complete with traditional Dorian chordal progressions and the flute and vocals forming a harmonic counterpoint.

Mulvany's songs are in a similar vein, capturing the whimsy and quizzical nature of the picturebook. They employ a traditional rhyme scheme (ABABCD CD)

---

<sup>100</sup> Crane, p. 20.

<sup>101</sup> Talis Kimberley, *Talis Kimberley: By Request Live at Duckon Chicago* (Chicago: Duckon Filk Programming, 2011) [on CD].

<sup>102</sup> Crane, p. 21.

<sup>103</sup> Crane, p. 21.

much like Kimberley's filk song (AABBCCDD), which accommodates the wide demographic of *Masquerade*'s audience, due to its simplicity. Mulvany also uses a wide variety of musical styles in *Masquerade*, from barbershop to soft violin accompaniment, but the most crucial is cabaret. When writing the adaptation, Mulvany 'had an epiphany – [she] wanted the play to be filled with music to complement [Williams'] masterful riddles'.<sup>104</sup> She knew that she wanted the 'Australian cabaret masters Mikangelo and the Black Sea Gentlemen' to play this music.<sup>105</sup> Cabaret, from the French for "little room", is a term 'loosely applied either to a place of informal musical entertainment [...] or to a specific mode of performance consisting of a sequence of short, simply structured, self-contained numbers in which textual projection is paramount'.<sup>106</sup> The quintessential cabaret song is a 'strophic ballad in which the text – usually satirical, erotic, or sentimental – is as important as its musical content', and is frequently 'delivered in a style poised between speech and song'.<sup>107</sup> Although certainly not erotic in tone, the style of song in *Masquerade* evokes that of traditional cabaret, placing the importance on the words, which help solve the riddle embedded in the story.

Riddles are embedded in the story of *Masquerade*, to be solved by the reader as they move along with the story. In many cases in the picturebook, the answers to these riddles are revealed in the accompanying pictures,<sup>108</sup> so Mulvany uses Joe as a way of processing and understanding these riddles for the audience. As Jack Hare is asked each riddle, the play moves back to the world of Joe and Tessa, showing an

---

<sup>104</sup> Mulvany.

<sup>105</sup> Mulvany.

<sup>106</sup> 'Cabaret', *The Oxford Companion to Music*, ed. by Alison Latham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 189.

<sup>107</sup> 'Cabaret', p. 189.

<sup>108</sup> An example is on pages 7-8 of *Masquerade*, where the answer to the riddle from Penny-Pockets Lady is "Honeycomb". Jack Hare does not outright state honeycomb as his answer, but it is clearly visible in the image accompanying the words.

episode of Joe's time in hospital, while he considers the riddle. When Joe has figured out this riddle, his speech merges with that of Jack Hare, signalled by the forward slash in the script. Here it is as if Jack is representative of the childhood innocence lost by Joe due to his diagnosis:

TESSA: Would you like some?

*No response.*

You should really eat something, Joe. It'll help you stay awake. And I don't want you to sleep while the sun is shining.

*A moment of realisation...*

Strangely enough...it might just help you with that riddle.

*She places it under the blankets. A beat. Joe emerges, licking the honeycomb.*

JOE: [*sung*] I have a little house,

Its windows number plenty...

PENNY: [*offstage*] It's full of flowers that no man picked,

And you may have it when it's empty.

*As JOE understands the riddle, PENNY appears in the Celestial World.*

JACK/JOE: Honeycomb?<sup>109</sup>

Through this, Joe can explore the outside world vicariously through Jack. Jack is then an extension of Joe, allowing him freedom of movement, and a sense of purpose. The honeycomb becomes a tangible spoken and physical connection, enabling Joe to transition to a more innocent state. The act of discovery and reasoning remains just as important to the story of *Masquerade*, but it is given extra weight, as it becomes an escape device for Joe and Tessa, a way of continuing to

---

<sup>109</sup> Mulvany, pp. 15-16.

leave the clinical world of the hospital. Mulvany's modification acts to keep the spirit of the "search" in Williams' story, but makes it practical to a theatrical audience, as well as making it necessary for her version's narrative.

Modification, as defined by Ryan, is most apparent in *Masquerade* in the second act of the play. At the end of the first act, when Jack fails to deliver the amulet to the Sun, or to read him the riddle he was entrusted with, the story of Williams' picturebook comes to an end, much to the displeasure and shock of Joe, causing him to 'give up'.<sup>110</sup> It is here that Mulvany causes the two worlds presented so far in *Masquerade* — the hospital world and the storyworld — to collide. When a nurse tells Tessa that there has been 'no change' in Joe's status after a series of tests, Tessa sings:

In here there is no change...  
How can I be jealous of a simple grey hare  
Who gets to see the world on a passionate dare?  
Why do the Moon and Sun, painted on a page,  
Get to be so full of love while I'm so full of rage?  
[...]  
It must change for us in here.<sup>111</sup>

In this moment of pain and disruption, Tessa can no longer fully immerse herself in the storyworld and its possibilities. She differentiates the innocent world, depicted on the page of Williams' picturebook, from the grim realities of the hospital. The book itself is no longer a sufficient escape, indeed the contrast between the book and her

---

<sup>110</sup> Mulvany, p. 33.

<sup>111</sup> Mulvany, pp. 34-35.

lived reality causes pain and ‘rage’ as she starts to grapple with very adult emotions of unfairness and self-pity.

In one of the most metafictional moments in the play, Tessa acknowledges that change is needed to continue the story of *Masquerade*, to not only take Joe away from the hospital, but to take the audience back to a childhood world devoid of suffering and death. She takes Joe by the hand and instructs him that they are ‘going to find that jewel’.<sup>112</sup> In Act 2, we are greeted by an encaged Jack Hare, singing forlornly. Mulvany’s ‘own story comes through more strongly here, and the two narratives (Jack’s and Joe’s) are better integrated with a greater emotional force’.<sup>113</sup> Mulvany moves ‘comfortably into her own, slightly more subversive, style of storytelling, and [throws] in new colourful characters’.<sup>114</sup> Tessa and Joe enter the world of the story, and begin a series of adventures, revisiting characters like the Practical Man and Tara Treetops, meeting new characters created by Mulvany like a Barbershop Quartet (missing one member named Barber Barbara), and resolving the conflict of the story as the Sun and Moon come together in the name of love.

The play ends with Tessa and Joe digging beneath the Earth for the amulet as the Sun and Moon are as close ‘as they are prescribed by the Laws of the Universe’.<sup>115</sup> Joe begins to look ‘frail and unwell’, which goes unnoticed by Tessa.<sup>116</sup> When Tessa cannot find the amulet, she is ‘devastated’, but Joe tells her that it does not matter.<sup>117</sup> Joe delivers the main riddle of love, as the Sun and Moon reappear, and

---

<sup>112</sup> Mulvany, p. 35.

<sup>113</sup> Neutze.

<sup>114</sup> Neutze.

<sup>115</sup> Mulvany, p. 58.

<sup>116</sup> Mulvany, p. 59.

<sup>117</sup> Mulvany, p. 59.

*Everyone watches as the SUN and the MOON break all laws of the universe. JACK, stunned, stands between them.*

*The MOON and the SUN each kiss a cheek of JACK's. It is a lingering kiss of love to each other, via the hare, that illuminates the entire universe and the furry messenger.<sup>118</sup>*

Exploiting the imaginative and tactile possibilities of theatre, this is a moment experienced through sight rather than sound. The meticulous stage directions chart the movement of the Sun and the Moon across the stage to surround Jack with their love. This is a moment only really possible on stage, a space in which 'all the laws of the universe' can be easily broken as long as the stage mechanics can convey the effect and the audience are willing to suspend their disbelief. Later, Joe and Tessa sit beneath the Sun and the Moon, and Joe peacefully dies. Tessa looks up and 'speaks to the audience', saying 'The sun set and the day was over'.<sup>119</sup> The lights fade to black as music plays, and 'Tessa holds her little boy'.<sup>120</sup> The rupturing and painful end of the first act, in which death is an intrusion, is replaced in this denouement with acceptance.

By modifying the ending, Mulvany is able to put her own narrative spin on the work, as well as giving the story a "proper" ending. The ending of *Masquerade* is also significant for its dealings with the heart of Williams' story, and that is of love, not just romantic love, but maternal and self-love. It also important in the way that it handles the death of Joe, relating back to earlier discussions of whether Mulvany's choice to include the illness narrative was right for "children's theatre". The ending

---

<sup>118</sup> Mulvany, pp. 59-60.

<sup>119</sup> Mulvany, p. 61.

<sup>120</sup> Mulvany, p. 61.

of *Masquerade* harkens back to what Longbottom and Slaughter describe as ‘times past’, where ‘one function of literature, particularly fairy tales and oral stories, was to help children to understand the world they lived in’.<sup>121</sup> Although it is not characteristic of all mainstream media representations of death, much of literature directed towards children contains ‘confusing, unrealistic and potentially harmful information about death and bereavement’.<sup>122</sup> However, there is also ‘recognition that carefully crafted media portrayals can have a positive influence on children’s understanding of death’.<sup>123</sup> *Masquerade*’s peaceful death for Joe, outside of the clinical world of the hospital, and in the arms of his loving mother under the sunshine, is a quiet death, exempt from the fantastical elements elsewhere in the play. Mulvany’s personal experiences, and her affinity for the text she adapted, allows for careful considerations around extension, transposition, and modification, create a way for Williams’ picturebook to be reimaged in front of a live audience, and keeping in with the spirit of his storyworld.

### ***Masquerade: Productions as Adaptation***

Mulvany’s *Masquerade* is able to give Williams’ picturebook a new life on stage, utilising the theatrical form to stage a treasured work of fiction. However, the play has had a limited performance history and has not been staged outside of Australia. *Masquerade* has been staged only once professionally, in its initial production which toured three Australian states in 2015 and has been subsequently staged by amateur

---

<sup>121</sup> Sarah Longbottom and Virginia Slaughter, ‘Sources of children’s knowledge about death and dying’, *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London. Series B, Biological Sciences*, 373.1754 (2018), 1-7 <<https://dx.doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2017.0267>> (p. 4)

<sup>122</sup> Longbottom and Slaughter, pp. 4-5.

<sup>123</sup> Longbottom and Slaughter, p. 5.

theatre companies and secondary schools across the country. Directed by Lee Lewis and Sam Armstrong for Griffin Theatre Company, *Masquerade* had its debut performance at the Drama Theatre in the Sydney Opera House on January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

This production, which later toured to Her Majesty's Theatre in Adelaide, and the Southbank Theatre in Melbourne, was well-received for its 'vivacious collaborations of music, light, colour, costume and larger than life characters', interweaving a 'sombre reality with a beautiful and bizarre other world populated by fantastical creatures'.<sup>124</sup> The acting of this production also received praise, particularly that of Nathan O'Keefe, who played Jack Hare, and Helen Dallimore, who played Tessa. As with any production, the design choices and direction lead to the possibility of adaptation *within* adaptation, as the stylistic and artistic choices of those involved work from the 'set of instructions' left by Mulvany in the form of the script; instructions that 'tell [the] actors what to say on stage', but not how to say it.<sup>125</sup>

One of the key stylistic elements of this production was recreating Williams' illustrations on stage. As Katja Krebs writes, illustrations that accompany children's literature not only 'take on their own canonical status', but they also 'already contain if not theatricality within them, then certainly a horizon of expectation with regard to the physical manifestation of the characters'.<sup>126</sup> Instead of trying to faithfully recreate Williams' paintings, the designer, Anna Cordingley, did not restrict herself to 'studying Kit [Williams'] beautiful paintings alone', but rather, she 'referred to a

---

<sup>124</sup> Claire Hansen, 'Reaching for the sun: *Masquerade* at the Sydney Festival', *The Conversation*, 13 January 2015, <<https://www.theconversation.com/reaching-for-the-sun-masquerade-at-the-sydney-festival-35022>> [accessed 6 September 2021].

<sup>125</sup> Martin Puncher, 'Drama and Performance: Toward a Theory of Adaptation', *Common Knowledge*, 17.2 (2011), 292-305 <<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/431157>> [accessed 10 March 2021] (pp. 293-294).

<sup>126</sup> Krebs, p. 584.

vast array of material, from the early shadow puppetry of Lotte Reiniger to the vibrant and daring interiors of a contemporary children's hospital'.<sup>127</sup> Costuming lends itself to a suggestion of a character, rather than a fidelity based recreation on stage. Even though characters like Tara Treetops and Penny Pockets closely resemble Williams' paintings, Cordingley states that when costuming an actor for a show like *Masquerade*, it is 'important not to lose sight of the human in there', as essentially, she will never convince an audience member – especially a young person – that Nathan [O'Keefe...] is actually a hare'.<sup>128</sup> Nor would she want to. O'Keefe is a 'hilarious, sparkling actor playing an unconventional hare, and to costume him as an eccentric man/hare hybrid is [...] the most imaginative and compelling way to present that character'.<sup>129</sup>

Costuming is important, as it 'embodies histories, states of being [and...] it can guide movement, define place, and structure relationships, as well as of course reveal the character'.<sup>130</sup> It is also useful for its 'ability to communicate metaphorically *and* viscerally [providing] a direct, visual, and embodied connection to the audience'.<sup>131</sup> Costuming 'draws attention to the performers' corporeal and material here-and-now reality, one which is shared with the present, sentient, and dressed spectators'.<sup>132</sup> The costuming for Tessa and Joe is practical and realistic to the "real world" and the situations they inhabit, but as they start to enter the fantastical world of *Masquerade*, peach and apricot tones are added to their wardrobe, mirroring the colours in Jack Hare's costume.

---

<sup>127</sup> Brookes, p. 21.

<sup>128</sup> Brookes, p. 21.

<sup>129</sup> Brookes, p. 21.

<sup>130</sup> Donatella Barbieri, *Costume in Performance: Materiality, Culture, and the Body* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), p. xxii.

<sup>131</sup> Barbieri, p. xxii. Emphasis in original.

<sup>132</sup> Barbieri, p. xxii.

One of the more unique stylistic elements of this production of *Masquerade* is the framing of the stage to match Williams' picturebook. Cordingley 'completely framed the stage with a haphazard alphabet interspersed with pictures of a hare, the moon and the sun'.<sup>133</sup> The 'framing device used by [Williams] intrigued' Cordingley the most, with 'their role in the resolution of the search'.<sup>134</sup> Thus, the production team arrived at their 'own proscenium/frame convention, which [enabled them] to spell vital riddles and illustrate charmed moments in the show', once again keeping the spirit of Williams' work alive in the show.<sup>135</sup> This highlights the transmedial ability of both forms of media, sharing a framing device which enhances not only the story, but the ability for the riddles to be solved in both texts.

This production also utilised a revolve as a means of changing from the "real" world of the hospital, and the celestial world of the picturebook with ease. A revolve can 'move a large amount of scenery and/or props in a short time. It allows for complex set changes to happen quickly and without interruption to the flow of the show. Or a scenery change can be artistically designed to become part of the show.'<sup>136</sup> For *Masquerade*, Cordingley used the revolve for the practical use of costume changes, but also exclusively for the scenes set in the hospital. Placing the hospital scenes on a revolve, Cordingley revealed to Brookes allowed for the "real" world to be couched 'within the celestial world in a literal, spatial sense, so it would be possible to zoom the audience's attention from one world to the other, or present both together expediently'.<sup>137</sup> This was done to offer a 'spatial world wherein the

---

<sup>133</sup> Carol Wimmer, 'Masquerade', *Stage Whispers*, n.d  
<<https://www.stagewhispers.com.au/reviews/masquerade>> [accessed 6 September 2021].

<sup>134</sup> Brookes, p. 21.

<sup>135</sup> Brookes, p. 21.

<sup>136</sup> Kerry Saxby, 'How Does a Revolve Work?', *Melbourne Theatre Company* (2021)  
<<https://www.mtc.com.au/discover-more/mtc-now/how-does-a-revolve-work/>> [accessed 9 September 2021].

<sup>137</sup> Brookes, p. 21.

two worlds can equally stand apart before dissolving into one'.<sup>138</sup> Furthermore, when the "real" world is not being presented, the space on the revolve is used for projections within the storyworld, further illustrating the way both worlds can blur within each other, as well as delineating the adapted material from the new material.

Of course, scripts must be embodied by actors to fully bring them to life. The entire ensemble was praised for their performances, but both Nathan O'Keefe, playing Jack Hare, and Helen Dallimore, playing Tessa, received substantial praise for their interpretations of Mulvany's writing. O'Keefe and Dallimore are representative of both facets of Mulvany's work, embodying the fantastical and the "real", respectively. Carol Wimmer writes that O'Keefe and Dallimore 'take the first half of the play from reality to fiction with finesse', with Dallimore combining 'the role of storyteller and agonised mother [...managing] heartache and desperation beneath a mask of positivity she must maintain'.<sup>139</sup> There is also a 'weariness and helplessness underlying the bright façade with which she faces each long day'.<sup>140</sup> Dallimore 'grounds the fantastical world in something real, grave, and heart-wrenching [...] she's the reality at the core of the play and she's a large part of what makes it work'.<sup>141</sup>

On the other hand, O'Keefe is 'energetically beguiling' in his performance as Jack Hare.<sup>142</sup> 'Light on his feet, appealing in his facial expressions, enthusiastic one moment, blighted the next', O'Keefe 'brings the audience along on his journey, his timing making the most of every comic aside and moving moment'.<sup>143</sup> Ben Neutze

---

<sup>138</sup> Brookes, p. 21.

<sup>139</sup> Wimmer.

<sup>140</sup> Wimmer.

<sup>141</sup> Tongue.

<sup>142</sup> Wimmer.

<sup>143</sup> Wimmer.

writes that it is difficult to ‘overstate just how much he lifts the entire production with his perfectly realised characterisation’, with O’Keefe presenting Jack Hare as a ‘cartoon character come to life in the best, most hilarious fashion possible’.<sup>144</sup>

Whereas Dallimore’s Tessa grounds the play in reality, O’Keefe represents the whimsy and wonder of it, acting as the ‘child in the world [...] discovering new things in every moment, re-drawing lines of friendship and despair, learning values and ideas’.<sup>145</sup>

By revelling in the theatricality of Williams’ story, as brought out by Mulvany in her script, this production of *Masquerade* utilises the many aspects of live theatre that make it so magical. The picturebook is respected onstage, with its images and puzzles given a physical form. Taking Mulvany’s words, directions, and world, and breathing new life into it through production elements and performance, directors Lewis and Armstrong have achieved the vision for the play as laid out to Mulvany by Williams - a play for all ages and incorporating Mulvany’s life story – reintroducing *Masquerade* to the world, for a new generation of treasure hunters.

\*\*\*

Mulvany’s *Masquerade* firmly establishes itself as an adaptation of Williams’ picturebook, announcing itself as “based” on the 1979 work. It is an adaptation that strongly links itself to a work Mulvany has treasured throughout her life, but also firmly places itself as departing from the source material to give it new life. This is not a simple transposition to the stage; Mulvany’s adaptation changes the medium in

---

<sup>144</sup> Neutze.

<sup>145</sup> Tongue.

which the story is presented, and presents it *as* a story, giving it a ‘different point of view [...creating] a manifestly different interpretation’.<sup>146</sup>

Mulvany expands, transposes, and modifies several elements of Williams’ picturebook to bring out its theatricality, and add in her personal story. Mulvany’s expansion, the addition of the metafictional “real” world of Tessa and Joe, all whilst ‘respecting the facts established in the original’,<sup>147</sup> allows for the original picturebook to be respected as a story, planting it in the “real”, and allowing for the escapism Mulvany links to the story. Mulvany’s transposition, that is, preserving the design and the main story of *Masquerade*, but locating it in a different setting, allows for the story of Williams’ book to be respected and presented, without it becoming farcical, or absurd. Ryan’s understanding of modification manifests itself in the plot points created by Mulvany, and the resolution of the story untold by Williams, with the Sun and Moon finally coming together in love, as well the involvement of Tessa and Joe, and their influence on this story.

Although divisive amongst critics, the addition of Mulvany’s personal life and experiences through the metafictional plot of *Masquerade* allows Williams’ picturebook to be re-evaluated as outlined by Marjorie Lewis. Lewis argues that ‘there is no common denominator among good [picturebooks]’,<sup>148</sup> and that children value them ‘rightly, for the total experience of the story and illustration’.<sup>149</sup> As Marantz writes, a picturebook ‘ought to be much more than some ancillary decoration or visual element’.<sup>150</sup> By recontextualising *Masquerade* for the stage,

---

<sup>146</sup> Hutcheon, p. 8.

<sup>147</sup> Ryan, p. 528.

<sup>148</sup> Marjorie Lewis, ‘Back to Basics: Re-evaluating Picture Books’, *School Library Journal*, 22.7 (1976), 82-83 (p. 82).

<sup>149</sup> Lewis, p. 83.

<sup>150</sup> Kenneth Marantz, ‘The picture book as art object: A call for balanced reviewing’, *Wilson Library Bulletin*, 52 (1977), 148-151 (p. 149).

Mulvany is exemplifying Lewis' main contention about why children 'return again and again to their favorites. They don't seem to care whether the pictures are full color, part color, or no-color [...] they care about humor and beauty; they pore over the pages of the books they love'.<sup>151</sup> It also affirms Marantz's contention that picturebooks are 'not literary works to be read. They are art objects to be experienced'.<sup>152</sup> Mulvany's choice to adapt *Masquerade* for the stage gives it meaning in a new medium, allowing it to literally come to life. The vibrancy, immediacy, and tactility of reading a picturebook, having a story told to us, in front of our eyes, is key to *Masquerade*'s success as a picturebook and a piece of theatre. Not only do the picturebook and the play share media qualities that make them transmedial, but share a performative element, that thrives when voices echo the words, or sing the songs.

Margaret Edson's play *Wit* (1999) ends with a powerful reminder that 'a woman dying of cancer might plausibly receive real, adult comfort from *The Runaway Bunny*'.<sup>153</sup> Even at times of 'terrible grown-up duress, great children's books, which are, when all is said and done, *great books*', can collapse years' worth of the 'rigidifying weight of adulthood, allowing the distressingly hapless child we all once were [...] air to breathe, and a chance to be heard, acknowledged, reasoned with' and perhaps even consoled.<sup>154</sup> *Masquerade* helped Mulvany when she was an ill child, and creating the adaptation came after the sudden loss of her partner, Mark. It was a return to safety for Mulvany, and when she met Williams at his home on the anniversary of Mark's death, he told her, simply, that she was 'meant to be [there]

---

<sup>151</sup> Lewis, p. 83.

<sup>152</sup> Marantz, p. 151.

<sup>153</sup> Tony Kushner and Maurice Sendak, *The Art of Maurice Sendak: 1980 to the Present* (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 2003), p. 33.

<sup>154</sup> Kushner and Sendak, p. 33. Emphasis in original.

today'.<sup>155</sup> Mulvany's adaptation is a testament to loving the source material, but also being unafraid to reimagine it, and wishing to share that love with the world, with fans old and new seeking a little adventure.

---

<sup>155</sup> Mulvany.

### Chapter 3: What a Queer Medium: Adapting *Fun Home* for the Stage

I first came across *Fun Home: The Musical* (2015) when I was at high school. Researching new musicals for an upcoming lip-sync competition, the talk of Broadway was an intimate musical about sexuality, death, and comics. As an avid reader of comics — reading everything from *Captain Underpants* to the works of Paul Hornschemeier — this musical piqued my interest. Listening to the cast album,<sup>1</sup> I was struck by the nuance of the lyrics, the intricacy of the music, how a production could feel so grand, but be so contained. For just over an hour, I sat transfixed by a story so relatable, yet so foreign; haunting and comforting all at once.

Later that year, during some free time on a theatrical school trip, I found a copy of Alison Bechdel’s graphic narrative *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (2006).<sup>2</sup> My eyes were drawn to dark hues of green on the glossy cover, juxtaposed by a monochrome sketch of Bechdel and her father. I bought it, and the next morning, I devoured the comic in one sitting.<sup>3</sup> Bechdel’s drawings felt etched with a raw energy I had only seen in Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* (1986, 1991).<sup>4</sup> It was real-life; panelised, paginated, and washed with a greyish blue, muting some moments, and enhancing others. I began to visualise the panels on the stage. Moments such as Alison playing ‘airplane’ with her father,<sup>5</sup> or losing her virginity to Joan,<sup>6</sup> were special and visceral on their own, but were enhanced by my knowledge of the

---

<sup>1</sup> Jeanine Tesori and Lisa Kron, *Fun Home (A New Broadway Musical)*, Original Broadway Cast, cond. by Chris Fenwick (New York: PS Classics, 2015) [on Spotify].

<sup>2</sup> From here in, the comic will be referred to as *Fun Home*, whilst the musical will be referred to as *Fun Home: The Musical*.

<sup>3</sup> This chapter will use the terms “graphic narrative” and “comic” interchangeably, in line with conventions set by Hillary Chute. See: Hillary Chute, ‘Comics as Literature? Reading Graphic Narrative’, *PLMA*, 123.2 (2008), 452-465 <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/25501865>> [accessed 23 March 2021].

<sup>4</sup> *Maus* was originally serialised in *RAW*, an avant-garde “graphix magazine”, and was released in two volumes in 1986 and 1991, respectively.

<sup>5</sup> Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (New York: Mariner Books, 2007), p.3.

<sup>6</sup> Bechdel, p. 80.

musical. The experience illuminated both forms of media for me and created a bond between both adaptation and the original I would be unable to forget. When I finally saw the musical, I was intrigued by the way that the structure of the comic seemed integral to the musical, in its staging, pace and development. As I started to learn more about musicals, comics and adaptation, *Fun Home*, in both forms of media, remained a touchstone demanding to be analysed through this lens. Bechdel's story is universal, it is alarming, alluring, and fascinating, and with each production, it is elevated in some way.

As with previous chapters, this chapter on *Fun Home* has a tripartite structure, profiling the adaptive process of the transition from comic to stage musical. However, this structure is modified slightly to grapple with the complex issues of media surrounding the adaptation. The first section of this chapter focuses on wider questions of media and compares the characteristics shared by both musicals and comics, and how these lend themselves to adaptation. A more specific engagement with the comic and script occurs in the second section which engages with, and contests, current debates surrounding the transmediality of *Fun Home: The Musical*. The final section, as with the previous chapters, will detail ways in which productions from New York, London, the Philippines, and Australia demonstrate how the musical adaptation *is* transmedial, as well as how the emotional weight and resonance of Bechdel's comic is heightened on stage.

## Musicals and Comics: Related Media

Musical theatre has always had a strong link to adaptation, with adaptations of biographies, plays, novels, and films, remaining popular for several decades.<sup>7</sup> On Broadway, the adapted musical has found continued success, both commercially, at the box office, and with accolades. Of the seventy-two musicals to receive the Tony Award for Best Musical, 69% percent have been adaptations, and between the 2010 and 2019 ceremonies, 82% of the nominees were adaptations.<sup>8</sup> While there is an argument to be made that adapted musicals are usually “cash-grabs”, playing off the popularity of its source text, I would argue this is no different to other transmedial texts or franchises, and certainly not devaluing of the medium in any way. The medium of the musical has often been seen as endorsing ‘the binary opposition between highbrow and lowbrow’ in the eyes of historians and critics.<sup>9</sup> This is due to the musical’s ‘ephemeral form, the common practise of adaptation, and its disposability’.<sup>10</sup> Musicals, according to David Savran, are unlike any other theatre form, as they are ‘single-mindedly devoted to producing pleasure, inspiring spectators to tap their feet, sing along, or otherwise be carried away’.<sup>11</sup> By occupying a ‘middlebrow status, [full of] blatant commercialism, [with a] lack of extant, stable evidence for study and analysis’, musicals struggle to be “taken seriously”.<sup>12</sup> In many respects, musicals occupy a similar space to comics, due to their placement in

---

<sup>7</sup> Examples of these adaptations include: *The Sound of Music* (1959), *My Fair Lady* (1957), *Les Misérables* (1980) and *The Producers* (2001), respectively.

<sup>8</sup> For this statistic, I have considered musicals that acknowledge they are adaptations of, or were inspired by, previously published material. Musicals based on events, but not material published about these events, such as *Come From Away* (2017) are therefore deemed “original”. Information correct as at the 73<sup>rd</sup> Tony Awards (2019).

<sup>9</sup> David Savran, ‘Toward a Historiography of the Popular’, *Theatre Survey*, 45.2 (2004), 211-217 <<https://doi.org/10.1017/S004055740400016X>> (p. 212).

<sup>10</sup> Millie Taylor, *Musical Theatre, Realism and Entertainment* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2012), p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> Savran, p. 216.

<sup>12</sup> Stacy Wolf, ‘In Defense of Pleasure: Musical Theatre History in the Liberal Arts [A Manifesto]’, *Theatre Topics*, 17.1 (2007), 51-60 <<https://doi.org/10.1353/tt.2007.0014>> (p. 51).

the middlebrow, seemingly unable to shake their preconceived notions, of being either too commercial, too childish, or too “difficult” to read.

Comics,<sup>13</sup> as a medium, have long been seen as a “childish” form, unable to shake its inherent association with Sunday newspapers, cheap paper and blotted ink, and a disposability unmatched by other literary forms. Comics are often seen as “lesser” forms of literature, and not “real reading”. Chris Ware writes that comics ‘are often seen as a gateway to “real reading” by those who don’t understand the difference between reading pictures and just looking at them’.<sup>14</sup> Comics, writes Ware, are ‘no more words with pictures than singing is just words with yelling’.<sup>15</sup> The association with superheroes and “funnies” has not helped the reputation of comics,<sup>16</sup> as its continual rejuvenation of the same characters, and its creation of new franchises and storylines, is often seen as stagnant and reductive. While superheroes were a defining feature of comics in the early twentieth century, and continue to be so, the medium has evolved.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, comics began to “mature” in the eyes of the public, with underground and alternative comics becoming popular, in protest of the Comics Code Authority, which sort to regulate comics to the masses.<sup>17</sup> With comics such as Justin Green’s *Blinky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin Mary* (1972), Will Eisner’s *A Contract with God* (1978) and Spiegelman’s *Maus*, the

---

<sup>13</sup> Comics is often understood as a genre, as opposed to the medium. As such, like Chute, I use “comics” as a singular verb where appropriate, no matter how clumsy it may sound. See: Hillary Chute, *Why Comics?: From Underground to Everywhere* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2017), p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> Chris Ware, ‘American Vernacular: Chicago and the Birth of the Comic’, *The New Yorker*, August 28 2021, <<https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/american-vernacular-chicago-and-the-birth-of-the-comic>> [accessed 29 August 2021].

<sup>15</sup> Ware.

<sup>16</sup> “Funnies” are comedic strips that tell comedic stories in single or few panels.

<sup>17</sup> For more on Underground Comics, see: James Danky and Denis Kitchen, *Underground Classics: The Transformation of Comics into Comix* (New York: Abrams Comicsart, 2009).

medium developed a reputation for telling important stories in a way that other media could not; a blend of words and images working in conjunction. Alison Bechdel's career began in underground comics, namely *Wimmen's Comix* and *Gay Comix*,<sup>18</sup> before syndicating her own strip across several publications called *Dykes to Watch Out For*.<sup>19</sup> Bechdel reached international acclaim with her comic *Fun Home*, a memoir detailing her childhood in Beech Creek, Pennsylvania, her university days and sexual awakening, and the apparent suicide of her father,<sup>20</sup> due to his closeted homosexuality.

*Fun Home* is a deeply personal memoir for Bechdel, it is the history of her own life, and the events leading up to, and preceding her biggest tragedy. In order for her to make sense of this cataclysmic event, Bechdel must create her own version of the place where she had no real agency, the "fun home", the 'mausoleum-like, funeral home where her father had control of every detail'.<sup>21</sup> The comic becomes an object, a new version of her home where she is both the architect and master builder, allowing her the same meticulous detailing that her father had in the construction of the house. *Fun Home* is multi-modal, containing maps, recreations of photographs, letters, and passages of novels, each meticulously drawn by Bechdel's own hand. For Bechdel, this is a 'bridging of the symbolic and the real',<sup>22</sup> even though the '*the real* is not delivered by the image', and Bechdel knows this multi-modal 'can never actually preserve the past', just recreate it.<sup>23</sup> Through Bechdel's recreation of

---

<sup>18</sup> See: *The Complete Wimmen's Comix: Volume 2*, ed. by Gary Groth (Seattle: Fantagraphics, 2016). *Gay Comix* was fundamental to both Bechdel's self-discovery of her lesbianism, and of her autobiographical comics, with Issue #19 featuring stories later reworked in *Fun Home*.

<sup>19</sup> The strip ran from 1983 to 2008 and has had several collections published.

<sup>20</sup> Bechdel writes that 'There was no proof, actually, that [her] father killed himself', but circumstances leading up to it suggest so. See: Bechdel, p. 27.

<sup>21</sup> Hillary L. Chute, *Graphic Women: Life Narrative & Contemporary Comics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), p. 179.

<sup>22</sup> Bechdel, p. 147.

<sup>23</sup> Chute, p. 191. Emphasis in original.

ephemera, the comic acts as an archive of a relationship lived and lost; a confession between family members about the strong and mutual bond between them. It is both catholic and cathartic, with the sins of the family laid bare for us to witness.

Furthermore, by trying to document her life through meticulous detail, Bechdel is marking the memoir's 'difference from her father's dead-end goal' of trying to capture and preserve 'impeccable surfaces [seen] in his own obsessive documentation' of both the family house,<sup>24</sup> and what Bechdel calls his 'exhibit [... a] still life with children'.<sup>25</sup> At every moment in the memoir, it is evident that Bechdel cannot escape the lingering presence of her father. At every moment of reflection, she is Bruce's daughter, a child acting as a 'conduit for the nostalgic gaze towards an irretrievable past'.<sup>26</sup> Although she writes from a place of stoicism and emotional reservation, Bruce is Bechdel's most significant collaborator and biggest inhibition, with *Fun Home* acting as the memorial marking his absence from the world, and his epitaph.

Much of the literary criticism on *Fun Home* focuses on Bechdel's lesbianism and reading the comic as queer.<sup>27</sup> The comic is just as interested in paternal relationships, and the similarities between Bechdel and her father, Bruce, and it is this canvassed territory that this chapter focuses on, both because of the plethora of excellent previous queer readings,<sup>28</sup> and because it is the complexity of the daughter-father relationship that drives many of the most compelling adaptation decisions.

---

<sup>24</sup> Chute, p. 193.

<sup>25</sup> Bechdel, p. 13.

<sup>26</sup> Maaheen Ahmed, 'Reading Children in Comics: A Sociohistorical Mapping', *Children's Geographies*, (2021), 1-12, <<https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2021.1919996>> (p. 8).

<sup>27</sup> Bechdel herself uses this term as a self-identifier, as well as a way of describing her work.

<sup>28</sup> See: Ian MacRae, 'Queering Epistemology and the Odyssey of Identity in Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*', in *Graphic Novels as Philosophy*, ed. by Jeff McLaughlin (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2017), pp. 130-149 and Michael Rerick, 'Queering the museum: challenging heteronormative space in Bechdel's *Fun Home*', *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*, 3.2 (2012), 223-230 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/21504857.2011.629665>>.

Even within her own memoir, Bechdel's coming out is overshadowed by Bruce, the revelation that he is gay, and then later, his suicide. It is evident in the comic that Bechdel wishes to show a visible connection to her father, maintaining a relationship between her life and his. She uses the form of the comic to navigate time and space, to fluctuate temporality, in relation to loss and trauma. *Fun Home* is often regarded by critics as being a "literary" text, due to its multiple references to canonical literature, but Hillary Chute theorises that this "literary" sense comes from 'the page composition, through panel size...shape and arrangement, [gesturing] at a certain rhythm'.<sup>29</sup> This connects to what Cathy Caruth describes as 'the complex relation between knowing and not knowing'.<sup>30</sup> *Fun Home*'s ability to represent multiple time periods on a single page, or a single frame, confirms this. One of the most affecting examples of this is the last page of the narrative, two simple panels showing the bread truck that kills Bruce in the 1970s, and Alison jumping into Bruce's arms in the early 1960s. It is here that we see that for Bechdel, the traumatic image of her father killing himself invades all other moments, all other memories of him, even those moments of 'rare physical contact'.<sup>31</sup>

One of the defining features of a graphic narrative is its flexible page architecture, where the white space surrounding the panels can be just as vital as the images or the words. This is what Bechdel refers to as 'the "space between the image and words" that enables *Fun Home*' to present her relationship with her father'.<sup>32</sup> As Stephen Tabachnick suggests, this empty space is used by audiences to make

---

<sup>29</sup> Chute, p. 180.

<sup>30</sup> Cathy Caruth, 'Trauma and Experience: Introduction', in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. by Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), pp. 3-12 (p. 3).

<sup>31</sup> Bechdel, p. 232.

<sup>32</sup> Chute, p. 191.

connections within the text, to move it forward at their own pace.<sup>33</sup> The emptiness is as crucial as what is presented directly on the page. This empty space also allows graphic narratives to be adaptable, malleable, and full of potential for the stage. The panels act as vignettes, and white space is where links between these are made. Furthermore, I argue that the emptiness in graphic narratives is akin to silence on stage, where the unsaid remains so. It is through silence that ‘we understand the characters, their despairs, agony, and [where] we can see through the mesh’.<sup>34</sup> In both forms of media, the emptiness reveals much about the characters, but also our own relationship to what is being said.

Lisa Kron, an award-winning autobiographical playwright, and performer began working on adapting *Fun Home* for the stage in 2008, with Jeanine Tesori, acclaimed composer of *Violet* (1997) and *Caroline, or Change* (2003), joining her later. Through a series of workshops and a residency in California, Kron and Tesori developed *Fun Home: The Musical*. Over the course of five years, the musical had several iterations, with revisions occurring right through the previews of the Off-Broadway production, requiring the actors to perform new material every night. Oskar Eustis, artistic director of the Public Theater where *Fun Home: The Musical* had its 2013 Off-Broadway debut, said that these constant revisions showed ‘how willing Lisa and Jeanine were to keep trying till they got it right’.<sup>35</sup> John Bryant argues that no text is a fixed thing, as there are always a variety of manuscript

---

<sup>33</sup> Stephen E. Tabachnick, ‘Introduction’, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Graphic Novel*, ed. by Stephen E. Tabachnick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 1-7 (p. 3).

<sup>34</sup> Sakeena Khan, ‘Roaring Reticence: Listening the Unsaid in the Plays of Samuel Beckett’, *International Journal of English and Education*, 4.1 (2015), 412-420, <[https://ijee.org/yahoo\\_site\\_admin/assets/docs/LT\\_5.36200628.pdf](https://ijee.org/yahoo_site_admin/assets/docs/LT_5.36200628.pdf)> [accessed 22 January 2022] (p. 412).

<sup>35</sup> Robin Pogrebin, ‘Memoir to Musical: Five-Year Journey’, *New York Times*, November 20, 2013, <<https://www-proquest-com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/blogs-podcasts-websites/memoir-musical-five-year-journey/docview/2214279838/se-2?accountid=17287>> [accessed 3 June 2021].

versions, revisions, and differences.<sup>36</sup> Adaptation is a process that requires adaptors to reinterpret then recreate, to appropriate material and salvage it.<sup>37</sup> Early versions of the musical were structured around Bechdel's drawings, rather than the memories they represent, which Kron and Tesori later removed with the exception of a singular image of Bruce and a young Bechdel at the conclusion of the show. Just like the comic, *Fun Home: The Musical* is presented through non-linear vignettes, and follows Alison's discovery of her sexuality, her relationship with her father, and mystery of his life and suicide. Alison acts as the narrator of her story, remembering and creating her memoir on stage. Bechdel is represented in the musical in three distinct stages: Small Alison (aged eleven), Medium Alison (aged nineteen), and Alison (aged forty-three). *Fun Home: The Musical* was a success on Broadway, winning five Tony Awards. It was lauded for its unbashful look into sexuality and suicide, as well as for being the first Broadway musical with a lesbian protagonist.<sup>38</sup>

Much of the scholarship surrounding *Fun Home: The Musical* focuses on its positioning as a queer musical, detailing the difficulties and struggles of being gay in rural America. Although gay male characters have featured prominently on Broadway, lesbians have not, and a 'musical featuring a lesbian protagonist, created by a lesbian librettist and a woman composer, is unprecedented on Broadway'.<sup>39</sup> Bechdel sees herself as a 'lesbian cartoonist',<sup>40</sup> with both parts equal to her identity.

---

<sup>36</sup> John Bryant, *The Fluid Text: A Theory of Revision and Editing for Book and Screen* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2002), pp. 1-2.

<sup>37</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 8.

<sup>38</sup> See: Curtis M. Wong, 'Fun Home' Brings Lesbian Protagonist to Broadway For The First Time', *The Huffington Post*, 31 March 2015, <[https://www.huffpost.com/entry/fun-home-broadway-\\_n\\_6955634](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/fun-home-broadway-_n_6955634)> [accessed 3 June 2021]. Other musicals have featured lesbian supporting characters, or "lesbian-leaning", such as *Rent* (1996) and *The Color Purple* (2005), but not an "out" lesbian protagonist.

<sup>39</sup> Joanna Mansbridge, 'Adapting Queerness, Queering Adaptation: Fun Home' on Broadway', in *Adaptation, Awards Culture, and the Value of Prestige*, ed. by Colleen Kennedy-Karpat & Eric Sandberg (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 75-94 <[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-52854-0\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-52854-0_5)> (p. 76).

<sup>40</sup> Jeanine Tesori and Lisa Kron, *Fun Home* (London: Samuel French, 2015), p. 17.

When analysing *Fun Home: The Musical*, it is important to think about it through a queer lens, and the medium in which Bechdel expresses herself. Much of this scholarship has already been done, and thus, this discussion focuses more particularly on medium, especially the musical's relationship to comics, as well as a story told through the lens of a father and daughter.

*Fun Home: The Musical* has found a way to tell the direct story of its original text, as well as using the medium to full effect, to be, in my view, the first genuine transmedial adaptation of a graphic narrative on stage. Musicals such as *Annie* (1977), and *The Addams Family* (2010) have found great success on Broadway, after adapting the characters from famous comic-strips, using them as the basis for their stories but never their original plotlines. However, they neglect any characteristics of the medium they originated in, and therefore are character adaptations, not comics adaptation. *You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown* (1967), based on Charles M. Schulz's *Peanuts* strip, found success in its original production, with its stripped back production value, small cast, and simple staging. Much like *Annie*, it used the characters to create a new story, in the "spirit" of the strip, without any of its characteristics. When the show was revived on Broadway in 1999, it featured updated dialogue, songs, and production design, namely, to incorporate the aesthetics of Schulz's cartoons. Through costume and set design, the production emulated the thick line work of *Peanuts* and was panned by critics for failing to live up to its source material.<sup>41</sup> *Fun Home: The Musical*, on the other hand, utilises character, story, and characteristics of the graphic narrative in its adaptation. As such, it can be

---

<sup>41</sup> See: Ben Brantley, 'Theater Review; Your Sister's Gutsy, Charlie Brown', *New York Times*, 5 February 1999, <<https://www.proquest.com/blogs-podcasts-websites/theater-review-your-sisters-gutsy-charlie-brown/docview/2235180679/se-2?accountid=17287>> [accessed 3 June 2021].

seen as a transmedial adaptation, one that is able to be adapted with various elements successfully from one medium to another.

### ***Fun Home: The Musical as Transmedia***

In categorising *Fun Home: The Musical* as a transmedial adaptation, this chapter is engaging in an ongoing critical debate. Jeanette D’Arcy argues that both *Fun Home* and *Fun Home: The Musical* are ‘apparently clearly delineated, singular but related texts [...] *Fun Home* [in both forms of media] is not obviously a transmedial project’.<sup>42</sup> D’Arcy cites Henry Jenkins’ article ‘Adaptation, Extension, Transmedia’, where he sees ‘adaptation is understood as a version or retelling of the original, whereas an extension goes beyond the original’, with extensions therefore working in opposite to adaptation.<sup>43</sup> If Jenkins’ definition is considered, then *Fun Home: The Musical* is not ‘transmedial project as Jenkins [would] envisage’, but rather it is a ‘clear retelling of the [graphic narrative], including most of the same events and transposing much of the text/dialogue straight from Bechdel’s book’.<sup>44</sup> The songs in the musical, however, constitute what Jenkins ‘refers to as “extensions”, as they are not just a retelling of the adapted text but go beyond it’.<sup>45</sup> However, extensions are a crucial part of updating and modernising texts, especially when the medium is changed. Linda Hutcheon and Siobhan O’Flynn theorise that as adaptation continues to evolve, the scope of this term must include ‘recreations, remakes, remediations,

---

<sup>42</sup> Jeanette D’Arcy, ‘Troubling Boundaries and Negotiating Dominant Culture: ‘*Fun Home*’ as a Transmedial Text’, *The Comics Grid: Journal of Comics Scholarship*, 9.17 (2019), 1-21, <<https://doi.org/10.16995/cg.146>> (p. 2).

<sup>43</sup> Henry Jenkins, ‘Adaptation, Extension, Transmedia’, *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 45.2 (2017), <[https://www.lfq.salisbury.edu/\\_issues/first/adaptation\\_extension\\_transmedia.html](https://www.lfq.salisbury.edu/_issues/first/adaptation_extension_transmedia.html)> [accessed 11 June 2021] (para. 5).

<sup>44</sup> D’Arcy, p. 3.

<sup>45</sup> D’Arcy, p. 4.

revisions, parodies, reinventions, reinterpretations, expansions, and extensions’.<sup>46</sup> A key element of adaptation is that the adaptation would not exist without the original. As such, viewing *Fun Home: The Musical* through Jenkins’ definition would be reductive of the adaptative process. A more productive definition comes from Lars Elleström, who regards a text as transmedial when media characteristics have been ‘successfully transferred among different kinds of media’.<sup>47</sup>

While the comic book format is replicated through the structure and performative elements of the musical, the rich multi-modal elements woven into *Fun Home* are replaced with ‘emotionally charged, lyrical, and, at time, comical songs that provide keen insight into the emotions of each character’.<sup>48</sup> Kron and Tesori’s most inspired move, according to Joanna Mansbridge, was to depict Bechdel as a ‘flesh-and-blood character in the musical, standing in the present tense, interacting with her past and examining, with exacting precision’, her relationship with her father, her lesbianism, Bruce’s suicide, and all the intertwining of these facets.<sup>49</sup> Alison’s desire to know the truth of her past is what brings the musical into being, with Alison singing

I want to know what’s true, dig deep into who  
and what and why and when,  
until now give way to then.<sup>50</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> Linda Hutcheon and Siobhan O’Flynn, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (Oxon: Routledge, 2013), p. 181.

<sup>47</sup> Lars Elleström, ‘Adaptation and Intermediality’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies*, ed. by Thomas Leitch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 509-525  
<<https://dx.doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199331000.013.29>> (p. 510).

<sup>48</sup> Mansbridge, p. 86.

<sup>49</sup> Mansbridge, p. 86.

<sup>50</sup> Tesori and Kron, p. 12.

Through this witnessing of Alison's search for the truth of her life, 'the audience sees memory as a form of creative, embodied labour'.<sup>51</sup>

The songs presented within the narrative of *Fun Home: The Musical* enhance the character arcs and emotional weight of the scenes, with D'Arcy stating that 'Ring of Keys' 'in particular demonstrates the "additive comprehension" that the theatrical medium provides in its extension of the 8-panel section' of the comic.<sup>52</sup> This song expands on 'the emotions of awakening experienced by [Small] Alison [...] as she begins to realise her queer identity' and it is made especially effective by the 'theatrical medium, as the audience must acknowledge the live, bodily presence of the child actor in this queer role, celebrating an awakening queer identity'.<sup>53</sup> *Fun Home: The Musical* expands on minutiae within the comic, giving emotion to elements that are minor in the narrative. In *Fun Home*, the ring of keys on the waist of the 'truck driving bulldyke' is a minor detail that does not pull focus in such a large, busy panel.<sup>54</sup> The panel takes up half of the page, with the ring of keys partially obscured by a countertop, but Kron places significant weight on this minor feature, as some tangible for Small Alison to connect with, to see a part of herself in the woman.<sup>55</sup> The encounter 'sustained [Bechdel] throughout the years',<sup>56</sup> but for Small Alison, it is her defining moment of realization, she "knows" this woman, and what she represents.<sup>57</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup> Mansbridge, p. 87.

<sup>52</sup> D'Arcy, p. 3.

<sup>53</sup> D'Arcy, p. 4.

<sup>54</sup> Bechdel, p. 119.

<sup>55</sup> See: Adam Hetrick, 'Why "Ring of Keys" Was the One Song *Fun Home*'s Creator *Didn't* Want to Write', *Playbill*, 25 January 2016, <<https://www.playbill.com/article/why-ring-of-keys-was-the-one-song-fun-homes-creator-didnt-want-to-write>> [accessed 17 June 2021].

<sup>56</sup> Bechdel, p. 119.

<sup>57</sup> Tesori and Kron, p. 57.

As well as ‘Ring of Keys’ highlighting a passing moment in the comic, songs such as ‘Maps’ and ‘Telephone Wire’ accentuate the relationship between Alison and Bruce, with the previously unspoken now being said. ‘Maps’ takes a single panel explaining Bruce’s relationship to his hometown and turns it into a ballad about the misunderstanding of her father. The panel emulates, albeit it in Bechdel’s hand, a detailed topographic map of Beech Creek, marking a mile and a half diameter where Bruce lived and died. It stands out on the page as an artifact that Bechdel uses to explain her father’s sensibility, but it is not particularly emotionally weighted. The song draws from this map, this ability to fit an entire life into a circle, that had Bruce not been stuck in this small Pennsylvania town, where Alison can ‘draw a circle [he] lived his life inside’, he would not have suffered so greatly.<sup>58</sup> As Richard Kislán writes, songs contain a ‘radiant emotional power that gives sentiment the wings to soar above reality [...recalling] in the listener personal experiences of deep and highly charged feeling’, thus permitting an audience ‘to feel together what has been felt before alone’.<sup>59</sup> For audiences experiencing *Fun Home: The Musical*, this moment is a time to reflect on their own connection with loved ones, and their possible misunderstandings, as well as being “in the room” with Alison, acting as her invisible support.

In ‘Telephone Wire’, Alison, for the first time in the musical, is acknowledged directly by a character on stage, with Bruce asking her if she is ‘ready to go for that drive’.<sup>60</sup> In the comic, this is a painfully awkward section made up of twenty-four panels across two pages, with narration and speech appearing between

---

<sup>58</sup> Tesori and Kron, p. 45.

<sup>59</sup> Richard Kislán, *The Musical: A Look at the American Musical Theater* (London; New York: Applause, 1995), p. 3.

<sup>60</sup> Tesori and Kron, p. 66.

uncomfortable silence, with Bruce admitting he had slept with a man at college, and that when he was a child he ‘really wanted to be a girl’.<sup>61</sup> However, in the musical, this scene gives emotional agency to both Bruce and Alison, alleviating the pressure of secrecy within both characters. Again, Kron’s lyrics latch on to the tangible, something Alison would be able to focus on, this time the telephone wires that ‘run and run’.<sup>62</sup> Alison still struggles to speak to Bruce about her lesbianism, building up the nerve to talk to him about it ‘at the light’, but being interrupted each time.<sup>63</sup> When Bruce finally provides details about an early homoerotic experience with a boy called Norris Jones, there is a brief moment of connection between the two, of a mutual understanding, which quickly fades away when Bruce starts detailing his next restoration project. Alison cannot believe that she came so close to understanding her father, but this was their ‘last night’, and so much went unsaid.<sup>64</sup>

Perhaps the most emotionally weighted song in the musical, is ‘Edges of the World’, the final appearance of Bruce before his suicide. In ‘Bruce’s eleven o’clock number [...] he rhapsodizes about the house [he is restoring] from a liminal space between hope and despair, in reflexive language pregnant with personal meaning’.<sup>65</sup> On the one hand, Bruce sees the house as a place full of possibility, singing

But when the sunlight hits the parlor wall  
at certain times of day

---

<sup>61</sup> Bechdel, p. 221.

<sup>62</sup> Tesori and Kron, p. 67.

<sup>63</sup> Tesori and Kron, p. 67.

<sup>64</sup> Tesori and Kron, p. 70.

<sup>65</sup> Jeffrey Magee, ‘From Flatbush to *Fun Home*: The Broadway Musical’s “Cozy Cottage” Trope’, in *Rethinking American Music*, ed. by Tara Browner and Thomas L. Riis (Champaign, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2019), pp. 34-49 (p. 46)

I see how fine this house could be

I see it so damn clear.<sup>66</sup>

On the other hand, the restoration seems impossible, as the house has a

[...] bad foundation, twisting floorboards, shoddy pipes, a gaping hole

It's a lot, it's a lot to keep under control.

Something cracking, something rotting, piles of ruin and debris,

killing me! crushing me! pushing me!<sup>67</sup>

The house is evidently a reflection of Bruce himself, in earlier dialogue he describes it as 'sitting empty out [on Route 150] for forty, fifty years', just as he has.<sup>68</sup> This is another way in which Tesori and Kron extend the narrative originally presented in the graphic narrative, as Bruce's suicide is never explicitly shown or foreshadowed by Bechdel. Rather, the moment is presented with the facts at hand in three panels, one of Bruce walking across the road, a mid-shot of the concerned truckdriver, and the spot where Bruce died, devoid of any life.<sup>69</sup> The song gives agency to Bruce, humanising him and validating his experiences, and giving him a voice separate to Alison's perception of him. In *Fun Home*, Bruce is rarely seen showing any emotion other than anger. He is frequently depicted in fits of rage, hitting his children,<sup>70</sup> and the family never knowing 'if the minotaur lay beyond the next corner'.<sup>71</sup> In this song, Bruce is finally vulnerable, accessible, and relatable to Alison as more than just a father, but someone lost in the world.

---

<sup>66</sup> Tesori and Kron, p. 72.

<sup>67</sup> Tesori and Kron, p. 72.

<sup>68</sup> Tesori and Kron, p. 70.

<sup>69</sup> Bechdel, p. 89.

<sup>70</sup> Bechdel, p. 18.

<sup>71</sup> Bechdel, p. 21.

*Fun Home: The Musical*'s ability to transpose the structure and storytelling elements of the graphic narrative is in part due to the similarities between theatre and comics storytelling. As Tony Kushner states 'playwrights work within many of the same drastic economies of dialogue and image as comic book artists', as 'both have to grapple, albeit it in different ways, with severe limitations and pressures of time and space'.<sup>72</sup> If Tabchnick's understanding of the comics reader is applied to the theatre, time is as fluid on the stage as it is on the page. Meaning is automatically made by audiences between scenes, especially those moving between significant periods of time. The fault of most adaptations of comics, is that they try and place the events of a story that is not bound by time, into a restricted setting. *Fun Home: The Musical* is not afraid to present itself in a non-linear fashion, playing up the temporality of its adapted form. As Chute contends, one of the most 'forceful formal devices' of comics is the ways in which they dramatically 'collapse or crush different moments of time together'.<sup>73</sup> Sarah K. Whitfield insists that it is crucial to view 'shapes and stories in musical theatre in relationship to their temporality',<sup>74</sup> with Zachary Dorsey arguing that the musical, when amplified by speech, song, and dance, 'the various dimensions of the subjective enable a musical's breadth of exclamations and ideologies and doubts and dreams to coalesce, however uneasily'.<sup>75</sup> Rather than the 'neatness of the past, present and future, the subjunctive mood sits adjacent to time and saturates everything with a sense of possibility'.<sup>76</sup> Jeanette D'Arcy has considered that the comic book structure of the musical means

---

<sup>72</sup> Tony Kushner, 'Introduction', in Howard Cruse, *Stuck Rubber Baby* (New York: Paradox Press, 1995), pp. i-iv (p. ii).

<sup>73</sup> Chute, p. 49.

<sup>74</sup> Sarah K. Whitfield, 'Disrupting Heteronormative Temporality through Queer Dramaturgies: *Fun Home, Hadestown and A Strange Loop*', *Arts*, 9.2 (2020), 69-82, <<https://doi.org/10.3390/arts9020069>> (p. 3).

<sup>75</sup> Zachary Dorsey, 'Big possibility: *Moscow*, and musical theatre's subjective dramaturgy', *Studies in Musical Theatre*, 10.2 (2016), 195-207, <[https://doi.org/10.1386/smt.10.2.195\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/smt.10.2.195_1)> (p. 197).

<sup>76</sup> Dorsey, p. 197.

the audience is ‘aware not only of how events unfurl in the performance but of the multiple ways in which the events could have occurred and thus of the contingent nature of social and political relationships and choices’.<sup>77</sup>

*Fun Home: The Musical* is ‘constructed of fragments of memory’,<sup>78</sup> culminating in what Alison calls ‘a picture of my father/ made of little marks’.<sup>79</sup> As illustrated in ‘Maps’, memory is ‘also spatial. Alison’s memories are attached to places, houses, and the objects in them’.<sup>80</sup> Graphic narratives are also spatial, and this lends itself nicely to stage adaptation, but challenging in its ability to be non-linear and still make sense for an audience. With a comic, the reader has the ability to control the pacing of the narrative, to be in charge of temporality. On stage however, this is out of the audience’s hands. To allow the audience to make sense of this complexity, Bechdel is represented on stage at three different ages: Small Alison (Eleven), Medium Alison (Nineteen), and Alison (Forty-Three). As Hutcheon theorises, ‘recognition and remembrance are part of the pleasure (and risk) of experiencing an adaptation; so too is change’.<sup>81</sup> Adaptation, like memory, ‘is a process of revision – literally “to see again” – which precisely describes Alison’s quest’.<sup>82</sup> As Alison recalls the memories of her childhood, she is simultaneously adapting them, both my “seeing them again” in the present moment, and by transforming them from ‘psychic material to visual images’.<sup>83</sup> The musical itself also enacts this process, as the audience watches Alison scrutinise, adapt, and then

---

<sup>77</sup> D’Arcy, p. 15.

<sup>78</sup> Rebecca Applin Warner, ‘Musematic Relationships in Jeanine Tesori’s Score for *Fun Home*’, in *Reframing the Musical: Race, culture and identity*, ed. by Sarah Whitfield (London: Red Globe Press, 2019), pp. 151-166 (p. 153).

<sup>79</sup> Tesori and Kron, p. 77.

<sup>80</sup> Mansbridge, p. 87.

<sup>81</sup> Hutcheon, p. 4.

<sup>82</sup> Mansbridge, p. 87.

<sup>83</sup> Mansbridge, p. 87.

document her past for the world to engage with. The musical negotiates, without reconciliation, the distance between the past and the present, by capturing ‘[Small] Alison’s sense of possibility and desire to connect with her father, [Medium] Alison’s confusion and longing to be accepted [...and] Alison’s desire to document the past’,<sup>84</sup> and to ‘know what’s true’.<sup>85</sup>

Leah Anderst writes that an important point of ‘comparison between the two works, and one that has a vital impact on the ways that readers and viewers are invited into the story, is the voice of the adult Alison Bechdel, the cartoonist-memoirist’.<sup>86</sup> From the outset of *Fun Home*, readers are presented with Bechdel’s “narrating-I”, a ‘voice that at once presents the story and shapes the way we understand the drawn scenes from her past’.<sup>87</sup> This voice dominates the graphic narrative, often ‘far exceeding any words exchanged between characters within the drawings. Its presence is unmistakably strong and at times even exerts a stronger, more overt influence than the drawings it accompanies’.<sup>88</sup> The voice of Bechdel often shapes the reader’s understanding of the visual content. The final page of the first chapter of *Fun Home* presents an everyday scene, of Bruce and Alison working together in the yard, but with the added “narrating-I”, this becomes a series of images coloured by longing, loss, and suicide.<sup>89</sup> In conjunction with the sombre, monochromatic colour washed drawings, the narrating-I ‘directs how [audiences] “read” these drawings [...keeping them] at a distance from the characters she has

---

<sup>84</sup> Mansbridge, p. 88.

<sup>85</sup> Tesori and Kron, p. 11.

<sup>86</sup> Leah Anderst, “‘It Both Is And Isn’t My Life’: Autobiography, Adaptation, and Emotion in *Fun Home*, the Musical”, in *The Comics of Alison Bechdel: From the Outside In*, ed. by Janine Utell (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 2020), pp. 105-118, JSTOR <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvx5w9fh.12>> [accessed 5 May 2021] (p. 110).

<sup>87</sup> Anderst, p. 110.

<sup>88</sup> Anderst, p. 110.

<sup>89</sup> Bechdel, p. 23.

drawn; they are mediated, even barred, by Bechdel's retrospective, authoritative voice, which speaks from above and with omniscience'.<sup>90</sup>

Tesori and Kron had to bring this strong textual narrating-I on to the stage, doing so by transforming Bechdel's narrative voice into one of the three Alisons. Kron discusses this in the foreword to *Fun Home: The Musical*, saying

Our source for this inside information is the narrative voice in the captions that surround every frame, which points out every instance of delusion, denial, hypocrisy, and retroactive irony. The voice is erudite, wry, and aching - the voice of a truth-seeker. It's what makes *Fun Home Fun Home*. We turned that voice into a character and made it the [centre] of our musical.<sup>91</sup>

The voice in the comic is portrayed onstage by a body 'who speaks in ways that [...] echo Bechdel's narrating-I but whose physical presence – whose audible voice, facial, and bodily expressions – adds dimensions to this figure that are nearly absent in the graphic memoir and from the readers' reception of the story'.<sup>92</sup> Alison often stands or sits at a drawing table onstage, watching and commenting on what plays out in front of her. Much like the narrating-I that 'floats in the gutters around the panels in the text, this character often stands outside of the action rather than inside of it', often reflecting 'on what is happening onstage than [participating] in scenes herself'.<sup>93</sup>

The opening stage direction of the musical establishes Alison as both the cartoonist who creates, but also as a figure who occupies the same space as her

---

<sup>90</sup> Anderst, p. 111.

<sup>91</sup> Tesori and Kron, p. 7.

<sup>92</sup> Anderst, p. 111.

<sup>93</sup> Anderst, p. 112.

creations:

*Adult ALISON enters and crosses to her drawing table. Next to the table, on the floor, is a battered cardboard box. She rummages around inside it, looking for something to draw. She finds a ring of keys. She arranges it on her table, picks up her pen, and begins to draw.*<sup>94</sup>

In the early scenes of the musical, Alison often says the word ‘caption’ to highlight that she is writing over a drawing. Whilst Alison speaks lines and sings songs that mirror the ‘words and sentiments that come through to the reader of *Fun Home* via Bechdel’s narrating-I’, she is also a character onstage, ‘walking us through the difficult process of selecting memories from her past and finding objects to draw from’.<sup>95</sup> Thus, the character is a version of Bechdel’s narrative voice, an embodied creation with things to do onstage. The character of Alison maintains some of the controlling relationship with the past and the stories being remembered, but importantly, she is also a character existing inside a ‘theatrical storyworld over which she does not have complete control. Where she was an omniscient narrator in [*Fun Home*], she does not exercise the same omniscience in the musical’.<sup>96</sup>

Crucially, there are key moments in the musical where Alison enters the story, losing some of what Anderst calls ‘her “narrative authority” or “narrative agency”’.<sup>97</sup> It is these moments where the story of *Fun Home: The Musical* seems to happen *to* her, rather than Alison making the story happen through her drawings and narration.

Joanna Mansbridge writes that any play’s dramatic ‘force is propelled by various and conflicting “wants” of its characters’, but in musicals, these “wants” are

---

<sup>94</sup> Tesori and Kron, p. 9.

<sup>95</sup> Anderst, p. 112.

<sup>96</sup> Anderst, p. 112.

<sup>97</sup> Anderst, p. 112.

expressed through song'.<sup>98</sup> While in *Fun Home*, the desires of the characters are not explicit, the musical adaptation makes this its primary goal, 'to express the unspoken desires of [the] characters and make them available for public recognition'.<sup>99</sup> Small Alison expresses her desire at the start of the musical, in the opening lines saying 'Daddy, hey Daddy, come here, okay? I need you'.<sup>100</sup> Small Alison also asks to 'play airplane',<sup>101</sup> a game that symbolizes her desire 'to transcend her father's limitations'.<sup>102</sup> Small Alison's desire to play with her father is juxtaposed with the Bechdel family's struggle to maintain the façade of perfection perpetuated by Bruce to hide his unexpressed desires. Bruce does not sing his own "want" song, rather it is sung by his family, having learnt to read and contain his signs of desire:

HELEN

He wants the brass candelabra set at an angle

The crayons and the glue should go back in the drawer

He wants the bust of Quixote square on the mantel [...]

FAMILY

He wants -

He wants -

He wants - [...]

ALISON (*Taking in her father's gaze*)

He wants more.<sup>103</sup>

Led by Helen, Alison's mother, the family learns to

---

<sup>98</sup> Mansbridge, p. 88.

<sup>99</sup> Mansbridge, p. 88.

<sup>100</sup> Tesori and Kron, p. 9.

<sup>101</sup> Tesori and Kron, p. 9.

<sup>102</sup> Mansbridge, p. 88.

<sup>103</sup> Tesori and Kron, pp. 14-17.

stay very still and  
maybe we'll please him  
Make one wrong move  
and the demons will seize him.<sup>104</sup>

Alison reflects on Bruce and how volatile and narcissistic he was, and that the image he made the family uphold was futile. The Bechdel family aimed to placate Bruce with cleanliness and perfection, but this changed nothing. No matter how perfect they appeared, the family and the house they lived in could not give him what he wanted.

The permanence of memory comes fully into fruition with one particular memory, or rather the absence of it. Alison yearns for her father to acknowledge and accept her sexuality, yet knowing that this never actually happened, Alison recreates this absent memory by reliving the last night with her father. The stage directions explain that 'she's not remembering this, she's living it again',<sup>105</sup> with Alison taking Medium Alison's place in the narrative. During this drive, Bruce indirectly confesses his homosexuality, reflecting that

lots of boys messed around, you know  
For them, it was just a game they outgrew  
But I always knew.<sup>106</sup>

With a rush of relief, Alison responds

Dad, me too!  
Since, like five, I guess [...]

---

<sup>104</sup> Tesori and Kron, p. 16.

<sup>105</sup> Tesori and Kron, p. 67.

<sup>106</sup> Tesori and Kron, p. 69.

I really tried to deny my feelings for girls

But I was like you

Dad, me too.<sup>107</sup>

Bruce is lost in his own memories and denied desires and fails to acknowledge Alison's yearning for mutual recognition. Although Bruce fails to recognise this in Alison, the audience of *Fun Home: The Musical* recognises this on her behalf. The audience, knowing that Bruce will kill himself before the end of the musical, sees a man aching for self-acceptance, but oblivious to his daughter's need for *his* acceptance.

*Fun Home: The Musical's* ability to use media conventions unique to each medium, as well as those shared between them, sets it apart from other musical adaptations. It is not a simple case of staging a story with music for a box-office draw, but rather to show the power of musical theatre to add depth and emotion to a story. By transposing the medium of comics to the stage, bringing its distinctive characteristics with it, *Fun Home: The Musical* is an excellent example of the power of transmedial adaptation, expanding and elevating a story and its medium for audiences to enjoy.

### ***Fun Home: The Musical: Productions as Adaptation***

*Fun Home: The Musical* has seen great successes across the world, gaining awards and recognition for its multiple incarnations. As well as productions in New York (Off-Broadway and Broadway), *Fun Home: The Musical* has had a US National

---

<sup>107</sup> Tesori and Kron, p. 69.

Tour, and has been staged in London, Manila, Vancouver, Singapore, in translation in Barcelona,<sup>108</sup> and most recently in Sydney. Each of these productions brings its own unique interpretation of Tesori and Kron's text, adapting it to fit the context and spaces the production inhabits. It would be unrealistic and limiting to assume that every production of *Fun Home: The Musical* would be the same, just because the text is the same. Live performance is 'fluid in that no two productions of one printed play text or musical score, or even two performances of the same productions, will be alike'.<sup>109</sup> With each new staging, there are bound to be losses and gains, differences, and similarities. For this to be understood, it is crucial to see the 'dramatic text as a set of instructions given by a writer [or writers] to actors. Primarily, these instructions tell actors what to say on stage, but also what to do in the form of implicit or explicit stage directions'.<sup>110</sup> Crucially, however, production elements, direction, and the theatrical space play just as significant a role in determining how the words written will be said or sung.

As outlined in Chapter 1, Martin Pucher argues that performing a text is not the 'process of carrying out instructions, nor [...] filling in gaps', but as 'one of transformation and adaptation'.<sup>111</sup> Thus, each production of *Fun Home: The Musical* is inherently an adaptation in and of itself. When *Fun Home: The Musical* first debuted at the Public Theater, it was presented in the traditional proscenium arch staging, which is often used for staging large musicals, as it separates the audience from the action on stage, creating a fourth wall. Musicals are presentational, with the

---

<sup>108</sup> This production was translated into Catalanian.

<sup>109</sup> Hutcheon, p. 170.

<sup>110</sup> Martin Pucher, 'Drama and Performance: Toward a Theory of Adaptation', *Common Knowledge*, 17.2 (2011), 292-305 <<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/431157>> [accessed 10 March 2021] (pp. 293-294).

<sup>111</sup> Pucher, p. 295.

‘cumulative impact of live singing, dancing, acting, and musical accompaniment [reminding] the audience and the performers [...] of the vigorous theatricality of the event’.<sup>112</sup> The presentational nature of the musical, as well as practical elements such as dance numbers, large casts, special effects, and equipment, leans itself to presenting itself in proscenium arch, encasing the spontaneity and conventions of the medium within its frame.

*Fun Home: The Musical*, however, had no issues breaking this fourth wall. When the show transferred to Broadway, the director of the production, Sam Gold, decided it would be, like the original production of *The Curious Incident*, performed in-the-round. Broadway’s Circle in the Square Theater became the new home for the show, and this ‘spatial transformation turned the private space of the Bechdel home into a shared scene of public witness’, which amplified the intimacy of the musical, ‘maximising the already collective experience of theatre spectatorship’.<sup>113</sup> Ka Harada, the sounds designer of this production, was initially apprehensive about doing a musical in-the-round, as they are notoriously difficult to do effectively. Once the show began to settle into this new performance style, the cast and crew realised that the production ‘took incredible leaps forward’.<sup>114</sup> As Harada states, audiences ‘really [felt] like [they were] part of the family, watching Alison’s past come to life. It is an immersion rather than a presentation’.<sup>115</sup> Mansbridge writes that this ‘immersion is the Bechdel family home is a central element of [*Fun Home: The*

---

<sup>112</sup> Kislán, p. 6.

<sup>113</sup> Mansbridge, p. 85.

<sup>114</sup> Eric Rudolph, ‘*Fun Home* on Broadway Audio: Intimacy in the Round’, *Mix Online* (2015) <<https://www.mixonline.com/live-sound/fun-home-broadway-audio-425717>> [accessed 21 June 2021].

<sup>115</sup> Rudolph.

*Musical's*] success on Broadway; despite their idiosyncrasies, we feel at home with this family'.<sup>116</sup>

By presenting this production in-the-round, Sam Gold was able to replicate the personal intimacy that is experienced when *Fun Home* is read. The unique experience of looking straight ahead, through the performance and witnessing what another audience member feels, is striking. Some say that 'faces across the arena are a distraction; others that they just become a backdrop, a human frame to the unfolding story'.<sup>117</sup> However, it is in these moments, when visible through the dim lights of the show, that the audience is most vulnerable, most receptive, and most intimate. Genuine human connection is tactile in the theatre; Alison and the audience have nowhere to hide.

If the Broadway production was able to capture the intimacy of Bechdel's comic, the London and Manila productions were able to convey the universality of the story. Although Alison Bechdel, and her family, are white Americans, these two productions of the show communicate the poignancy and power of the show, without remaining slavishly faithful to every detail of Bechdel's life, in particular the family ethnicity. The London production, also directed by Sam Gold, cast Zubin Varla as Bruce, Cherrelle Skeete as Joan, and Ashley Samuels as the various male characters that Bruce interacts with. Varla is of Parsi Indian descent, and Skeete and Samuels are Black, marking distinct racial difference from the real-life character they portray, as well as previous casting decisions. These casting choices reflect the growing practise of "colour-blind" or "integrated" casting on both stage and screen. While

---

<sup>116</sup> Mansbridge, p. 85.

<sup>117</sup> David Ward, 'Conquering theatre in the round', *The Guardian*, 7 October 2008, <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2008/oct/07/theatre>> [accessed 21 June 2021].

some of these casting decisions are made to directly engage with topical issues of race and representation, as with Lin Manuel Miranda's *Hamilton: An American Musical* (2015), Gold's production seeks to highlight the universality of a story that already engages with complex issues of exclusion and acceptance. Bechdel herself initially struggled with seeing her own life as universal, something removed from herself, saying:

When the memoir came out, I bristled at critics who qualified the struggle it describes as “universal”. It felt like they were trying to co-opt my identity. But it doesn't strike me that way anymore. I've come to the conclusion that we're all queer – there is no normal.<sup>118</sup>

Jeanine Tesori has been vocal about the fact that whilst the musical is an adaptation of Bechdel's memoir, it also serves ‘as a guide’, telling Bechdel's story for all to relate to.<sup>119</sup> Lisa Kron's own view of the goal of auto/biographical material, is that it ‘should not be to tell stories about yourself but, instead, to use the details of your own life to illuminate or explore something universal’.<sup>120</sup>

While there is a climate of diverse representation in casting musicals,<sup>121</sup> the aim of many is to explore human nature; qualities that define our collective experience in the world. Love, acceptance, identity, these ideas know no bounds. Zubin Varla's performance of Bruce is beautifully emotive, and extremely resonant,

---

<sup>118</sup> Judith Thurman, ‘Finish Line: Backstage at *Fun Home*’, *The New Yorker*, 11 May 2015, <<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/05/11/finish-line-backstage-at-fun-home>> [accessed 8 May 2021].

<sup>119</sup> Jack Smart, ‘Composer Jeanine Tesori on the 100 Musicals of *Fun Home*’, *Backstage*, 3 December 2020, <<https://www.backstage.com/magazine/article/musicals-fun-home-10863>> [accessed 8 May 2021].

<sup>120</sup> Lisa Kron, *2.5 Minute Ride and 101 Humiliating Stories* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2001), p. xi.

<sup>121</sup> Musicals like *The Color Purple* and *Hairspray* require certain race-based casting and would rightly receive backlash if incorrectly casted. *The Phantom of the Opera*, however, would not necessarily require Euro-centric casting.

with his deep, booming voice giving weight to Kron's lyrics. It is what is done with the role that defines its worth, and Varla caught 'perfectly the contradictions of a man who is both intellectually assertive and emotionally hesitant',<sup>122</sup> and conveys both 'generosity and the terrible internal conflicts that make him override his daughter's individuality'.<sup>123</sup> All of this is done with a constant subtlety.<sup>124</sup>

The production in the Philippines is similar in this regard, casting Asian women in the central roles of Alison, Small Alison, Medium Alison, and Helen. Homosexuality is tolerated in the Philippines, but those who identify as such have limited legal rights. By staging *Fun Home: The Musical* with Filipino actors, the production, directed by Bobby Garcia seeks to engage the general understanding of what Alison ultimately seeks, to be 'just like you'.<sup>125</sup> Many audience members in the Philippines would have been drawn in by the casting of Lea Salonga, who plays Helen. Salonga, best known for originating Kim in *Miss Saigon*, as well as being the first Asian woman to win a Tony Award, was the face of the production, even though Helen is a more minor character in the show compared to Alison and Bruce. This move allowed a way in for audience members to explore and understand a complex and emotional musical. Jansen Musico writes that there were who lined 'up to see [*Fun Home: The Musical*], waiting to be wooed by Lea Salonga. And, without a doubt, they will be awed. But there is much more to the play than Salonga', audiences will leave the theatre with 'either puffy eyes or a tune stuck in their

---

<sup>122</sup> Michael Billington, 'Fun Home review – Bechdel memoir takes stage musical in new directions', *The Guardian*, 28 June 2018, <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2018/jun/28/fun-home-review-alison-bechdel-musical-graphic-novel-memoir>> [accessed 21 June 2021].

<sup>123</sup> Sarah Crompton, 'Review: *Fun Home* (Young Vic)', *WhatsOnStage*, 27 June 2018, <[https://www.whatsonstage.com/london-theatre/reviews/fun-home-young-vic\\_46963.html](https://www.whatsonstage.com/london-theatre/reviews/fun-home-young-vic_46963.html)> [accessed 21 June 2021].

<sup>124</sup> Crompton.

<sup>125</sup> Tesori and Kron, p. 11.

heads'.<sup>126</sup> To see oneself in art, especially in live performance is to feel understood. For queer members of the audience in the Philippines to see themselves personified onstage would be monumental, as it is anywhere in the world, and Bechdel's story, through Tesori's music and Kron's words, is a perfect vessel for it.

The most recent production of *Fun Home: The Musical* was performed in Australia, in a co-production between Melbourne Theatre Company and Sydney Theatre Company. Directed by Dean Bryant, the production was originally scheduled for July 2020, but was cancelled due to COVID-19 restrictions in Australia. The re-scheduled production ran in May 2021, to critical acclaim, and was celebrated, alongside *Hamilton: An American Musical* and *Come From Away*, as the only professional musicals running in the world. The Sydney production utilised the elements of production available to display the power of temporality that is so pertinent in the comic.

Reviews of the Sydney production lauded the set, designed by Alicia Clements, with Isabel Hudson, for its enhancement of the story. Judith Greenaway notes that audiences would come out of *Fun Home: The Musical* 'humming the pictures rather than the songs [...] though never static, the story is created in images and the use of the revolve is elegantly ingenious'.<sup>127</sup> Other reviews have called it 'stunning' with the 'large rotating set [allowing] an ease of flow between Alison's past and present'.<sup>128</sup> Writing for *The Guardian*, Debbie Zhou described the set

---

<sup>126</sup> Jansen Musico, 'Review: *Fun Home* is a joyful exploration of sexual identity', *CNN Philippines*, 14 March 2017, <<https://www.cnnphilippines.com/life/culture/2017/03/14/fun-home-review.html>> [accessed 21 June 2021].

<sup>127</sup> Judith Greenaway, 'Theatre Review: *Fun Home*, Sydney Theatre Company', *ArtsHub*, 3 May 2021, <<https://www.performing.artshub.com.au/news-artile/reviews/performing-arts/judith-greenaway/theatre-review-fun-home-sydney-theatre-company-262481>> [accessed 5 May 2021].

<sup>128</sup> Alannah Maher, 'Review: *Fun Home* wows on Sydney stage', *TimeOut*, 6 May 2021, <<https://www.timeout.com/sydney/theatre/fun-home>> [accessed 18 May 2021].

design as ‘spectacular, transforming the Bechdel house into 360-degree grandeur’.<sup>129</sup> While the Broadway production used the theatre in-the-round to capture the intimacy between the audience and the family circle, Bryant’s staging at the Roslyn Packer Theatre ‘artfully navigates Clements’ design with his own characters’ emotional states: the space feels increasingly bigger and emptier as [Alison] grows more uncertain of the picture she had of her father’.<sup>130</sup>

This use of space highlights the temporality that is so deeply embedded into the show, with time periods and events seamlessly merging into one another. Temporality is a staple of both theatre and comics, as a finite amount of time is available for a production to tell its story, and the flexible structure of comics allows constant temporality shifts. With this production of *Fun Home: The Musical*, however, the set design also plays into the cyclical nature of Alison’s memories, with events and times looping around her, as it ‘all comes back’.<sup>131</sup>

In Bechdel’s comic response to the musical, ‘Play Therapy’, she explains the strange yet cathartic experience of having your life dramatized. She writes that it would be ‘strange enough seeing fictional characters one had created brought to life onstage’, but this is her ‘actual family’.<sup>132</sup> Bechdel also struggled, initially, to understand her relationship to it, saying ‘It’s not mine. I didn’t make it. But it’s my life’.<sup>133</sup> She had expected the musical adaptation would be a ‘bit artificial’, a ‘lighter, arms-length take on [her] childhood. [She] was not prepared for the opposite

---

<sup>129</sup> Debbie Zhou, ‘*Fun Home* review – Alison Bechdel memoir – musical adaptation burrows its way into your heart’, *The Guardian*, 11 May 2021, <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2021/may/11/fun-home-review-alison-bechdel-memoir-musical-adaptation-burrows-its-way-into-your-heart>> [accessed 15 May 2021].

<sup>130</sup> Zhou.

<sup>131</sup> Tesori and Kron, p. 11.

<sup>132</sup> Alison Bechdel, ‘Play Therapy’, *Vulture*, 15 April 2015, <<https://www.vulture.com/2015/04/alison-bechdel-fun-home.html>> [accessed 26 June 2021].

<sup>133</sup> Bechdel.

impact'.<sup>134</sup> For Bechdel, the adaptation seemed to 'get to the emotional heart of things more directly than the book had', and certainly 'more directly than [her] parents [...] ever had in real life'.<sup>135</sup> Seeing her life acted out before, her story told indirectly, proved cathartic. Her 'impossible wish' is that her parents could see the musical, and that it could 'heal them too'.<sup>136</sup> What Bechdel crucially points out here is the power of live performance, to witness emotion through the vehicle of another human's body, and the funeral home that has defined her life, built from wood and plaster, fully lit for audiences to enter.

\*\*\*

From the outset, *Fun Home: The Musical* establishes itself firmly as an adaptation, fitting perfectly into Hutcheon's definition of an adaptation, something that is announced, created, and received.<sup>137</sup> Hutcheon writes that an adaptation is first 'seen as a formal entity or product', with it being 'an announced and extensive transposition of a particular work or works'.<sup>138</sup> This transposition often involves a shift in medium, changing the frame and therefore the context, 'telling the same story from a different point of view [...creating] a manifestly different interpretation'.<sup>139</sup> *Fun Home: The Musical* directly refers to its source material through its title, story, and characters, announcing itself as based on Bechdel's comic.

As a 'process of creation',<sup>140</sup> *Fun Home* has been reinterpreted and recreated by Tesori and Kron, appropriating and salvaging Bechdel's graphic narrative, giving

---

<sup>134</sup> Bechdel.

<sup>135</sup> Bechdel.

<sup>136</sup> Bechdel.

<sup>137</sup> Hutcheon, pp. 7-8.

<sup>138</sup> Hutcheon, p. 7.

<sup>139</sup> Hutcheon, p. 8.

<sup>140</sup> Hutcheon, p. 8.

it new meaning on the stage. Both the story and form of Bechdel's memoir have been transposed, embodying the temporality comics is famous for. *Fun Home: The Musical* is also a product that is received, viewed critically as an intertextual piece, with Hutcheon writing that audiences 'experience adaptations [...] as palimpsests through our memory of other works that resonate through repetition with variation'.<sup>141</sup> Audiences of the musical will experience the text differently, regardless of whether they are familiar with its source material. They will frame it through their own experiences with other musicals, stage productions, and literature about family, growing up, and coming out.

Although D'Arcy argues that *Fun Home: The Musical* does not necessarily meet the requirements of transmedia through the lens of Jenkins, his views on adaptation and transmedia are often reductive, excluding many adaptations as 'redundant'.<sup>142</sup> D'Arcy states that *Fun Home: The Musical* is not a transmedia adaptation as it is a retelling of Bechdel's comic, but this definition would exclude a plethora of adaptations across various medium. Retelling is a vital part of adaptation discourse and retelling through a new medium is just as valid. It is untrue to argue that *Fun Home* and *Fun Home: The Musical* tell the same story in the same way, as the new medium brings forth an emotional depth sometimes lacking in Bechdel's panels, due to her reserved and stoic writing.

However, *Fun Home: The Musical* meets several definitions of transmedia adaptation. Regina Schober believes that adaptation is the process in which

---

<sup>141</sup> Hutcheon, p. 8.

<sup>142</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), p. 105.

connections are ‘established between two different modes of representation’.<sup>143</sup> With the musical adaptation announcing its relationship to Bechdel’s graphic narrative inherently creates a transmedial link, as once media transformation is spoken of, there has already been a connection established, ‘creating an inherent relationship between two medial expressions, whether the adaptation is “intended” or a more covert appropriation of transmedial or modal constituents’.<sup>144</sup>

Bechdel herself has said that the musical form captures her life and its universality in a way that her memoir could not. Through song, Bechdel’s drawings are transformed into a new form of literature. Just as the words and images inform each other in a comic, music and lyrics inform each other in a musical. By finding moments of vulnerability and untapped emotion in *Fun Home*, Tesori and Kron expose their characters, placing them in front of an audience, bearing their souls to them. Furthermore, each production illuminates the power of the story to a different audience, using staging, casting, and production design to connect with an audience, and display the universal themes of family, love, and acceptance.

Bechdel writes in her comic ‘Fun Home! The Musical!’ that she was stunned, when seeing a preview of the show in 2013, at how good it was. Having ceded authority over her memoir, she did not know how the musical would achieve its goal. Her memoir had been an ‘intricate, nonlinear account of [her] closeted gay father’s suicide and [her] own coming out as a lesbian’.<sup>145</sup> She could not imagine ‘anyone bursting into song’, but quickly learnt that ‘musicals are always about life-

---

<sup>143</sup> Regina Schober, ‘Adaptation as connection – Transmediality reconsidered’, in *Adaptation Studies: New Challenges, New Directions*, ed. by Jorgen Bruhn, Anne Gjelsvik & Eirik Frisvold Hanssen (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 89-112 (p. 89).

<sup>144</sup> Schober, p. 89.

<sup>145</sup> Alison Bechdel, ‘Fun Home! The Musical!’, *Seven Days*, 2 July 2014, <<https://www.sevendayssvt.com/vermont/fun-home-the-musical/Content?oid=2393463>> [accessed 15 May 2021].

and-death situations'.<sup>146</sup> One of her earliest memories was transformed into a gay anthem, her first, awkward, sexual encounter became an 'exuberant showstopper'.<sup>147</sup> The musical, a medium that is 'sometimes thought of as building distance between the story and the audience – musical numbers are, after all, not representative of everyday life – here draws Bechdel closer to the characters she created, closer to their experiences, and to their emotions'.<sup>148</sup> We see this in 'Play Therapy', with Bechdel attending a workshop reading of the musical. While the other audience members stand clapping around her, Bechdel is on the left, blowing her nose, with a few droplets spraying above her. The adaptation has brought the author of the source material to tears, and this suggests that 'if one of [Bechdel's] goals of her narrative is to reach an emotional core for her readers, the musical version reaches that goal more efficiently for its viewers'.<sup>149</sup> Perhaps, most poetically for Bechdel, her mother and father were given a new life, one where they could express themselves earnestly, and her 'parents – who had met, as it happened, in a play – would get to go on living in one'.<sup>150</sup>

---

<sup>146</sup> Bechdel.

<sup>147</sup> Bechdel.

<sup>148</sup> Anderst, p. 106.

<sup>149</sup> Anderst, p. 106.

<sup>150</sup> Bechdel.

## Conclusion

The theatre is a place of possibility. No other form of media has its ability to present a story in such an immediate, embodied way. It is malleable, turning car parks to coliseums, human bodies to parts of the universe; it is a place where you can be anything. The theatre is also free from conceptual constraint. If it can be said or presented on stage, it can be performed. If this thesis has proved anything, I hope it is that the theatre has the ability and adaptability to tell *any* story. In what other form could – without a single ounce of facetiousness – a man dressed as a hare help the Moon and the Sun fall in love? What other medium can capture 700 people with a sombre solo about suicide, or reward those faithful to the show’s end with a mathematical extravaganza?

Barney Norris writes that stories are ‘common property. Everyone who ever goes to see a play takes home their unique version of the tale: like witnesses to a car accident, no two people will ever see the same play’.<sup>1</sup> This is a ‘very important principle in adaptation, and also a liberating one’.<sup>2</sup> Adaptations themselves are much the same, each presenting, reconstructing, and creating a unique version of the source material. Clayton Mackenzie’s assertion that ‘the very processes of theatrical production make it inevitable that a play will “write new” the novel upon which it is based’,<sup>3</sup> certainly rings true, and I believe this holds true for all forms of media adapted to the stage. The theatrical medium, in its various forms, draws the lifeblood

---

<sup>1</sup> Barney Norris, ‘Built on violence: adapting *The Remains of the Day* for stage’, 14 March 2019, *The Guardian*, <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/mar/14/plays-the-thing-barney-norris-adapting-remains-of-the-day-kazuo-ishiguro>> [accessed 5 October 2021].

<sup>2</sup> Norris.

<sup>3</sup> Clayton Mackenzie, ‘Adapting Novels For The Stage: New Clothes Or New Emperors?’, *Studia Universitatis Petru Maior. Philologia*, 11 (2011), 154-160 <<https://www.proquest.com/docview/1038159914/fulltextPDF/77044514C170484CPQ/1?acountid=17287>> [accessed 6 October 2021] (p. 156).

and humanity from the source material, and re-present its stories through the tactile and the ephemeral.

Linda Hutcheon provides a different emphasis, highlighting that adaptation is a process of creation and reception.<sup>4</sup> Theatrical adaptations boast the ability to be continuously re-created and re-received. While the process of making a film is an inherently collaborative one, a film reaches an endpoint where it does not change. When the film is watched again, in a cinema, on a streaming service, or on home media, the film remains as it was. In the theatre, playscript adaptations can be shared and translated across the world, constantly reworked for different stages and environments, and with each production taking the same words, and perpetually adapting them within performance. Nothing is fixed in the theatre; each night, each beat is different. There is no re-shooting, no director's cut. Just what exists in the moment.

This thesis has utilised the various trends of adaptation studies, both new and old, to formulate a cohesive argument for the inclusion of theatrical adaptation in adaptation scholarship. It has likewise foregrounded a recognition of theatre's relationship to transmediality. Although a conclusive definition of transmediality has yet to be agreed upon in adaptation studies, there is compelling evidence to ensure theatre is included in all future definitions. Critics such as Henry Jenkins may claim that retelling a story in a new medium is not transmedial, nor an expansion of the storyworld, but this thesis has refuted this claim. By retelling a story on stage, the storyworld of the text is expanded through deviation, through new additions, and through the physical act of performance. A cinematic universe may not have been

---

<sup>4</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 8.

created, or a rollercoaster built, or action figures sold, but the story has evolved, it has adapted.

Adaptation studies, as the name suggests, is a prolific field that is always evolving. As new forms of media are created, attention spans are shortened, and media continues to be consumed like never before, the theatre remains immediate and tactile. Adaptations like *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, *Masquerade*, and *Fun Home: The Musical* exemplify adaptation trends and discourse. In each form of media which presents the story, characteristics of that medium are celebrated, enhancing the storyworld being told. Haddon's first-person dive into Christopher's interior consciousness becomes an ensemble-driven spectacle. Williams' surrealist picturebook uses naturalistic costuming to tell a story in which magic is a necessary escape from illness. Bechdel's restrained comic panels morph into musical numbers on a revolving stage.

By viewing these adaptations through three stages, the original work, the adapted script, and subsequent productions of that script, this thesis has argued that page to stage adaptation does not have to only mean a transition of a novel into a dramatic play. It can be a picturebook brought to life through cabaret, or a comic reformulated as a musical. Any form of media can be elevated on the stage. The feeling of a collective gasp, of undivided attention on one performer, is unique.

Most importantly, I think, the theatre must be included in adaptation discourse, as its very presence is in jeopardy. COVID-19 has put theatre's future in flux. The pantomimes I saw as a child may never go back on. Theatre cannot be shot on a closed set or released on Netflix. Theatre needs people, it needs attention, it needs life. Theatre allows us to confront reality, to witness life in front of us, in a

tactile and tangible way. It remains a constant place of legitimate escapism, with playwright Sarah Ruhl noting it as ‘one of the few places left in the bright and noisy world where we can sit in the quiet dark together, to be awake’.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Sarah Ruhl, *100 Essays I Don't Have Time to Write* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2015), p. 103.

## Bibliography

Albrecht-Crane, Christa and Dennis Cutchins, 'Introduction: New Beginnings for Adaptation Studies', in *Adaptation Studies: New Approaches*, ed. by Christa Albrecht-Crane & Dennis Cutchins (Madison, New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2010), pp. 11-22

Ahmed, Maaheen, 'Reading Children in Comics: A Sociohistorical Mapping', *Children's Geographies*, (2021), 1-12,  
<<https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2021.1919996>>

Anderst, Leah, "'It Both Is And Isn't My Life": Autobiography, Adaptation, and Emotion in *Fun Home*, the Musical', in *The Comics of Alison Bechdel: From the Outside In*, ed. by Janine Utell (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 2020), pp. 105-118, JSTOR  
<<https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvx5w9fh.12>> [accessed 5 May 2021]

Applin Warner, Rebecca, 'Musematic Relationships in Jeanine Tesori's Score for *Fun Home*', in *Reframing the Musical: Race, culture and identity*, ed. by Sarah Whitfield (London: Red Globe Press, 2019), pp. 151-166

Barbieri, Donatella, *Costume in Performance: Materiality, Culture, and the Body* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017)

Barker, Mike and John Rousseau, 'Appendix: The Perfect Solution', in Bamber Gascoigne, *The Quest for the Golden Hare* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1983), pp. 205-224

Base, Graeme, *The Eleventh Hour* (Camberwell: Viking, 1988)

Bechdel, Alison, *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (New York: Mariner Books, 2007)

— —, ‘Fun Home! The Musical!’, *Seven Days*, 2 July 2014,

<<https://www.sevendayssvt.com/vermont/fun-home-the-musical/Content?oid=2393463>> [accessed 15 May 2021]

— —, ‘Play Therapy’, *Vulture*, 15 April 2015,

<<https://www.vulture.com/2015/04/alison-bechdel-fun-home.html>> [accessed 26 June 2021]

Beckett, Sandra L., ‘Crossover Picturebooks’, in *The Routledge Companion to Picturebooks*, ed. by Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 209-219

Benjamin, Walter, ‘The Storyteller’, in *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zohn, ed. by Hannah Arendt (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970), pp. 83-109

Billington, Michael, ‘*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* – review’, *The Guardian*, 3 August 2012, <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2012/aug/03/curious-incident-dog-review>> [accessed 11 December 2021]

— —, ‘*Fun Home* review – Bechdel memoir takes stage musical in new directions’, *The Guardian*, 28 June 2018, <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2018/jun/28/fun-home-review-alison-bechdel-musical-graphic-novel-memoir>> [accessed 21 June 2021]

Boenisch, Peter, *Directing Scenes and Senses: The Thinking of Regie* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015)

— —, 'Exposing the Classics: Michael Thalheimer's *Regie* Beyond the Text', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 18.1 (2008), 30-43  
<<https://doi.org/10.1080/10486800701741477>>

Bolton, Jacqueline, *Theatre of Simon Stephens* (London: Methuen, 2020)

Boon, Maxim, 'Review: *Masquerade* (Sydney Festival)', *Limelight*, 11 January 2015, <<https://www.limelightmagazine.com.au/reviews/review-masquerade-sydney-festival/>> [accessed 9 August 2021]

Bortolotti, Gary R. and Linda Hutcheon, 'On the Origin of Adaptations: Rethinking Fidelity Discourse and "Success": Biologically', *New Literary History*, 38.3 (2007), 443-458 <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/20058017>> [accessed 25 March 2021]

Bradford, Clare, 'The Picture Book: Some Postmodern Tensions', *Papers: Explorations into Children's Literature*, 4.3 (1993), 10-14

Brantley, Ben, 'Theater Review; Your Sister's Gutsy, Charlie Brown', *New York Times*, 5 February 1999, <<https://www.proquest.com/blogs-podcasts-websites/theater-review-your-sisters-gutsy-charlie-brown/docview/2235180679/se-2?accountid=17287>> [accessed 3 June 2021]

- Brodie, Sara, 'Director's Note', *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* programme (Auckland: Auckland Theatre Company, 2016),  
<[atc.co.nz/media/4254/atc-curious-programme-vweb2.pdf](http://atc.co.nz/media/4254/atc-curious-programme-vweb2.pdf)> [accessed 11 December 2021]
- Brooke-Hitching, Edward, *The Madman's Library: The Strangest Books, Manuscripts and Other Literary Curiosities From History* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2020)
- Brookes, Robyn, *Study Guide: Masquerade* (Adelaide: State Theatre Company, 2017) <<https://www.statetheatrecompany.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Study-Guide-Masquerade-FINAL.pdf>> [accessed 4 April 2021]
- Brown, Felicity, 'Review of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* (directed by Emma Rice) at Shakespeare's Globe, 24 May 2017', *Shakespeare*, 13.4 (2017), 359-361  
<<https://doi.org/10.1080/17450918.2017.1352511>>
- Brown, Peter, '*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* Review 2013', *London Theatre*, 12 March 2013,  
<<https://www.londontheatre.co.uk/reviews/the-curious-incident-of-the-dog-in-the-night-time-review-2013>> [accessed 11 December 2021]
- Brownlee, Shannon, 'Fidelity, Medium Specificity, (In)determediacy: Identities that Matter', in *The Routledge Companion to Adaptation*, ed. by Dennis Cutchins, Katja Krebs & Eckart Voigts (London: Routledge, 2020)  
<<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315690254>> pp. 157-168

Bryant, John, *The Fluid Text: A Theory of Revision and Editing for Book and Screen*  
(Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2002)

Bulson, Eric, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Novel*, ed. by Eric  
Bulson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 1-20,  
<<https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316659694.002>>

Burry, Alexander, *Multi-Mediated Dostoevsky: Transposing Novels into Opera,  
Film, and Drama* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2011)

Cardwell, Sarah, *Adaptation Revisited: Television and the Classic Novel*  
(Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002)

— —, 'Pause, Rewind, Replay: Adaptation, intertextuality and (re)defining  
adaptation studies', in *The Routledge Companion to Adaptation*, ed. by  
Dennis Cutchins, Katja Krebs & Eckart Voigts (London: Routledge, 2020)  
<<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315690254>> pp. 7-17

Carlson, Marvin, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor:  
University of Michigan Press, 2001)

Carroll, Noël, 'Medium specificity arguments and self-consciously invented arts:  
Film, video, and photography', *Millennium Film Journal*, 14/15 (1984), 127-  
153

— —, 'The Specificity of Media in the Arts', *The Journal of Aesthetic  
Education*, 19.4 (1985), 5-20 <<http://www.jstor.com/3332295>> [accessed 26  
August 2021]

- Carter, Angela, 'Notes from the Front Line', in *Gender and Writing*, ed. by Michelene Wandor (London: Pandora Press, 1983), pp. 69-77
- Cartmell, Deborah and Imelda Whelehan, *Adaptations: From Text to Screen, Screen to Text* (London: Routledge, 1999)
- —, *Screen Adaptation: Impure Cinema* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010)
- Caruth, Cathy, 'Trauma and Experience: Introduction', in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. by Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995)
- Chute, Hillary, 'Comics as Literature? Reading Graphic Narrative', *PLMA*, 123.2 (2008), 452-465 <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/25501865>> [accessed 23 March 2021]
- —, *Why Comics?: From Underground to Everywhere* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2017)
- Chute, Hillary L., *Graphic Women: Life Narrative & Contemporary Comics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010)
- Clapp, Susannah, 'The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time; Philadelphia, Here I Come!: Playing the Games: Taking Part/After the Party – review', *The Guardian*, 5 August 2012, <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2012/aug/05/curious-incident-dog-night-review>> [accessed 11 December 2021]

- Cook, Malcolm and Max Sexton, 'Adaptation as a function of technology and its role in the definition of medium specificity', in *The Routledge Companion to Adaptation*, ed. by Dennis Cutchins, Katja Krebs & Eckart Voigts (London: Routledge, 2020) <<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315690254>> pp. 361-371
- Cooppan, Vilashini, 'The Novel as Genre', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Novel*, ed. by Eric Bulson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 23-42, <<https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316659694>>
- Cothran, Casey A. and Mercy Cannon, 'Introduction: Embarking on a New Investigation', in *New Perspectives on Detective Fiction: Mystery Magnified*, ed. by Casey A. Cothran and Mercy Cannon (New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 1-12
- Crane, Doug, 'Story as Song: Filking Children's Literature', *The Looking Glass: New Perspectives on Children's Literature*, 2.3 (1998), 20-21 <<https://www.ojs.latrobe.edu.au/ojs/index.php/tlg/article/view/1012>> [accessed June 26 2021]
- Crompton, Sarah, 'Review: *Fun Home* (Young Vic)', *WhatsOnStage*, 27 June 2018, <[https://www.whatsonstage.com/london-theatre/reviews/fun-home-young-vic\\_46963.html](https://www.whatsonstage.com/london-theatre/reviews/fun-home-young-vic_46963.html)> [accessed 21 June 2021]
- D'Arcy, Jeanette, 'Troubling Boundaries and Negotiating Dominant Culture: *Fun Home* as a Transmedial Text', *The Comics Grid: Journal of Comics Scholarship*, 9.17 (2019), 1-21, <<https://doi.org/10.16995/cg.146>>

Danky, James and Denis Kitchen, *Underground Classics: The Transformation of Comics into Comix* (New York: Abrams Comicsart, 2009)

Davies, Ross, 'Business Diary: Reckless hunt the necklace', *The Times*, 31 July 1981, *The Times Digital Archive*, <<https://www.link-gale-com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/apps/doc/CS319129855/TTDA?u=waikato&sid=bookmark-TTDA&xid=e1212a3f>> [accessed 21 July 2021]

Dorsey, Zachary, 'Big possibility: *Moscow*, and musical theatre's subjective dramaturgy', *Studies in Musical Theatre*, 10.2 (2016), 195-207, <[https://doi.org/10.1386/smt.10.2.195\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/smt.10.2.195_1)>

Elleström, Lars, 'Adaptation and Intermediality', in *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies*, ed. by Thomas Leitch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 509-525 <<https://dx.doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199331000.013.29>>

Elliot, Kamilla, 'The theory of *badaptation*', in *The Routledge Companion to Adaptation*, ed. by Dennis Cutchins, Katja Krebs & Eckart Voigts (London: Routledge, 2020) <<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315690254>> pp. 18-27

Emig, Rainer, 'Adaptation and the concept of the original', in *The Routledge Companion to Adaptation*, ed. by Dennis Cutchins, Katja Krebs & Eckart Voigts (London: Routledge, 2020) <<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315690254>> pp. 28-39

Falconer, Rachel, *The Crossover Novel: Contemporary Children's Fiction and Its*

*Adult Readership* (New York: Routledge, 2008)

<<https://www.doi.org/10.4324/9780203892176>>

Fleishman, Mark, 'Physical images in South African theatre', *South African Theatre*

*Journal*, 11 (1997), 199-214

<<https://doi.org/10.1080/10137548.1997.9688204>>

Forster, E.M., *Aspects of the Novel* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1954)

Gascoigne, Bamber, *The Quest for the Golden Hare* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1983)

Greenaway, Judith, 'Theatre Review: *Fun Home*, Sydney Theatre Company',

*ArtsHub*, 3 May 2021, <<https://www.performing.artshub.com.au/news-article/reviews/performing-arts/judith-greenaway/theatre-review-fun-home-sydney-theatre-company-262481>> [accessed 5 May 2021]

Griggs, Yvonne, 'Reconfiguring the Nordic Noir brand: Nordic Noir TV crime

drama as remake', in *The Routledge Companion to Adaptation*, ed. by Dennis

Cutchins, Katja Krebs & Eckart Voigts (London: Routledge, 2020)

<<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315690254>> pp. 278-286

Groth, Gary, ed. *The Complete Wimmen's Comix: Volume 2* (Seattle: Fantagraphics,

2016)

Haddon, Mark, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (London:

Vintage, 2004)

— —, ‘*The Curious Incident*’s Origins’, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* Programme, Gielgud Theatre (London: Delfont Mackintosh, 2012), pp. 17-18

— —, ‘Mark Haddon on *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* – Guardian book club’, *The Guardian*, 13 April 2013, <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/apr/13/mark-haddon-curious-incident-book-club>> [accessed 22 November 2021]

Hansen, Claire, ‘Reaching for the sun: *Masquerade* at the Sydney Festival’, *The Conversation*, 13 January 2015, <<https://www.theconversation.com/reaching-for-the-sun-masquerade-at-the-sydney-festival-35022>> [accessed 6 September 2021]

Hetrick, Adam, ‘Why “Ring of Keys” Was the One Song *Fun Home*’s Creator Didn’t Want to Write’, *Playbill*, 25 January 2016, <<https://www.playbill.com/article/why-ring-of-keys-was-the-one-song-fun-homes-creator-didnt-want-to-write>> [accessed 17 June 2021]

Hunt, Peter, ‘Introduction: The World of Children’s Literature Studies’, in *Understanding Children’s Literature*, ed. by Peter Hunt (London; New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 1-14

Hutcheon, Linda, ‘From Page to Stage to Screen: The Age of Adaptation’, in *Great Minds at the University of Toronto: The University Professor Lecture Series 2002-2003*, ed. by Michael Goldberg (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), pp. 37-54

— —, ‘On the Art of Adaptation’, *Daedalus*, 133.2 (2004), 108-111

<<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20027920>> [accessed 4 July 2021]

— —, *A Theory of Adaptation* (London: Routledge, 2006)

Hutcheon, Linda, and Siobhan O’Flynn, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (Oxon: Routledge, 2013)

Jenkins, Henry, ‘Adaptation, Extension, Transmedia’, *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 45.2 (2017),

<[https://www.lfq.salisbury.edu/\\_issues/first/adaptation\\_extension\\_transmedia.html](https://www.lfq.salisbury.edu/_issues/first/adaptation_extension_transmedia.html)> [accessed 11 June 2021]

— —, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006)

— —, ‘The Revenge of the Origami Unicorn: Seven Principles of Transmedia Storytelling’, *Confessions of an Aca-Fan* (December 12, 2009)

<[http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2009/12/the\\_revenge\\_of\\_the\\_origami\\_uni.html](http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2009/12/the_revenge_of_the_origami_uni.html)> [accessed 17 April 2021]

Jensen, Klaus Bruhn, ‘Intermediality’, in *The International Encyclopedia of Communication Theory and Philosophy*, ed. by Klaus Bruhn Jensen & Robert T. Craig (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2016), pp. 1-12

<<https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118766804.wbiect170>>

Joe, Nathan, 'Review: *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (Auckland Theatre Company), *Theatre Scenes*, July 28 2016,

<<https://www.theatrescenes.co.nz/review-the-curious-incident-of-the-dog-in-the-night-time-auckland-theatre-company/>> [accessed 11 December 2021]

Johnson, Denise, *The Joy of Children's Literature*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2012)

Just, Daniel, 'The Modern Novel from a Sociological Perspective: Towards a Strategic Use of the Notion of Genres', *Journal of Narrative Theory*, 38.3 (2008), 378-397, <<https://doi.org/10.1353/jnt.0.0015>>

Keuris, Marisa, *The Play: a manual* (Pretoria: Van Schaik, 1996)

Khan, Sakeena, 'Roaring Reticence: Listening the Unsaid in the Plays of Samuel Beckett', *International Journal of English and Education*, 4.1 (2015), 412-420, <[https://ijee.org/yahoo\\_site\\_admin/assets/docs/LT\\_5.36200628.pdf](https://ijee.org/yahoo_site_admin/assets/docs/LT_5.36200628.pdf)> [accessed 22 January 2022]

Kimberley, Talis, *Talis Kimberley: By Request Live at Duckon Chicago* (Chicago: Duckon Filk Programming, 2011) [on CD].

Kislan, Richard, *The Musical: A Look at the American Musical Theater* (London; New York: Applause, 1995)

Krebs, Katja, 'Ghosts We Have Seen Before: Trends in Adaptation in Contemporary Performance', *Theatre Journal*, 66.4 (2014), 581-590  
<<https://doi.org/10.1353/tj.2014.0125>>

- Kron, Lisa, *2.5 Minute Ride and 101 Humiliating Stories* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2001)
- Kushner, Tony, 'Introduction', Howard Cruse, *Stuck Rubber Baby* (New York: Paradox Press, 1995), pp. i-iv
- Kushner, Tony and Maurice Sendak, *The Art of Maurice Sendak: 1980 to the Present* (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 2003)
- Lambidoni, Evangelia, 'Life Viewed through the Eyes of a Child with Autism', *The Journal of Education*, 188.1 (2007), 93-109  
<<https://www.jstor.org/stable/42744124>> [accessed 24 November 2021]
- Lane, David, *Contemporary British Drama* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010)
- Lanes, Selma, *The Art of Maurice Sendak* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1980)
- Latham, Alison, ed. *The Oxford Companion to Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002)
- Leitch, Thomas, 'Review Article: Adaptation Studies at a Crossroads', *Adaptation*, 1.1 (2008), 63-77 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/adaptation/apm005>>
- Lewis, David, *Reading Contemporary Picturebooks: Picturing text* (New York: Routledge, 2001)
- Lewis, Marjorie, 'Back to Basics: Re-evaluating Picture Books', *School Library Journal*, 22.7 (1976), 82-83

Loftis, Sonya Freeman, *Imagining Autism: Fiction and Stereotypes on the Spectrum* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015)

Long, Geoffrey, 'Transmedia Storytelling: Business, Aesthetics and Production at the Jim Henson Company' (Master's Thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2007), in *Dspace@MIT*  
<<https://dspace.mit.edu/handle/1721.1/39152>> [accessed 17 April 2021]

Longbottom, Sarah and Virginia Slaughter, 'Sources of children's knowledge about death and dying', *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London. Series B, Biological Sciences*, 373.1754 (2018), 1-7  
<<https://dx.doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2017.0267>>

Lunden, Jeff, 'The Unadaptable *Curious Incident* Gets a Stage Adaptation', *NPR*, October 7, 2014, <<https://www.npr.org/2014/10/07/354139148/the-unadaptable-curious-incident-gets-a-stage-adaptation>> [accessed 19 March 2021]

Mackenzie, Clayton, 'Adapting Novels For The Stage: New Clothes Or New Emperors?', *Studia Universitatis Petru Maior. Philologia*, 11 (2011), 154-160  
<<https://www.proquest.com/docview/1038159914/fulltextPDF/77044514C170484CPQ/1?accountid=17287>> [accessed 6 October 2021]

MacRae, Ian, 'Queering Epistemology and the Odyssey of Identity in Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*', in *Graphic Novels as Philosophy*, ed. by Jeff McLaughlin (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2017), pp. 130-149

Magee, Jeffrey, 'From Flatbush to *Fun Home*: The Broadway Musical's "Cozy Cottage" Trope', in *Rethinking American Music*, ed. by Tara Browner and Thomas L. Riis (Champaign, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2019), pp. 34-49

Maher, Alannah, 'Review: *Fun Home* wows on Sydney stage', *TimeOut*, 6 May 2021, <<https://www.timeout.com/sydney/theatre/fun-home>> [accessed 18 May 2021]

*The Man Behind the Masquerade*, dir. by Julian Carey (BBC Four, 2009) [on iPlayer]

Mansbridge, Joanna, 'Adapting Queerness, Queering Adaptation: *Fun Home* on Broadway', in *Adaptation, Awards Culture, and the Value of Prestige*, ed. by Colleen Kennedy-Karpat & Eric Sandberg (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 75-94 <[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-52854-0\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-52854-0_5)>

Marantz, Kenneth, 'Introduction', in *The Art of Children's Picture Books: A Selective Reference Guide*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., ed. by Sylvia S. Marantz & Kenneth A. Marantz (New York: Garland, 1995), pp. xi-xvii

— —, 'The picture book as art object: A call for balanced reviewing', *Wilson Library Bulletin*, 52 (1977), 148-151

Marmion, Patrick, 'The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time review',

*Daily Mail*, 10 August 2012,

<<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-2186265/The-Curious-Incident-Dog-Night-Time-theatre-review-Curious-tale-worth-telling>>

[accessed 13 December 2021]

'Masquerade', *Criminal*, 16 July 2021, podcast, Criminal Podcast,

<<https://www.thisiscriminal.com/episode-169-masquerade-7-16-21/>>

[accessed 4 October 2021]

McFarlane, Brian, 'It Wasn't Like That in the Book...', in *The Literature/Film*

*Reader: Issues of Adaptation*, ed. by James M. Welsh & Peter Lev

(Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2007)

Mulvany, Kate, *Masquerade* (Sydney: Currency Press, 2015)

— —, 'Masquerade: How Kate Mulvany unlocked the secrets of Kit Williams' classic tale', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 December 2014,

<<https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/theatre/masquerade-how-kate-mulvany-unlocked-the-secrets-of-kit-williams-classic-tale-20141219-12aj1k.html>>

[accessed 3 August 2021]

Murphy, *Page to Stage: The Craft of Adaptation* (Ann Arbor: University of

Michigan Press, 2013)

Musico, Jansen, 'Review: *Fun Home* is a joyful exploration of sexual identity', *CNN Philippines*, 14 March 2017,

<<https://www.cnnphilippines.com/life/culture/2017/03/14/fun-home-review.html>> [accessed 21 June 2021]

Naidoo, Kareesha and Hermann Wittenberg, 'Between text and stage: the theatrical adaptations of J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*', *South African Theatre Journal*, 30.1-3

(2017), 30-45 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/10137548.2017.1327257>>

Neutze, Ben, 'Sydney Festival: *Masquerade* review', *Daily Review*, 11 January 2015

<<https://www.dailyreview.com.au/sydney-festival-masquerade-review/>>  
[accessed 9 September 2021]

Newell, Kate, *Expanding Adaptation Networks: From Illustration to Novelization*

(London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017)

Nodelman, Perry, 'Illustration and Picture Books', in *International Companion*

*Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*, ed. by Peter Hunt (London; New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 113-124

Norris, Barney, 'Built on violence: adapting *The Remains of the Day* for stage', 14 March 2019, *The Guardian*,

<<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/mar/14/plays-the-thing-barney-norris-adapting-remains-of-the-day-kazuo-ishiguro>> [accessed 5 October 2021]

O'Thomas, Mark, 'Translation, Theatre Practice and the Jazz Metaphor', *Journal of Adaptation in Film and Performance*, 6.1 (2013), 55-64

<[https://doi.org/10.1386/jafp.6.1.55\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/jafp.6.1.55_1)>

Patterson, John, 'By the book', *The Guardian*, 15 March 2008,

<<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2008/mar/15/fiction>> [accessed 7 October 2021]

Paul, Pamela, 'Your Kids Aren't Too Old for Picture Books, and Neither Are You',

*The New York Times*, 20 February 2021

<<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/20/opinion/sunday/picture-books-reading.html>> [accessed 17 July 2021]

Pogrebin, Robin, 'Memoir to Musical: Five-Year Journey', *New York Times*,

November 20, 2013, <[https://www-proquest-](https://www-proquest-com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/blogs-podcasts-websites/memoir-musical-five-year-journey/docview/2214279838/se-2?accountid=17287)

[com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/blogs-podcasts-websites/memoir-musical-five-](https://www-proquest-com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/blogs-podcasts-websites/memoir-musical-five-year-journey/docview/2214279838/se-2?accountid=17287)

[year-journey/docview/2214279838/se-2?accountid=17287](https://www-proquest-com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/blogs-podcasts-websites/memoir-musical-five-year-journey/docview/2214279838/se-2?accountid=17287)> [accessed 3 June 2021]

Puncher, Martin, 'Drama and Performance: Toward a Theory of Adaptation',

*Common Knowledge*, 17.2 (2011), 292-305

<<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/431157>> [accessed 10 March 2021]

Reilly, Kara, ed. *Contemporary Approaches to Adaptation in Theatre* (London:

Palgrave Macmillan, 2018)

- Rerick, Michael, 'Queering the museum: challenging heteronormative space in Bechdel's *Fun Home*', *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*, 3.2 (2012), 223-230 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/21504857.2011.629665>>
- Robertson, Caroline E. and Simon Baron-Cohen, 'Sensory Perception in Autism', *Nature Reviews. Neuroscience*, 18.11 (2017), pp. 671-684
- Rudolph, Eric, '*Fun Home* on Broadway Audio: Intimacy in the Round', *Mix Online* (2015) <<https://www.mixonline.com/live-sound/fun-home-broadway-audio-425717>> [accessed 21 June 2021]
- Ruhl, Sarah, *100 Essays I Don't Have Time to Write* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2015)
- Ryan, Marie-Laure, 'Transmedia Storytelling as Narrative Practice', in *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies*, ed. by Thomas Leitch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 527-541  
<<https://dx.doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199331000.013.30>>
- Savran, David, 'Toward a Historiography of the Popular', *Theatre Survey*, 45.2 (2004), 211-217 <<https://doi.org/10.1017/S004055740400016X>>
- Saxby, Kerry, 'How Does a Revolve Work?', *Melbourne Theatre Company* (2021)  
<<https://www.mtc.com.au/discover-more/mtc-now/how-does-a-revolve-work/>> [accessed 9 September 2021]
- Scaggs, John, *Crime Fiction: The New Critical Idiom* (New York: Routledge, 2005)

- Schober, Regina, 'Adaptation as connection – Transmediality reconsidered', in *Adaptation Studies: New Challenges, New Directions*, ed. by Jorgen Bruhn, Anne Gjelsvik & Eirik Frisvold Hanssen (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 89-112
- Schulman, Michael, 'Angels in America Rises Again', *The New Yorker*, March 19 2018, <<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/03/26/angels-in-america-rises-again>> [accessed October 14 2021]
- Shakespeare, William, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. by Stanley Wells (London: Penguin, 2005)
- Simej-Barton, Paul, 'Review: Talented cast deliver humour and heartbreak', *The New Zealand Herald*, 25 July 2016, <[https://www.nzherald.co.nz/entertainment/review-talented-cast-deliver-humour-and-heartbreak/I6PKBT4HKTQYRCDBTCIEPNAMY/?c\\_id=1502967&objectid=11680571](https://www.nzherald.co.nz/entertainment/review-talented-cast-deliver-humour-and-heartbreak/I6PKBT4HKTQYRCDBTCIEPNAMY/?c_id=1502967&objectid=11680571)> [accessed 11 December 2021]
- Simmonds, Diana, 'Masquerade – Sydney Festival 2015', *StageNoise*, 10 January 2015, <<https://www.stagenoise.com/review/2015/masquerade-sydney-festival-2015>> [accessed 20 August 2021]
- Smart, John, 'Composer Jeanine Tesori on the 100 Musicals of *Fun Home*', *Backstage*, 3 December 2020, <<https://www.backstage.com/magazine/article/musicals-fun-home-10863>> [accessed 8 May 2021]

- Smythe, John, 'Highly Entertaining With Just Enough Character Complexity And Social Commentary Bite', *Theatreview*, 3 May 2015,  
<<https://www.theatreview.org.nz/reviews/review.php?id=8100>> [accessed 3 October 2021]
- Stephens, Simon, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015)
- Stephens, Simon and Duška Radosavljević, 'Theatre as an Intellectual Concertina: Simon Stephens in Conversation with Duška Radosavljević', *Theatre and Adaptation: Return, Rewrite, Repeat*, ed. by Margherita Laera (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2014), pp. 255-268  
<<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781472526533.ch-017>>
- Storey, Dee C., 'Reading Comprehension, Visual Literacy and Picture Book Illustrations', *Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts*, 25.1 (1984), 54-59  
<[https://www.scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading\\_horizons/vol25/iss1/10/](https://www.scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons/vol25/iss1/10/)>  
[accessed 14 June 2021]
- Tabachnick, Stephen E., 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Graphic Novel*, ed. by Stephen E. Tabachnick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 1-7
- Taylor, Millie, *Musical Theatre, Realism and Entertainment* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2012)
- Tesori, Jeanine and Lisa Kron, *Fun Home* (London: Samuel French, 2015)

— —, *Fun Home (A New Broadway Musical)*, Original Broadway Cast, cond. by Chris Fenwick (New York: PS Classics, 2015) [on Spotify]

Thompson, Laura, 'The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time review', *Daily Telegraph*, 4 August 2012, <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-reviews/9450156/The-Curious-Incident-of-the-Dog-in-the-Night-Time-adapted-by-Simon-Stephens-Cottesloe-Theatre-review.html>> [accessed 13 December 2021]

Thurman, Judith, 'Finish Line: Backstage at *Fun Home*', *The New Yorker*, 11 May 2015, <<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/05/11/finish-line-backstage-at-fun-home>> [accessed 8 May 2021]

Todorov, Tzvetan, *The Poetics of Prose*, trans. by Richard Howard (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977)

Tomlinson, Carl M. and Carol Lynch Brown, *Essentials of Children's Literature*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2002)

Tompkins, Joanne, 'Editorial Comment: Theatre and Adaptation', *Theatre Journal*, 66.4 (2014), ix-xi <<https://doi.org/10.1353/tj.2014.0133>>

Tongue, Cassie, 'Review: *Masquerade* – Sydney Festival', *AussieTheatre*, 12 January 2015, <<https://www.aussietheatre.com.au/reviews/review-masquerade-sydney-festival>> [accessed 20 August 2021]

Ue, Tom, 'Adapting *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*: A Conversation with Simon Stephens', *Journal of Adaptation in Film & Performance*, 7.1 (2014), 113-120 <[https://dx.doi.org/10.1386/jafp.7.113\\_7](https://dx.doi.org/10.1386/jafp.7.113_7)>

Urquhart, Conal and Rachel Williams, 'Apollo theatre collapse injures more than 80 people in London's West End', *The Guardian*, 19 December 2013,

<<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2013/dec/19/apollo-theatre-london-balcony>> [accessed 30 September 2021]

Van Beynen, Jack, '*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*: a unique mind on stage', *Stuff*, July 12 2016,

<<https://www.stuff.co.nz/entertainment/stage-and-theatre/81984487/the-curious-incident-of-the-dog-in-the-night-time-a-unique-mind-on-stage>> [accessed 11 December 2021]

Wagner, Geoffrey, *The Novel and the Cinema* (Rutherford, New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1975)

Ward, David, 'Conquering theatre in the round', *The Guardian*, 7 October 2008,

<<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2008/oct/07/theatre>> [accessed 21 June 2021]

Ware, Chris, 'American Vernacular: Chicago and the Birth of the Comic', *The New Yorker*, August 28 2021, <<https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/american-vernacular-chicago-and-the-birth-of-the-comic>> [accessed 29 August 2021]

Watts, Julie, *The Art of Graeme Base* (Camberwell: Viking, 2008)

Whitehead, Anne, *Medicine and Empathy in Contemporary British Fiction: A Critical Intervention in Medical Humanities* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017).

- Whitfield, Sarah K., 'Disrupting Heteronormative Temporality through Queer Dramaturgies: *Fun Home*, *Hadestown* and *A Strange Loop*', *Arts*, 9.2 (2020), 69-82, <<https://doi.org/10.3390/arts9020069>>
- Wilks, Mike, *The Annotated Ultimate Alphabet* (London: Pavilion Books, 1988)
- Williams, Kit, *The Bee on the Comb* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1984)
- —, *Engines of Ingenuity* (Corte Madeira, CA: Ginko Press, 2001)
- —, *Masquerade* (New York: Schocken Books, 1979)
- —, *Out of One Eye: The Art of Kit Williams* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1986)
- Wimmer, Carol, 'Masquerade', *Stage Whispers*, n.d.
- <<https://www.stagewhispers.com.au/reviews/masquerade>> [accessed 6 September 2021]
- Wolf, Matt, 'National Theatre Hits Its Mark', *The New York Times*, August 7 2012, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/08/arts/08iht-lon08.html>> [accessed 11 December 2021]
- Wolf, Stacy, 'In Defense of Pleasure: Musical Theatre History in the Liberal Arts [A Manifesto]', *Theatre Topics*, 17.1 (2007), 51-60
- <<https://doi.org/10.1353/tt.2007.0014>>
- Wolf, Werner, *The Musicalization of Fiction: A Study in the Theory and History of Intermediality* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999)

Wong, Curtis M., 'Fun Home Brings Lesbian Protagonist to Broadway For The First Time', *The Huffington Post*, 31 March 2015,

<[https://www.huffpost.com/entry/fun-home-broadway-\\_n\\_6955634](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/fun-home-broadway-_n_6955634)>

[accessed 3 June 2021]

Wright, Jude, 'Listening to the Monster: Eliding and restoring the creature's voice in adaptations of *Frankenstein*', *Journal of Adaptation in Film & Performance*,

8.3 (2015), 249-266 <[https://doi.org/10.1380/jafp.8.3.249\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1380/jafp.8.3.249_1)>

Zhou, Debbie, 'Fun Home review – Alison Bechdel memoir – musical adaptation burrows its way into your heart', *The Guardian*, 11 May 2021,

<<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2021/may/11/fun-home-review-alison-bechdel-memoir-musical-adaptation-burrows-its-way-into-your-heart>>

[accessed 15 May 2021]