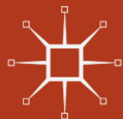
PALGRAVE STUDIES IN ADAPTATION AND VISUAL CULTURE

Adaptation, Awards Culture, and the Value of Prestige

Edited by
Colleen Kennedy-Karpat
and Eric Sandberg



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CHAPTER 1

Adaptation and Systems of Cultural Value

Colleen Kennedy-Karpat and Eric Sandberg

Howard Jacobson's dystopian novel *J* (2015) imagines a future Britain in which power is exerted not through the direct force of the police or army, but through a pervasive social system that controls what people read, watch, and listen to: in Althusser's terms, this is a society controlled not by a "Repressive State Apparatus" but by "Ideological State Apparatuses" (1971, 143). Undesirable cultural products are "not banned – nothing was banned exactly – simply not played. Encouraged to fall into desuetude, like the word desuetude" (11). The state also actively encourages acceptable forms of cultural activity through the awarding of prizes: "When all the gongs go to landscape, why would any aspiring artist waste his energies on the dull and relentless cruelties of the human face,"

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or indeed on any other unacceptable subject (33)? A Booker Prize-winning author himself, Jacobson shows an alert, self-reflective irony in his presentation of the influence that prizes have on cultural production and consumption, and raises some of the key issues at stake at the intersection of taste, cultural prestige, and the formal and informal systems that mediate between them. This volume sets out to examine some of the ways these factors interact in the context of adaptations, because adaptations, and the ways in which they are labelled and consumed, represent one of the most intensely contested regions in the realm of cultural prestige.

This has long been the case. Consider, for example, Charles Dickens' (1839) *Nicholas Nickleby*, which offers two strikingly different assessments of adaptation. A "literary gentleman" who has adapted "two hundred and forty-seven novels as fast as they had come out – some of them faster than they had come out" proffers this "definition of fame": "When I dramatise a book, sir,.... *that's* fame" (632). Nickleby, on the other hand, considers these adaptations to be little more than "impudent robberies" (633). He is willing to concede that even Shakespeare (or "Bill" in the words of the egregious adapter) relied on traditional material, but argues that there is a difference between turning "familiar things into constellations which should enlighten the world for ages" and the modern tendency to "cut, hack and carve" existing works into a new and unsuitable medium for profit (633). However, the issue at stake, Nickleby insists, is not primarily financial. Instead, it is the question of *prestige* that is central to his – and Dickens' – outrage: "If I were a writer of books, and you a thirsty dramatist, I would rather pay your tavern score for six months, large as it might be, than have a niche in the Temple of Fame with you for the humblest corner of my pedestal, through six hundred generations" (634).

Today, adaptations can lead to similar disputes over the rightful distribution of prestige. When Andrew Davies brings Tolstoy's *War and Peace* to television for the BBC (2016), do the cultural kudos rightfully belong to him, as Christopher Stevens implies by praising the decision to cut the "moronic ending" of the novel (*Daily Mail*, February 8, 2016), or to Tolstoy, as Clive James suggests by sending the viewer back to a novel which is "good enough to get involved with again, even if it's the last thing you do" (*Guardian*, February 13, 2016)? But before deciding to whom the prestige surrounding a work should be assigned – the original author, as Dickens indicates, or the "literary gentleman" who deftly repurposes the work for new times, places, and audiences – we need to ask what exactly is at stake here.

What is Prestige?

The concept of prestige might, at first, seem relatively straightforward: it denotes the admiration felt by a particular community for a particular person or thing, and is linked directly to the idea that its bearer possesses some sort of exceptional quality. Yet even a definition as simple as this reveals some of its complexities: prestige is, firstly, determined communally, existing only when a group of people agrees that it does. But this fundamental negotiability must be reconciled with the idea that prestige is a response to something inherent to the object around which it accrues. Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane* (1941) is a prestigious film because a community of viewers, critics, academics, film industry institutions, and other evaluators have agreed that it is, but this agreement is based on certain qualities attributed to the film itself: its innovative cinematography, for instance, or its complex narrative structure.

Alternatively, Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the symbolic economy proposes multiple forms of cultural capital, all of which describe how value might adhere to *Citizen Kane*. The film as reproducible object – whether in film stock, videotape, or digital file – is cultural capital "in the objectified state," where economic capital (the money needed to make, own, or see the film) meets what Bourdieu terms symbolic capital: the ability to take possession of a work through viewing, discussion, allusion, and other demonstrations of cultural mastery (1986, 246). An individual's ability to effectively *use* the film to demonstrate cultural competence in this way contributes to the "embodied state" of her cultural capital, the product of "time… invested" both personally and by social groups (244). Finally, the fact that Citizen Kane spent several decades at the top of *Sight & Sound*'s survey of "greatest films" and has been featured routinely in university film studies syllabi are part of the "institutionalized state" of its cultural capital (248). These manifestations can build on one another through the "circular relations of reciprocal recognition among peers," a process of self-affirming, mutual recognition of value among different cultural actors (1993, 116). In this kind of feedback loop, *Citizen Kane* is "great" because *Sight & Sound* says so, and *Sight & Sound* is "great" because it is able to recognize the greatness of *Citizen Kane*.

Seen in this light, the cultural value of an art object is a complex, largely constructed phenomenon that relies on various economic, social, and institutional forces that join together to "consecrate" selected works (Bourdieu 1993, 113). There is little room here for any sense of the object itself acting

as an authentic, rather than constructed, source of cultural prestige. Still, while Harold Bloom may represent a minority within academic criticism, he is neither alone nor insane in insisting that "aesthetic eminence" amounts to something more than "capitalist mystification" (1997, xvii). The relationship of prestige to the cultural object around which it circulates thus steers us straight into some of the thorniest patches of aesthetic and social theory. If aesthetic value inheres in the cultural object, prestige is "simply" an external recognition of this internal value. But if the quality from which prestige ostensibly arises is itself "radically contingent, being neither a fixed attribute, an inherent quality, or an objective property of things but, rather, an effect of multiple, continuously changing, and continuously interacting variables," then prestige is little more than a consensual validation of a communal hallucination (Smith 1991, 30).

Christopher Nolan's 2006 film adaptation of Christopher Priest's 1995 novel *The Prestige* explores this bifurcation at the heart of the concept of prestige. Stage magicians Robert Angier and Alfred Borden are locked in a bitter feud for public acclaim, but the fame they seek is based on a moment of illusion. As Priest writes, "the third stage" of a magic trick "is sometimes called the effect, or the prestige, and this is the product of magic. If a rabbit is pulled from a hat, the rabbit, which apparently did not exist before the trick was performed, can be said to be the prestige of that trick" (73). Understood in this way, prestige is the heart of a more systematic cultural trick designed to conceal an absence of reality. The concept of prestige thus carries within itself a recognition of its intangibility, its impermanence, its status as (at least potentially) nothing more than sleight of hand. Yet in Priest's novel and Nolan's film, prestige is also identified with a magical reorientation of reality that is acknowledged by other performers and audiences alike. Thus, however intangible prestige may be, it certainly *exists*, and it has real effects on the circulation of culture. James English's landmark study *The Economy of Prestige* (2005) – a work inspired by Bourdieu's examination of symbolic capital – describes one of these effects as "capital intraconversion," the process by which "capital" accumulated in one field of human activity – for example, talent in oil painting or exceptional deftness in Morris dancing – can be converted, more or less readily, into "capital" in another symbolic area such as politics or financial gain (2005, 10). This intraconversion can also occur between media through the processes of adaptation, a process that many chapters in this book explore.

The Centrality of Prestige

One of the inaugural works of the Western literary canon, Homer's *Iliad* (2015), places prestige at the centre of its value system. The story begins with a dispute between Agamemnon and Achilles over the possession of a "prize" (the captive Briseis), dedicates its penultimate book to the awarding of prizes for athletic achievement during Patroclus' funeral games, and ends with intense negotiations over the exchange of another "prize": Hector's corpse. Less tangible forms of prestige are also central to the worldview of its characters. The Lycian king Sarpedon argues that the inevitability of death means that the prestige earned in "battle where men win glory" is the ultimate good (XII.325). It also offers more tangible benefits: "seats of honor in Lycia, with cuts of meat and goblets filled/. . . . a great plot of land by the banks of Xanthos /a beautiful plot, with an orchard and wheat-bearing field" (XII.311–314). While this sort of warrior-ethos may seem far removed from the red carpets of the twenty-first century, it remains a powerful metaphor for the competitive nature of much, if not *all* cultural work – think of Bloom's agonistic theories of poetic misreading or "misprision" – and for the tangible rewards available to those who can secure their claim to cultural prestige (1997, 14). Just as Sarpedon and Glaukos enjoy not only the respect of their people, but also the material goods their society values most highly, so too do contemporary winners of cultural prestige enjoy both conceptual and physical rewards, ranging from the outright cash prizes of literary culture – the 8 million Norwegian Kronor of the Nobel, or the more modest 50,000 Pounds Sterling of the Man Booker – to the money earned through extra sales (of books, theatre tickets, BluRay discs, and so on) that the culture industry associates with prize winning.[1] Zlata Rodionova, for example, recently cited a study that suggests an Oscar win for Best Actor increases a male winner's salary by an average of 81 per cent for subsequent films, along with other studies that indicate even *nominations* for Best Picture have a substantial impact on a film's box office (*Independent*, February 26, 2016).

But prestige does not just bring plaudits and material rewards to cultural producers; it also plays a vital role in the consumption of cultural artefacts. Markers of prestige allow consumers to discriminate among an impossibly huge range of books, movies, television series, stage shows, etc. to focus on those that they believe will bring them the greatest personal enjoyment or social benefit. This selective function has always been an

important by-product of prestige, and it has become even more central as the field of cultural production has grown through the twentieth century and up to the present. English notes that since the 1970s, the "*economic* market for *symbolic* goods" has expanded dramatically (2005, 77, emphasis in the original). For one specific context, consider English's (conservative) estimate of half a million novels published in the past quarter-century (2016, 402). Reading a novel a day over this period would cover approximately 0.018 per cent of this total, a very rough figure that underscores the need for selective cultural consumption amidst "the long tail of today's fiction market: hundreds of thousands of effectively readerless novels" (English 2016, 402). Works in all media now face this challenge of overabundance and, confronted with an overwhelming array of cultural goods, audiences will often rely on prestige to decide what merits their attention.

(Per)forming Prestige

Public measures of prestige come not only from formal industry awards, but also from alternative or informal framings. Such critical assessments range from niche-focused fan discourse, such as the message boards Laura Mee examines in this volume, to the kind of unquantifiable, mainstream "buzz" that builds around a text like the television series *True Detective* (2015) or Lin-Manuel Miranda's stage musical *Hamilton* (2015). A popular groundswell of attention can make industry recognition, such as *Hamilton*'s pile of Tony awards, seem simultaneously inevitable and irrelevant: the sense that "everyone" is already engaging with a particular cultural work offers an endorsement that, for many, is equally if not more convincing than a collection of statuettes.

But even within formal awards culture, the granting of an accolade is only one part of a larger system of prestige. The very act of collecting awards – the publicity of the events, the rituals of surprise and gratitude enacted by their recipients, and even the public repudiation of an award – underscores the performativity involved in the circulation of prestige. The awards themselves function as spectacle, with televised coverage offering a potent combination of the commercial and celebratory functions of prize culture that English describes in his alignment of these "spectacular distractions" with the "increasing ephemerality of postmodern cultural life" (2005, 31; 77). Laurence Raw's chapter in this volume begins with an apt illustration: the opening scene of *All About Eve* (1950), during which the titular ingénue receives an acting award for work that, as

Raw argues, raises questions about the role of awards in cultural production. Performance itself relies on a kind of adaptation, and *All About Eve* examines both the performativity of awards culture and how prestige is assessed in performance itself. However, as Anna Blackwell's chapter here explains, specific kinds of performance also contextualize prestige in particular ways. Describing an author-driven variant of what Murray Pomerance has called the actor-character bond (2016), Blackwell shows how British Shakespearean actors first build a reputation for their interpretations of the Bard on stage and screen, then carry the prestige associated with this theatrical canon into other, decidedly non-Shakespearean contexts across a variety of media platforms.

Industrial practices can also connote prestige or a lack thereof. New digital media have extended the prestige continuum by democratizing publication and distribution practices. It takes minimal technical competence to self-publish an ebook or upload a movie to a video hosting site, but the prestige value of such publications is precarious, to say the least. For mainstream work, industry practices remain relevant. For instance, staggered, multi-platform releases can cultivate a sense of exclusivity that signals prestigious aspirations. A new novel appears in a pricey, first-edition hardcover, followed by a cheaper paperback edition; skipping the hardcover signals that a book has not been earmarked for prestige. A film opens in theatres before it is made (legally) available for home viewing; a direct-to-video release mirrors the fortunes of the direct-to-paperback book. The question of *where* a film débuts is also critical: a film that opens the Cannes film festival – as opposed to less celebrated festivals, or at the multiplex – is already understood to have achieved something. *How* a film is screened (e.g. 35 mm versus digital projection) also signifies prestige, as underscored by the digital 3D of James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009) or Quentin Tarantino's insistence on distributing 70 mm prints of *The Hateful 8* (2015). In cases like these, cinephiles who fail to show up for the theatrical run are excluded from certain discourses of quality and technical merit. On the reception end, too, as Mee's chapter argues, a viewer can also gain or lose prestige within a community based on how or when they see a film.

Internal aspects of a text can also signal prestige. In modern and contemporary fiction, for example, certain narrative strategies are associated with reading practices that require considerable cultural capital to approach with confidence. Fragmented narratives, disjunctions between *fabula* and *syuzhet*, or the integration of non-"novelistic" forms of text (such as essayistic digressions) can all send prestige signals to readers. Zadie Smith's

novel *NW* (2012), for example, is clearly "marked" as prestige literature by its use of text message threads, online navigation directions, concrete poetry, and differing font sizes, to name just a few of its textual strategies. The BBC2 adaptation of *NW* made a similar, if more restrained use of prestige effects. Jasper Rees writes in *The Telegraph* that "fidelity to the novel meant that there was no regular A to B narrative, with a visible through-line and a clear destination," but in this case, a clearly legible claim to aesthetic prestige may have played a more important role than a desire for an unobtainable "fidelity" (November 14, 2016). Similarly, films employ a number of textual signposts that point to aspirations of quality. As Eric Sandberg discusses in Chapter 4, the use of natural lighting is one such indicator, but there are many others, from the strategic use of static shots and black-and-white film stock in Paweł Pawlikowski's *Ida* (2013), to star casting, as evidenced in the stage-to-screen adaptation of *Fences* (2016). In this film, which follows a successful stage revival of August Wilson's Pulitzer Prize-winning play, Denzel Washington (who also directed the film) and his co-star Viola Davis reprise their roles in what seems an obvious gambit for awards-to-awards intraconversion; Catherine Shoard's review trumpets the headline: "Denzel Washington and Viola Davis set to convert Tonys to Oscars" (*Guardian*, November 22, 2016), a prediction that only Davis fulfilled with her Best Supporting Actress win. Music can also lend prestige to a film, as Michael Saffle argues in this volume by studying how the musical selections for adaptations of *The Great Gatsby* both reflect the evolving prestige of jazz, which plays a significant role in F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel, and serve as magnets for recognition in their own right. Separating a multimodal text like film into its component parts – cinematography, performance, music, writing, editing, and so on – multiplies the possibilities to accumulate prestige, though it should be noted that these contributions to the larger whole are themselves subject to hierarchies of value.

In all of its forms and framings, prestige has a determinative effect over which cultural artefacts are successfully circulated and which are doomed to languish in the back rooms of cultural commerce. This upward trajectory must be definitively established not only for an art object to achieve immediate success, but also to escape its contemporaneousness. There is a tension here between timelessness and what Dorothy L. Sayers mocks as "The Book of the Moment" syndrome in her 1935 novel *Gaudy Night*, in which she satirizes the tendency to valorise cultural objects specifically because of their "nowness" (242). Indeed, by its very nature the annual awards cycle threatens to undermine any inferred staying power by treating every year's selection pool as equal, and every winner as comparably

worthy of the honour. But disruptions in the cycle can and do occur. In 2012, the Pulitzer Prize Board refused to award a fiction prize. Or, to take a hypothetical case, an industrial conflict like the Writers' Guild of America strikes in 2007–08 might disrupt production enough to reduce the number of contenders for that year's awards. Assuming the awards are not cancelled, would (and should) these winners be taken as "true" winners? Or are they doomed to be diminished by the proverbial asterisk in the record book, seen as less than real, like athletes at the 1984 Olympics, for not having defeated a full, fair field? If the mechanisms for recognizing prestige are altered or halted – e.g. the partial suspension of the Venice Biennale during World War II – is the nature of that prestige similarly changed?

While there is no one "right" way to measure prestige, its conferral generally relies on a balance of timelessness and timeliness, suggesting the potential for a particular work to evade time's relentless effacement and maintain its value across generations. Once that value reaches the status of a cultural investment, the canon steps in to fulfil a function similar to the time-limited awards cycle, but with the added implication of greater endurance.

From Awards Bait to Canon Fodder

By performing a selective function similar to annual awards, but on a much larger scale, canon building purports to determine which works merit continued attention and circulation. The canon-building impulse long predates the late twentieth-century burgeoning of prize culture (English 2005, 323–328). As Amiel Vardi (2003) has argued, classical Roman literary culture was deeply involved in canon-formation through the "enumeration of the best representative writers within a specific genre" (138). A twentieth-century example of a similar effort is the 51-volume set of Harvard Classics published in 1909 – known as Dr Eliot's Five-Foot Shelf – which attempted to match the prestige of the sponsoring institution and of the collected works with the perceived need for "common" readers to obtain pre-selected texts covering fields ranging from science to literature (Chapman 1909). The success of the sets, with more than 350,000 sold over two decades, indicates the appeal of such an attempt to stabilize hierarchies of value and vouch for continued relevance (Kirsch 2001). More recently, the Criterion collection of DVD and BluRay discs explains on its website that it selects "important classic and contemporary films" meant to guide discerning cinephiles to and through "the greatest films from around the world." Admission to repositories like these confers on individual works a status

not dissimilar to that enjoyed by award winners, though infused with the canon's implicit promise to transcend the whims of awards culture.

While awards might mark a *perception of potential* for a work to go the distance, this perception may turn out to be fleeting; in such cases, the canon can serve as a kind of cultural corrective. A film might be hailed as an "instant classic," winning armloads of prizes in its year of release, then slink off into obscurity, its seemingly preordained slot in the canon filled, perhaps, by one of the also-rans that failed to claim any little gold men. For instance, in a much-ballyhooed upset, *Sight & Sound*'s influential, decennial survey recently declared the best film of all time to be Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1959) over *Citizen Kane* (1941), which had held the top spot for 50 years. However, neither film won Best Director or Best Picture prizes; indeed, *Vertigo* won no Oscars at all, while out of its nine nominations, *Kane* won only Best Original Screenplay. Meanwhile, none of the films that *did* win these coveted prizes in 1941 and 1959 appears in the same survey's top 100. Similarly, literary prizes – even those with considerable reach and influence – often recognize writers and works that quickly disappear from public memory. The list of early twentieth-century Nobel laureates in literature is a who's who of "who *is* that?" Beyond a handful of enthusiasts, few would remember, much less *read* Frédéric Mistral (1904), Verner Von Heidenstam (1916), or Jacinto Benavente (1922). Even more recent winners like Camilo José Cela (1989) can quickly fall into oblivion – at least outside of their home countries, where memories of international prestige can help maintain a national or regional reputation. Indeed, as Priyanjali Sen's essay in this volume illustrates, the continued and near-inescapable influence of many Nobel laureates in national or regional cultures (versus their relative obscurity elsewhere) underscores the difficulty, if not the outright impossibility of creating a durable canon with a global scope; however, Sen's study also underscores how adaptation can play a crucial role in ensuring canonical status. Prizewinning and canonical authors alike maintain high visibility over time in no small part because their work finds new audiences through adaptation.

While international consciousness is dominated by a handful of major awards – a result of what English calls the "single winner axiom that underpins the entire prize economy" – there are also prizes that focus on almost every imaginable community, encouraging each of them to demonstrate "pride, solidarity, and celebration" through recognition of their cultural output (2005, 199; 25). But the twin processes of community demarcation and canon building can obscure or omit vast swaths of the collective output

that the canon claims to represent. Canonization favours certain kinds of work, such as drama over comedy, and replicates social prejudice that privileges certain people at the helm of creative projects (generally, white men over everyone else). David Savran, drawing on Bourdieu, argues that "canons of taste are structured by a symbolic violence that rationalizes and perpetuates social inequalities," and awards culture also enables that rationalization (2009, 225). When these awards inevitably show their blind spots, they are, with increasing frequency and volume, publicly called out for them. On the other hand, some prizes, like the NAACP Image Award, actively work to correct the inherent biases of awards culture by embracing the unavoidable connection between aesthetic values and cultural identity (English 2005, 59). In the same vein, alternative canons push against a conception of the canon as singular and intractable. For instance, *Slate*'s Black Film Canon, compiled by Aisha Harris and Dan Kois (May 30, 2016) and *Sight & Sound*'s October 2015 issue dedicated to women in film both frame themselves as correctives to canon-building exercises, including *Sight & Sound*'s own survey, that routinely minimize contributions from minorities and women. These counter-canons thus invite a renegotiation of how prestige should be earned and recognized while underscoring its inherent contingency, particularly as regards the composition of the group that has been tasked, or has tasked itself, with assigning or withholding it.

Ultimately, since all canons are fundamentally and perpetually renegotiable, canonical status is neither permanent nor secure. In this, canonization resembles the formation of a star: what begins as little more than inert matter ignites once it achieves a certain density and mass, and becomes able to radiate energy, just as a canonized work of art is able to "radiate" prestige. But this energy is finite, and like a star, a canonical work can burn out, losing its ability to confer prestige and thus sinking back into cultural oblivion. This analogy also highlights another key aspect of a canonical work: it can not only be the *object* of prestige, but also its *subject*, generating cultural value potent enough to be conferred on other works that claim affiliation (or allegiance) to it. And this is one of the places where adaptation intersects most powerfully with prestige.

Adaptation and the Canon

Adaptation is one way to signal the continued relevance of canonical works, or indeed to revive a work at risk of losing its canonical status. Whether they aim for strict fidelity or venture into free adaptation, the

number, frequency, and variety of adaptations of a "classic" text underscore its canonical status at least as compellingly as its sustained presence in its original form. Consider the way the continuous adaptation of a play like *Romeo and Juliet* – which Douglas Brode claims has been brought to film more times than any other play ever written – has maintained and extended its cultural reach, taking it from a sixteenth-century (already adaptive) text to, to cite a single example, a 2005 advertising campaign for international retail giant H&M built around a short film adaptation of the play, *"Romeo and Juliet" by David Lachapelle* (2000, 42; Burnett and Wray 2006, 2). The current and the canonical also intersect in the field of cultural awards, since even a text as established, yet as seemingly distant, as the *Iliad* might earn nominations and wins in the here-and-now. All it takes is a contemporary intervention to make a canonized classic seem fresh and ripe for new audiences: a film adaptation like *Troy* (2004), nominated for an Oscar and several other awards; a translation like Seamus Heaney's *Beowulf*, winner of the Whitbread (now Costa) book of the year award in 1999; or an adaptive reboot like *Sherlock* (2010–present), which won a BAFTA in 2011 for Best Drama Series and whose titular role has catapulted Benedict Cumberbatch to international fame. By reintroducing canonized works into contemporary culture, adaptation is a powerful mediator between the canon and the zeitgeist.

Still, as discussed above, the relationship between award wins and canonization is not straightforward; canonicity cannot be predetermined according to the number or relative prestige of awards won. Moreover, a significant portion of works considered "canonical" in media whose history reaches back centuries or more (e.g. literature and theatre) effectively predate the recent, rapid proliferation of awards culture. Shakespeare's plays won no awards when they were first performed, for there were no awards for them to win. Clearly this does not affect his canonical status. But on the other hand, when contemporary awards hail the achievements of new productions and adaptations of Shakespeare – including Shakespearean performers, as Blackwell emphasizes in her chapter – or the film adaptations of Jane Austen that Anne-Marie Scholz discusses in Chapter 8, or even an Internet spoof of Hitchcock, this renewed attention can change the way we read (or rank) his plays, her novels, and/or his films.[2] Adaptation is a forward-looking process that sets old works in new frames, reinterpreting them not just in terms of new(er) media but "through the values of the present" (Stam 2000, 57). But adaptation also affects these older works. As T. S. Eliot (1920) argued in "Tradition

and the Individual Talent," the production of a new piece of art affects the "existing order": its creation alters "the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole," and in this regard, adaptations often serve as especially self-conscious interventions (44–45).

Adapted works that proliferate across platforms and amass public recognition in a relatively short time can leverage this visibility (or ubiquity) to make a case for inclusion in the canon. The very fact of having been adapted sends a powerful signal to audiences and cultural arbiters about the value of a work, and the impetus for adaptation frequently arises from the conferral of prestige institutionalized by prize culture. Simone Murray has calculated that winning a Booker increases a novel's chances of being adapted for the screen from an industry-wide 0.1 per cent to somewhere above 20 per cent, and the Man Booker website proudly highlights the fact that many of its prize-winning books "have been adapted into acclaimed films and TV series with stellar casts" (2012, 110). The adaptation of such work can in turn launch a new cycle of prizes, a cascade effect that suggests or solidifies the emerging canonical status of the source text. This is very much the dynamic described by Eric Sandberg in this volume on the multiple prize-winning adaptations of Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall*, and this cross-media recognition may have an even greater impact on marginalized forms such as comics or graphic novels. Joanna Mansbridge's chapter on the adaptation of *Fun Home* – which began as a widely acclaimed graphic memoir before winning further accolades as a Broadway musical – suggests that MacArthur winner Alison Bechdel's original work has already achieved canonical status, and that the adapted musical stands an excellent chance to be recognized for years to come as a landmark achievement in its own right.

Another way of thinking about the relationship between adaptation and canonical prestige is to consider the visual turn – that is, the recent cultural and institutional tendency to place aspects of visual culture at the centre of experience. Lisa Cartwright and Marita Sturken observed at the turn of the millennium that "our culture is an increasingly visual one," and this seems even clearer today (2001, 1). In the *New York Review of Books*, for example, Jacob Weisburg notes that video is the "dominant consumer and commercial activity on the Web," and predicts that popular social media platforms like Facebook will soon shed all references to written articles, relying instead on visual content alone (October 27, 2016). This ongoing cultural transformation has had a pronounced impact on various ecosystems of prestige, both in terms of entrenched media hierarchies that structure the broad relationships between text, stage, and screen(s), and in

terms of the cultural positioning of individual works in relation to others. To take a single example, print works such as novels or short stories no longer (if indeed they ever did) exist in a single-medium prestige economy; instead, they now operate across multiple intersecting and, indeed, competing cultural economies. Much of the controversy surrounding Bob Dylan's 2016 Nobel Prize may stem from discomfort with the institutional acknowledgement of this multimedia reality in which the conceptual, institutional, and commercial lines separating pop music from poetry, the movie theatre from the library, and the stage from the television screen are being steadily effaced.[3] In a climate such as this, adaptation claims an important role as a process that links the overarching modes of the textual and the visual and (at least potentially) facilitates the transfer of prestige across media borders.

However, this does not imply a simple, unidirectional flow of prestige and value from non-visual to visual media. On the contrary, as we have seen, adaptation frequently reinforces and extends the prestige of canonical works in print culture by bringing them back into wider public circulation. For instance, Alison Flood reported that the BBC adaptation of *War and Peace* propelled Tolstoy's classic, but seldom read, novel into *The Bookseller*'s top 50 sales list (*Guardian,* February 17, 2016). Or consider the "ambiguous anachronism both innovative and monstrous" of the novelization, an adaptive form defined as "culturally less legitimate" despite its allegiance to print culture (Baetens 2005, 44; 46). Similarly, in this volume Thomas Leitch discusses the relationship between Pulitzer prize-winning novels and plays and their cinematic and televisual adaptations, showing how prestige moves not only across the text–visual divide, but from one visual paradigm to another. Leitch has already argued that adaptation studies can act as "a sorely needed bridge between" literacy and literature, between reading and writing, and between active and passive forms of engagement with our cultural tradition (2007, 18). Adaptation also has the ability to play to the conventions and strengths of different forms of media, but adding the component of prestige raises an important question: at what point(s) in the adaptive process does prestige originate?

Authorship, Fidelity, and Prestige

This is the question debated in *Nicholas Nickleby*, and it has important implications for discussions of fidelity, that bugbear of academic adaptation studies. As Thomas Leitch has pointed out, historically "studies of adaptation

tend to privilege literature over film" and have thus insisted on fidelity to (literary) source texts as a primary criterion for evaluation (2007, 3). A number of explanations have been proposed to account for the stubborn persistence of this kind of fidelity discourse, and while Murray has identified a recent "sea-change" in academic adaptation studies that has reframed adaptation as a form of "endless intertextual citation," in critical and popular cultures the emphasis on fidelity remains strong, as indicated by the regular appearance of terms like "'infidelity,' 'betrayal,' 'deformation,' 'violation,' 'bastardization,' 'vulgarization' and 'desecration'" (2012, 2–3; Stam 2005, 3).[4] But these alleged 'violations' often find a large audience – indeed in many cases larger, and more profitable, than those of the "original" works. The tension surrounding adaptations is not, however, financial, as they were (at least partially) in the case of *Nicholas Nickleby*, for as Murray points out, monetary rewards for adaptation in today's cultural economy are often synergistic rather than competitive (26). Rather than money, prestige is what is primarily at stake when a work is adapted, and fidelity is one of the ways adaptations can both recognize and exploit the prestige of other works.

Adapting the canon seems to carry with it a particular burden of fidelity, inasmuch as the new text aims to be *recognized* as an adaptation and treated as such by surrounding discourses. Whether viewers know the source text or not, the conventions involved in signalling literary adaptation are visible and predictable enough that Leitch has proposed treating this adaptive mode as its own genre of film and television (2008). One hallmark, according to Leitch, is the emphasis placed on the source text in the titles of these adaptations, e.g. Baz Luhrmann's 1996 film *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet*, a move that unequivocally foregrounds the source at the expense of the adapter, even in cases where the latter has already established his or her own cultural standing as an auteur (2008, 113). In some cases, like the Bengali literature-to-film adaptations that Priyanjali Sen describes in Chapter 7, adapters find that the prestige of a source text can boost the perceived value of their own work. But other literary adaptations resist this deferential impulse, subsuming even canonical source texts under the work of the adapter. In his chapter on *Oliver Twist*, Jeffrey E. Jackson discusses how David Lean and Roman Polanski fit their respective adaptations into their *oeuvres* not by obscuring their source, but rather by drawing on Dickens' work to underscore specific themes, including a particular relationship to the very concept of authorship.