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The Scandal of Adaptation

Edited by
Thomas Leitch

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Palgrave Studies in Adaptation and Visual Culture

This series addresses how adaptation functions as a principal mode of text production in visual culture. What makes the series distinctive is its focus on visual culture as both targets and sources for adaptations, and a vision to include media forms beyond film and television such as videogames, mobile applications, interactive fiction and film, print and nonprint media, and the avant-garde. As such, the series will contribute to an expansive understanding of adaptation as a central, but only one, form of a larger phenomenon within visual culture. Adaptations are texts that are not singular but complexly multiple, connecting them to other pervasive plural forms: sequels, series, genres, trilogies, authorial oeuvres, appropriations, remakes, reboots, cycles and franchises. This series especially welcomes studies that, in some form, treat the connection between adaptation and these other forms of multiplicity. We also welcome proposals that focus on aspects of theory that are relevant to the importance of adaptation as connected to various forms of visual culture.

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ISSN 2634-629X ISSN 2634-6303 (electronic)
Palgrave Studies in Adaptation and Visual Culture
ISBN 978-3-031-14152-2 ISBN 978-3-031-14153-9 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-14153-9

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG.
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

Acknowledgments

Our heartfelt thanks are due to Julie Grossman and Barton Palmer, whose vigorous support of this project from its beginnings was indispensable in bringing it to birth, and to Lina Aboujieb, Lakshmi Radhakrishnan, Petra Treiber, and the entire production staff at Palgrave Macmillan, who did everything humanly possible to keep it on track. We are also grateful to Lawrence Venuti, whose example in writing *The Scandals of Translation* has been inspiring. Our greatest debt is to the South Atlantic Modern Language Association, who have extended their hospitality to the adaptation studies community for over ten years, and whose topic for their 2020 conference, "Scandal!", was an open invitation to produce this collection.

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Introduction

Thomas Leitch

This collection of fourteen new chapters on adaptation is a valentine—or, more precisely, three valentines. The first is to "Scandal!"—the thematic rubric of the 2020 convention of the South Atlantic Modern Language Association (SAMLA), a perfect subject for adaptation scholars. The second is to SAMLA, which for the past ten years has hosted over fifty sessions on adaptation studies, most of them under the nominal aegis of the Association of Adaptation Studies. In 2011 R. Barton Palmer, who had long been active in SAMLA's governance, approached me with the idea of "colonizing" the conference by proposing a series of adaptation panels that would offer participants the experience of a conference within the conference. The SAMLA organizers were exceptionally hospitable to the project, and Barton and I took turns for several years soliciting proposals and organizing them into panels and roundtables, passing this job on to Dennis Perry and then Kate Newell, who organized the 2020 sessions, as all of us rejoiced in the growing sense of community among the adaptation scholars who returned to the conference year after year. So this volume is intended specifically as a belated celebration of ten years of adaptation events at SAMLA.

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T. Leitch (ed.), *The Scandal of Adaptation*, Palgrave Studies in Adaptation and Visual Culture,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-14153-9_1

The project's third valentine is addressed to Lawrence Venuti's 1998 monograph *The Scandals of Translation*, a groundbreaking intervention into translation studies—though not into adaptation studies, which by and large has ignored its sister field as it has pursued a parallel path. With a few welcome exceptions like the essays Laurence Raw collected in *Translation, Adaptation and Transformation* (2012) and Venuti's own 2007 essay "Adaptation, Translation, Critique," which Venuti chose not to reprint in his 2013 collection *Translation Changes Everything*, there have been few truly productive conversations between translation scholars and adaptation scholars. Instead of seeking to remedy this unfortunate lack, this volume draws inspiration from Venuti's work, especially from the aptly titled *The Scandals of Translation*, whose opening paragraph defines its subject in gratifyingly bracing terms:

> The scandals of translation are cultural, economic, and political. They are revealed when one asks why translation today remains in the margins of research, commentary, and debate, especially (though not exclusively) in English. Any description of these margins risks seeming a mere litany of abuse, the premise of an incredible victimology of translation and the victims it leaves in its wake. Translation is stigmatized as a form of writing, discouraged by copyright law, depreciated by the academy, exploited by publishers and corporations, governments and religious organizations. Translation is treated so disadvantageously, I want to suggest, partly because it occasions revelations that question the authority of dominant cultural values and institutions. And like every challenge to established reputations, it provokes their efforts at damage control, their various policing functions, all designed to shore up the questioned values and institutions by mystifying their uses of translation. (Venuti, *Scandals* 1)

Substituting *adaptation* for every instance of *translation* in this paragraph would preserve its essential truth and indicate just how scandalous adaptation is, how closely the scandals it poses academic fields and entertainment and communication establishments resemble the scandals of translation, and how these institutions have protected themselves against these scandals by policing, disavowing, and marginalizing it.

The parallel between the scandals of adaptation and those of translation is not perfect. What Venuti calls "perhaps the greatest scandal of translation"—"asymmetries, inequities, relations of domination and dependence [that] exist in every act of translating, of putting the translated in the service of the translating culture" (Venuti, *Scandals* 4)—is not

equally true of adaptation because the borders it most often crosses, medial rather than linguistic, do not question national and cultural identities as centrally or persistently as the border-crossings of translation. Even so, each of the eight "categories and practices" (Venuti, *Scandals* 1) Venuti goes on to examine in detail in *The Scandals of Translation*—heterogeneity, authorship, copyright, the formation of cultural identities, the pedagogy of literature, philosophy, the bestseller, globalization—is challenged by adaptation as well; some of them—the bestseller, authorship, and especially copyright, which may without exaggeration have been instituted on a global scale as a specific response to the scandal of unauthorized adaptations—are perhaps even more urgently challenged by adaptation than translation. For its part, adaptation studies has focused recently on interrogating widely shared assumptions about several related categories—media, aesthetics, and the text—whose monolithic status is called into question by adaptation's very existence.

As Venuti acutely notes, "The only authority that translation can expect depends on its remaining derivative, distinguishable from the original compositions that it tries to communicate, and collective, remaining open to the other agents who influence it, especially domestic readerships. Hence, the only prestige that a translator can gain comes from practicing translation, not as a form of personal expression, but as a collaboration between divergent groups, motivated by an acknowledgement of the linguistic and cultural differences that translation necessarily rewrites and reorders" (Venuti, *Scandals* 4). Adaptation studies has clearly been more interested, and more successful, in following the first of these directives (accepting its subject's derivative status) than the second (acknowledging its status as a collective activity open to a wide range of other gatekeepers, stakeholders, and agents). My own research on the relative neglect of the collaborative model of adaptation illustrated by the films of John Huston, which has been far less influential than the auteurist models associated with Alfred Hitchcock and Andrew Davies, suggests that adaptation continues to be theorized as a process of appropriation, to use Julie Sanders's term, rather than collaboration.

Another crucial difference between adaptation studies and translation studies is thrown into sharp relief by Venuti's emphasis on the prestige available to translators who *practice* translation as a collaboration. For better or worse, very few adaptation scholars, unlike virtually all translation scholars, have any practical experience as adapters themselves. So the goal Venuti announces in introducing the essays reprinted in *Translation*

Changes Everything (2013)—"to worry the questionable distinction between translation theory and practice, whether that practice is research or translating" (Venuti, *Translation* 8)—reveals a distinction between theory and practice even more firmly entrenched in adaptation studies.

Even so, virtually every claim Venuti makes in the closing paragraph of his Introduction to *Translation Changes Everything* could be equally urged on behalf of adaptation:

> [T]ranslation [or adaptation] carries the potential to bring about multiple transformations. Translation [adaptation] changes the form, meaning, and effect of the source text, even when the translator maintains a semantic correspondence that creates a reliable basis for summaries and commentaries. Translation [adaptation] changes the cultural situation where the source text originated through an investment of prestige or a creation of stereotypes. Translation [adaptation] changes the receiving cultural situation by bringing into existence something new and different, a text that is neither the source text nor an original composition in the translating language [or adapting medium], and in the process it changes the values, beliefs, and representations that are housed in institutions. Translation [adaptation] deals in contingencies open to variation. To cling to an instrumental model of translation [translation], to insist on the existence of a source invariant, to suppress the translator's [adapter's] interpretation, and to neglect the cultural situation to which it responds must ultimately rest, then, on a fear of change. (Venuti, *Translation* 10)

The last two sentences in this passage suggest that focusing on the scandals of translation, or of adaptation, raises logically unavoidable (though largely avoided) and uncomfortable questions about current events and the public humanities. Adaptation studies has been marginalized by literary studies, which treats adaptations as mere by-products of the creative process; by cinema studies, which is so intent on establishing its independence from literary studies that it resolutely turns its back on the adaptations that link the fields; by intermedial studies, which confines adaptation to a single room in its capacious mansion of medial and intermedial practices; and even by translation studies, which follows Venuti's "choice of translation theory as a source of concepts for adaptation studies" and criticism that adaptation studies often "betrays an ignorance of translation studies over the past three decades" without acknowledging the possibility that translation scholars may prefer to contest outdated versions of adaptation studies for reasons of their own (Venuti, "Adaptation" 28, 29). But

this very marginalization gives adaptation studies, like translation studies, the ability to speak truth to power.

Although adaptation scholars have been slow to acknowledge the scandalous nature of adaptation and turn it to account, they have long recognized the scandalous power of individual adaptations that, as Dudley Andrew reminded his audience during a recent conference presentation, can make taboo subjects reserved to elite literary audiences available to everyone. The obvious case is Stanley Kubrick's 1962 film adaptation of Vladimir Nabokov's 1955 novel *Lolita*, which was marketed with the tagline—"How did they ever make a movie of *Lolita?*"—that was designed precisely to emphasize the film's power to intensify the scandals posed by the novel by indicating that its presumed visual explicitness would make it even more scandalous. More recently, the field's continued emphasis on novel-to-film adaptations has provided still another scandal to practitioners and theorists who rightly claim the neglect of a wide range of adaptations from operas to podcasts whose study would greatly enrich the field.

The leading question the contributions to this volume seek to address is the relation between scandalous individual adaptations and the scandal of adaptation as such. What Simone Murray has called the adaptation industry, which is closely intertwined with the publishing and filmmaking industries (and with other industries Murray does not consider), accepts, encourages, and depends on the production of many individual adaptations. Any number of adaptations are accepted as a necessary part of Murray's adaptation industry: adaptations of contemporary bestsellers seeking to reach a larger audience, adaptations of forgotten or neglected classics yearning to be rediscovered, adaptations of established classics like *Hamlet* and *Little Women* that are proven properties because they have already been repeatedly adapted. So a large number of stakeholders inside and outside the adaptation industry are not scandalized by adaptations unless their subject or approach offers scandal. These stakeholders routinely set the virtue of adaptability, the ability to generate new adaptations, against the virtue of integrity, the ability to remain true to oneself. This last phrase suggests that in moral philosophy, integrity is typically prized above adaptability, as in Plato, Aristotle, and more recent champions of the Western canon and its works like E.D. Hirsch and Harold Bloom. Adaptability, by contrast, is prized above integrity in the world of fashion, which is sustained by implanting the desire for more or less gratuitous wardrobe purchases unmotivated by any practical necessity. Bodybuilders and weight-loss coaches urge their followers to change themselves until

they reach their ideal corporal specifications, then urge them to take continued action to maintain their target weight and muscular ability on the assumption that maintenance requires ceaseless activity. More to the point, adaptability is preached by Hollywood agents and dealmakers who live off new movies and by writing teachers working to help their students adapt models like the five-paragraph essay to their own expressive or argumentative uses. One of the foundational debates in contemporary adaptation studies is between champions of integrity, who frown on adaptations generally and prefer them faithful, and champions of adaptability, who want to do whatever they can to encourage a wider array of adaptations.

The different positions in this debate can readily be traced to different stakeholders in the adaptation community. Authors usually appreciate the money, if not the experience, when their novels and plays and stories are adapted to television or film, even when, like J.K. Rowling, they like to retain tight control over them, or, like Daphne du Maurier, they disapprove of particular adaptations. Unlike Charles Dickens and Victor Hugo, whose campaigns against unauthorized adaptations played a pivotal role in the establishment of international copyright, more recent authors like J.D. Salinger, Thomas Pynchon, and Sara Paretsky who do not want their work to be adapted can easily take measures to avoid it—at least until they die, when their heirs, like Audrey Geisel, can authorize the adaptations that Geisel's late husband, who published his children's books under the byline Dr. Seuss, had resisted. Screenwriters and filmmakers of every sort prefer to have the option of adapting established properties instead of being obliged to invent their own. Fans eagerly await the latest iterations of Spider-Man, *Emma*, and *Lord of the Rings*, even if they end up condemning specific features or whole adaptations online. And adaptation scholars, once united in denigrating adaptations as derivative, have softened this stance, like George Bluestone, or reversed it, like Robert Stam, even as debates over fidelity, repeatedly laid to rest as resolved, have kept rising from the grave, typically circling around variously faithful adaptations that hold out the promise of balancing the claims of adaptability and integrity.

The two constituencies most likely to be scandalized by adaptation as such, then, are academics, especially literature teachers, who do not happen to be adaptation scholars, and movie reviewers who do not happen to be academics. The motives in each case are clear. Academics are famous defenders of established canons, and reviewers lose no opportunity to demonstrate that they are superior to the material they review. It does not

follow from this revelation that adaptability should be prized over integrity, but only that in taking positions in this age-old debate, adaptation scholars and others should consider more mindfully which positions they represent, how their views compare to their cohorts' interests, and what arguments can plausibly be made against them.

The rise of adaptation studies as a methodology or discipline poses the kinds of threats to fields like literary studies and cinema studies that would automatically provoke defensive measures by established fields determined to marginalize or devalue or ignore this new interloper along with all the others. Apart from these reflexive reactions, adaptation offers a scandal to aesthetics as such. Recent work in performance studies has sought to complement the canonical archives on which traditional aesthetics has based its methods and prestige with the notion that archives are powerless and inert unless they are performed by active interpreters whose different approaches challenge the archive even as they bring it alive. Aesthetics' central emphasis on the stable identity of the work of art as a *Ding an sich* is challenged by adaptation theory's emphasis on becoming rather than being. The notion of all art as a series of works-in-progress offers scandal even to two areas with which it is often aligned: Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of carnival, which is rooted in a specific historical moment in the Middle Ages, and intermedial studies, which focuses on a set of synchronic intermedial relations, not a diachronic series of processes. Although Kamilla Elliott has recently charged that "the top-down rhetoric of 'theorizing adaptation' pervades adaptation studies, while a reciprocal, inverse rhetoric of 'adapting theorization' remains underdeveloped" (239), adaptation scholars have increasingly been more invested in, and more successful in pursuing, what I have called "petit theories" (Leitch, "Against" 704) that mount new challenges to the quasi-canonical Grand Theory on which they rely. And of course adaptations of nonfictional texts offer scandal to historians who continue to hold film adaptations to monolithic truth standards they have long since waived for their own written histories.

The relations between individually scandalous adaptations and the scandal of adaptation as a practice are on full display in the 1942 United Artists film *To Be or Not to Be*. Although the film, directed by Ernst Lubitsch, is based on a screenplay by Edwin Justus Mayer which is based in turn on an original story by Lubitsch and Melchior Lengyel, contemporaneous reviewers unanimously treated its story of a Polish acting troupe's unwilling entanglement with a Gestapo plot against the Polish Underground in World War II as an adaptation of recent history, and their

verdicts were uniformly negative. Bosley Crowther's review in the *New York Times* is typical: "[I]n a spirit of levity, confused by frequent doses of shock, Mr. Lubitsch has set his actors to performing a spy-thriller of fantastic design amid the ruins and frightful oppressions of Nazi-invaded Warsaw. To say it is callous and macabre is understating the case" (883). Even audiences who had made Charlie Chaplin's Hitler-baiting satire *The Great Dictator* the top-grossing American film of 1940 were scandalized by Lubitsch's attempt to make light of the traumas the Third Reich had visited on occupied Poland. Political satires have always been rare in American cinema because of the obvious and gratuitous risks they run of antagonizing half their potential audience, and *To Be or Not to Be* is an even rarer creature, an American political satire that does not involve either elections or Americans.

The film's reputation has risen steadily over the years—it currently holds an 8.2 rating on the Internet Movie Database, a 96% Fresh rating on Rotten Tomatoes' Tomatometer, and a Metascore of eighty-six—but even commentators who have reversed the earlier verdict against it have been slower to appreciate the ways the scandal of its very existence and its irreverent approach to the horrors of the Gestapo are rooted in a more specific series of scandals at the heart of its story. Like *Primary Colors* (1998), which views politics in terms of a romance between the candidate and others (especially, though not entirely, voters), *To Be or Not to Be* is a movie about the relations between politics and love. Since no one runs for public office in the Third Reich, the forms political action take here are demagoguery, resistance, and spying. The film revolves around a romantic triangle including the Polish actors Joseph and Maria Tura, husband and wife (Jack Benny and Carole Lombard), and Stanislav Sobinski (Robert Stack), a young lieutenant in love with Maria who discovers that Professor Siletsky (Stanley Ridges), a friend and mentor of a Resistance bombing squad Sobinski and several other exiled Polish fighters have formed in England, is actually a German spy who plans to turn over to the Gestapo the personal information members of the squad have supplied him when they learned of his upcoming visit to Warsaw and asked him to get in touch with their friends and relatives. In an attempt to defeat Siletsky's plans, Sobinski parachutes into Warsaw, and Maria and Joseph, warned by him of Siletsky's intentions, play a series of roles designed to delay his delivery of the information or trick him into delivering it to them instead of the Gestapo. As David Lehmann, who observes that "there are few movies that mix reality and imposture to such superb effect, with artifice

trumping actuality as the actors play their parts not on the stage but in the streets and enemy headquarters of their Nazi-occupied city," has recently noted, "Benny plays five roles" in the film, "and in each of them, he is Jack Benny" (Lehman). Pauline Kael, who opined that Lubitsch "starts off on the wrong foot and never gets his balance," complained that Benny is "bizarrely cast" (774) as Tura, a Shakespearean actor affronted to the point of despair when Sobinski, whom he has never met, repeatedly walks out of his performance as Hamlet during the opening line of the famous soliloquy that begins "To be or not to be," not because he knows his wife has given Sobinski this cue for their romantic backstage meetings, but because he thinks that the unknown audience member has chosen this particularly noisy and disruptive way to criticize Tura's performance. But the scandalous casting of Benny as Hamlet, a noted Shakespearean actor, or ultimately a hero of the Polish underground is very much to the film's point.

The film's satire, which at first seems scattershot, is in fact tightly organized around three thematic concerns: the politics of self-serving bluster, resistance, and espionage; romance, the province of both feuding domestic partners and suitors who threaten the partners' stability; and acting, which includes both the troupe's onstage performances of *Hamlet* and their increasingly improvisational offstage acting by stage-trained actors thrust into high-stakes real-life situations over which they have little control—a reminder that a central theme of *Hamlet* itself, the play to whose leading role Joseph Tura is so clearly inadequate, is the relationship between action and acting. The film's politicians are self-aggrandizing, self-absorbed, and histrionic, a tendency Tura inadvertently parodies when, thinking himself mortally shot in his confrontation with Siletsky, he cries, "Long live Poland!" before the rest of the troupe rushes in to rescue him from his nonexistent wound. Its spies are deceptive, secretive, and competitive. Its lovers are deceptive, secretive, histrionic, self-absorbed, and competitive. And its actors, from the Turas to Rawitch (Lionel Atwill), are deceptive, histrionic, self-absorbed, and competitive. So it is perfectly logical that in the course of the film, each of these activities emerges as an increasingly illuminating metaphor for the others.

The film repeatedly treats politics as acting, acting as romance, romance as politics, and romance as acting for the sake of comic confusion throughout the many situations in which they intermingle, overlap, or are mistaken for each other. Its story is framed by two attempts of the supporting actor Bronski (Tom Dugan) to fool audiences outside the theater into

believing he is Adolf Hitler, the first of them laughably unsuccessful, the second breathtakingly consequential. The company stages *Hamlet* only when they are forbidden to stage *Gestapo*, the presumably scandalous play they had originally chosen. Maria, who had earlier proposed to the stage manager Dobosh (Charles Halton) a ludicrously glamorous staging of her first appearance in a concentration camp, accepts Sobinski's suit by telling him, "This is the first time I've ever met a man who could drop three tons of dynamite in two minutes," and agreeing to join him aboard his bomber. Later, Siletsky warns Maria, who wants to seduce and assassinate him, how important it is to take the right side in politics as in love, and she responds to his kiss by murmuring dreamily, "Heil, Hitler." Tura, outraged at both Maria's danger and her activism, attempts to reassert himself by announcing, "I'll decide with whom my wife will have dinner, and whom she's going to kill." In the film's best-known sequence, Tura, masquerading as Col. Ehrhardt of the Gestapo, finding himself unable to make convincing small talk with Siletsky, whom the troupe has lured to the theater they have disguised as Gestapo headquarters, can only repeat, "So they call me Concentration Camp Ehrhardt"—a scandalous juxtaposition of comic ineptitude, serious danger, and jaw-droppingly inappropriate reference to the concentration camps where, as the real Col. Ehrhardt (Sig Ruman) says when Tura approaches him in disguise as Siletsky, "We do the concentrating and the Poles do the camping." Ehrhardt, who, when he is asked by the false Siletsky if he is familiar with "that great, great Polish actor Joseph Tura," replies, "Oh, yes. What he did to Shakespeare we are doing now to Poland," gets to top Tura's most famous line with an even more scandalous repetition. When Tura repeats to him Siletsky's remark that he is known as Concentration Camp Ehrhardt, he muses, "So they call me Concentration Camp Ehrhardt" (Fig. 1)——an echo that prompts Tura's self-satisfied remark, "I had a feeling you would say that," and confirms Bronski's response to Dobosh's criticism that his opening performance as Hitler was unsuccessful because he is "only a little man with a mustache": "So is Hitler," the ultimately scandalous takedown of the fearsome dictator's posturing hubris. The story appropriately climaxes with a pair of bravura performances. The actor Greenberg (Felix Bressart), emerging from a women's lounge in a Warsaw theater Hitler is visiting, gives a stirring rendition of Shylock's "Hath not a Jew eyes?" speech from *The Merchant of Venice* in order to provide a distraction while Bronski, masquerading as Hitler, leads Greenberg and Hitler's attendant troops from the theater.

Fig. 1 The Gestapo's Col. Ehrhardt (Sig Ruman) reacts with delight to the report that he is called "Concentration Camp Ehrhardt" in *To Be Or Not to Be*

These conflations of politics, spying, romance, and acting, along with what Scott Eyman has called the film's "daring analogy between the rape of a nation with the aesthetic rape of a playwright" (302), offer scandal to audiences' assumptions about both the idealism and the transactional brutality of politics, the purity, glamour, and transcendence of romantic love, and the apparently necessary social assumption that you can trust other people because they act only when they are onstage. What makes these conflations both comic and scandalous ("how *could* you?") is their constant implication of a third-party audience that the performances of politics, spying, and romance depend on as surely as any performance does. But film's most penetrating scandal is its persistent use of deflating analogies between politics and romance, romance and acting, acting and politics, with the constant implication that no matter which of these deeply human activities is defined in terms of any of the others, the results are scandalously reductive. So too the deepest scandal of adaptation is not that a given adaptation will betray the original text it adapts, but that it will reveal productive fissures, limitations, and invitations in that text, and in the process challenge the very idea of originality.

Although the chapters in this volume are organized into two parts, "Scandalous Adaptations" and "Scandalous Adaptation," that respectively emphasize the scandals many individual adaptations have occasioned and

the scandalous nature of adaptation itself, this distinction is largely a matter of degree, for they all share a common concern with the relation between these two kinds of scandal.

Irina Makoveeva begins Part I with an examination of some of the many adaptations of *Anna Karenina*, a novel that manages to be at once canonical and scandalous. The unapologetic adultery at the heart of Tolstoi's novel and the many social transgressions that surround it made it a *succès de scandale* to many of its earliest readers, and the torrent of adaptations of Anna's story, which Makoveeva treats selectively but incisively, are distinguished from each other not only by their choice of presentational medium or their handling of the novel's nineteenth-century setting but by the ways they choose to treat that scandal in times that consider themselves less hidebound, beginning but not ending with the questions of whether they have sought to efface or inflate that scandal and how they have linked, or failed to link, the infidelity of Tolstoi's heroine to their own infidelities.

The production history of *Scarlet Street*, the subject of R. Barton Palmer's chapter, illustrates almost exactly the opposite premise: the ways an adaptation of a story relatively free of scandal could seek commercial success precisely through "the provocation of public outrage" even as it cannily complied with the strictures of the Production Code Administration and the Legion of Decency. The filmmakers' concerted attempts to minimize its ties to the fifteen-year-old novel on which it was based and its "continuation" of several crucial features of Fritz Lang's previous film, *The Woman in the Window*, are faithfully echoed within the film by the plot of the lowlife heroine and her accomplice to pass off the paintings she is given by her starry-eyed accountant lover as her own. The censor-baiting tactics of Universal Studios not only extended the time *Scarlet Street* remained in the public eye and swelled its box-office receipts but helped provide an "antiestablishmentariasm" blueprint for over a decade of films noirs that would follow.

One of the last entries in this first-generation noir cycle, *Sweet Smell of Success*, provides the subject for Julie Grossman's chapter on the seamy side of adaptation. The film, like the novella it adapts, focuses on the circle around a gossip columnist, a professional scandalmonger. Walter Winchell, who supplied the model for the baleful J.J. Hunsecker, was himself a quintessential adapter of other people's words, poses, and ideas whose practice showed just how dirty adaptation can be—a revelation that is intensified by the film's noir sensibility. Nor is this dirty adaptation

restricted to the narrative, for accounts of the film's contentious production display many instances of "maladaptation in the workplace." Repeated examples of maladaptation in the narrative, in its real-life model, and in its production history blur the lines between fact and fiction, showing that "[b]ecause they are the products of complex social contexts and multiple wranglings, adaptations can never 'come clean.'" Grossman makes the resonance of these lessons for contemporary American sociopolitical culture disturbingly clear.

Elisabeth L. Austin and Elena Lahr-Vivaz explore the relationship between adaptation and incest in three adaptations of Cirilo Villaverdes's novel *Cecilia Valdés*. Just as *Cecilia Valdés* is widely considered Cuba's national novel, the unwittingly incestuous relationship at its heart reveals "the *foundational scandal* of Spanish American literature" by disclosing "the fabricated nature of paternity and fidelity, of knowable origins and predictable futures" as violations of the taboo against incest and its potentially monstrous offspring affront the social norms designed to contain it. Each of these "hideous progeny," in Julie Grossman's term, treats the scandalous revelation of incest differently than the novel. The first one, like MGM's 1935 *Anna Karenina*, creates a new scandal by effacing the forbidden relationship, displacing it onto a coupling with a dramatically different social valence; the second doubles down on the original scandal in order to mount a sociopolitical critique of 1987 Cuba; and the third broadly hints that not only all adaptations of *Cecilia Valdés* but perhaps all adaptations of anything are inherently and productively incestuous.

Instead of analyzing acknowledged adaptations of an equally canonical text, Jerod Ra'Del Hollyfield plumbs the controversy surrounding the recent video release of *Weird Science*, an iconic '80s teen movie that draws its central concept from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, rendered retrospectively controversial by revelations of writer-director John Hughes's misogyny, which made the film's objectification of women seem even more toxic. He treats dismissive online commentary on the film as a manifestation of what he calls "BuzzFeed Theory: Internet writing aiming for optimal dissemination that acts as full-fledged adaptations of the texts it discusses in order to curtail the web of intertextuality by deposing and replacing source texts via scandal, a strategy that protects it from resistant scholarly interventions." Focusing on the ways the film's scandalous video release provoked social media distillations of nuanced assessments into memes and hot takes that flattened the debates that spawned them with the effect, and perhaps the goal, of supplanting and burying both the film

itself and its earlier commentary, Hollyfield makes a compelling case for academic, non-academic, and anti-academic analyses as adaptations.

Taking off from the proposition that Donna Tartt's bestselling novel *The Goldfinch* is an adaptation of Carel Mauritius's 1654 painting, which continues in different ways to inform John Crowley's 2019 film adaptation of the novel, Kate Newell focuses on the question "What is it?" to interrogate the status of Crowley's film—which was widely viewed as too faithful to Tartt's novel either to replicate the experience the novel provided or to establish its own independent cinematic credentials—the novel itself, and Fabritius's trompe l'oeil painting as at once "the thing and yet not the thing" each one seeks to represent. For Newell, the continuing debates over the generic categories that might best describe the painting, the novel, or the film reveal that "[t]he scandal of *The Goldfinch*(es) is the scandal of trompe l'oeil" at the heart of adaptation and adaptation studies, "which likewise remains caught in a dilemma of how to discuss adaptations as adaptations without having categories of 'the thing' and 'yet not the thing' overdetermine that discussion."

Daniel Singleton brings Part I into the very recent past by detailing the ways in which the [COVID] pandemic undermined two of 2020's most highly anticipated video game releases, *The Last of Us Part II* and *Cyberpunk 2077*. The delay of *The Last of Us Part II* provoked impatient hackers to release game footage that included a major spoiler that turned many avid fans against the game; the developers' determination to incorporate material from an ever-expanding pool of media from earlier video games to role-playing games to film franchises to immersive platforms weighed down *Cyberpunk 2077* with a hopeless array of bugs and contradictory expectations that encouraged its target audience to turn from players into outlaw adapters who posted GIFs of its bugs, produced patches to address its shortcomings, or hacked into the production company's servers, downloaded the game's source code, and auctioned it on eBay. Both episodes, as Singleton notes, "reveal how thoroughly the process of adaptation pervades the production as well as consumption of video games, setting the stage for scandals that erupt."

Part II begins with Glenn Jellenik's analysis of a double scandal: the widely acknowledged bowdlerization of so many texts by their adaptations, and the generally overlooked critical under-reading of acts of bowdlerization that scholars eagerly call out but then ignore. Focusing on the stage and screen adaptations that sought to tame two subversive novels, William Godwin's *Things As They Are, or The Adventures of Caleb Williams*