A PICTURE VS. A THOUSAND WORDS:

HOW AUTHORED CHILDREN'S CLASSICS RETAIN CULTURAL RELEVANCY

THROUGH BRITISH TELEVISION ADAPTATIONS

by

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ABSTRACT

Certain classic children's stories have transcended the generations to become cultural icons over a century after their publication. The endless adaptation and reinvention that creates iconography can be both assistance and obstruction to the preservation of authored stories which, unlike classic oral folk tales, were originally composed to a specific and unchanging design. This thesis examines how certain classic stories – Hans Christian Andersen's "The Snow Queen," Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*, and Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* – have been transmuted from set, authored texts to collections of representative elements with wide cultural applications. In addition to examining the broader progression of adaptation for these stories, this thesis offers support through analysis of two relevant British television adaptations for each tale. These adaptations reflect not only the cultural view of these stories within Britain but how that nationalized view itself must evolve to fit the wider commercialized television landscape of the early 21st century.

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INTRODUCTION

CONTRARIWISE: WHOSE STORY IS IT, ANYWAY?

When does a story enter our culture to the point it becomes iconic? As children, we are exposed to stories that were loved by our parents, grandparents, siblings and others who influence us. The more we hear a story, the more familiar it becomes, and it can be a touchstone we share with people throughout our entire lifetime: first, the family member who told it to us originally, then new friends we meet, and on outward to what seems to be the entire world. A story that truly affects us at that level becomes less something we know and more something that is part of our being; it is assimilated into our worldview and may influence our interests, goals, and larger life decisions. When a story is still larger than that, iconography finally comes into play. The strict structure of stories with beginnings, middles and endings has been lost, and we are left instead with iconic images from stories we abandoned with our childhoods but never forgot. A lonely glass slipper. A box of Turkish Delight. A street of yellow bricks. When these cease to become random objects and, instead, transform into symbols of a bigger whole, we can see the transcendence of a story beyond itself and into the greater cultural milieu.

To put it more simply: stories do not actually become icons. Instead, we build cultural icons from the remnants of stories.

At first, such a process seems counterintuitive. Why remember a story at all except as a story? Perhaps the answer is that society's relationship to such icons has simply changed. Once, symbolic icons would have been a shared mnemonic, a key to unlock the memory of well-studied volumes within a classical education. In our modern culture, however, where the educational curriculum is neither shared nor upheld as the

marker of a successful adult individual, the concept of such mnemonics breaks down. Understanding the relevance of a glass slipper does not mean that a person can recite Perrault's version of "Cinderella" or even a version of the story that hits the same beats; the knowledge of any authored text or dominant interpretation is usually relegated to a niche group of enthusiasts and academics. We do not live in an age that supports Homer's *Odyssey*, Aesop's Fables, or even Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. We live in an age of "that story with [x] in it." Although there is one exception to this loss of shared education, which will be discussed later in this introduction, by and large we live in a time of cultural shorthand. Whole stories are deemed to be unnecessary when a few striking images will do.

Yet stories are not dead: our culture still tells them, although we live in a society that generates a great deal of disposable entertainment. It is the insatiable imaginative hunger of children that keeps many *specific* stories alive today, even at a reduced level, and it is likely that the few stories still shared throughout the culture are stories we ask for again and again as children. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, a new generation of children has more opportunities than ever before to absorb its favorite stories. Although the traditional storytelling method has not died, it has receded into the background to be replaced by a number of new communication methods that are designed to effectively deliver story material, often to as wide an audience as possible. A favorite story can be found in multiple illustrated editions for children; in abridged editions for small children; in read-along editions for beginning readers; in coloring books, sticker books, and various other publications that encourage children to identify a pleasurable experience of play with a favored tale. There are interactive computer versions that can

assist in teaching children colors, shapes and eye-hand coordination; there are even stage versions that use actors or puppets to bring a story to life in three dimensions.

In all this morass of ubiquity, however, there is surely nothing more predominant than the boob tube. Television has permanently altered the landscape of the stories that are told and how they are communicated to audiences, privileging the prescribed visual over the individual interpretation.[1] Additionally, certain versions of stories find long-standing purchase with the international audience and irrevocably change how those stories are imagined by future generations. Unlike reading, watching television is not restricted to those who possess a certain skill set or attention span; unlike cinema films, access is not purchased on the basis of individual viewing. Exposure to a television version of a story can occur through accidental channel-changing as much as through specific intention to watch, and it does not necessarily require the outside vender of a library, vendor or subscription service for children to tune into a broadcast. In short, children of the past half-century have had a unique and unlimited access to both new and classic stories without ever facing the need to pick up a book. It is, perhaps, debatable whether this is a by-product or progenitor of our reductive, image-driven culture. It is, however, surely significant that for a child today, stories are a medium of *images* – both passively displayed and actively encouraged – not a medium solely of *words*.

The adage says that a picture is worth a thousand words, and much of television's output is designed strictly for the image-based format. However, producers are interested

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[1] The collection *Children & Television: Images in a Changing Sociocultural World*, edited by Gordon L. Berry and Joy Keiko Asamen, specifically addresses how television is a significant influence on the developing child mind, impacting how children the world around them and providing a prescribed interpretation instead of allowing children to make their own determinations. In particular, the collection addresses how television tells children how to "see" ethnic minorities, people who are elderly, and people who are disabled, as well as what it means to be a model – and homogenized – American citizen.

in reaping the cultural currency of stories that are familiar to their audiences – sometimes,

in name only. As a result, the television adaptation has become an influential medium

through which very old stories are brought to brand new audiences. Sometimes, they

retain their original structure, but on many occasions, they are manipulated and adjusted

to suit the assumed needs of the medium, the audience, the production company, and

other aspects involved in the commercialization of creative media. Adaptations, then,

may only minimally resemble the works on which they are based, which can lead whole

generations of children to interpret a story in a manner unintended by the original creator.

For stories that originate from the oral tradition, such as many of the familiar fairy tales,

this may not be a wholly disturbing prospect; although the hegemony of a single

interpretation may be distressing to academics and obsessive readers, these are stories

that were meant to be retold and reshaped to fit different circumstances and cultures.

However, the same process can be seen as inherently opposed to the purpose of an

authored story, which would have originally boasted an intentional structure and audience

and may now see those completely obliterated. Often, television adaptations of authored

stories reduce the complexity of the original work, rendering stories easy to digest – and

easy to assimilate into as many different imaginations as possible.

  The supremacy of the image over the constructed story is particularly interesting

to consider when applied to American broadcasting. As the dominant media power of the

Western world up to this point, the United States' entertainment industry has

unprecedented access to the minds of children across the globe. This might not be so

significant were it not for the fact that many of the stories Americans have acculturated

are distinctly non-American in origin. This is the dark aspect to the American dream of

the melting pot: having descended from emigrants of a variety of different cultures, including a dominant Anglicized heritage, American society has forsaken the mythology of the actual American landscape and indigenous peoples as one that is foreign and largely without value; instead, like a black hole, American producers absorb works from their ancestral cultures and transform them into "American-esque" properties, with distinctly Americanized structures, messages and values. To children the world over, therefore, the "real" version of a story now has nothing to do with original, authored text, and everything to do with Americanized values, such as the sanitation of violent and sexualized imagery, reversal of downbeat endings, introduction of idealized protagonists, and so on. Many retain a similarity to their source only on the basis of titles and specific iconographic elements, again privileging cultural shorthand over "the real story."

The obvious culprit of this kind of appropriation is the Walt Disney Company.[2] Although it is hardly alone in what it has done to modify the modern conception of so many classic stories, Disney[3] is unique in having created so successful an entertainment empire that its name is not only trusted, respected, and even preferred among many consumers, it is actually a synecdoche for the certain type of entertainment the company produces. (This familiarity of product puts Disney more in line with such global giants as Apple and Coca-Cola than other movie studios or animation houses.) As will be discussed later in this thesis, Disney adheres to a certain formula that has a proven record of success. It does not change approach based on the story it wishes to adapt; instead, it

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[2] Henry A. Giroux and Grace Pollock's work, *The Mouse that Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence*, dissects the Disney ideology and the specific qualities it promotes to consumers. Ultimately, it suggests that Disney bombards the suggestible child audience with a view of the world that is sanitized, stereotyped and extremely restrictive.

[3] This thesis utilizes "Disney" as the shortened term for the overall company, not the individual man.

alters stories to fit the formula. That this process disassociates many stories from their authors' original intent is totally disregarded by many consumers, while others see it as a necessary evil to obtain a desired effect. For many people, it may not matter at all which story Disney adapts next, only that Disney has made another safe and entertaining product to provide to their family. The objective, therefore, is not to see "a"/"another" *Aladdin;* the objective is to see *Disney's Aladdin,* no matter how much it deviates from the story introduced in Antoine Galland's edition of *One Thousand and One Nights*.

The success of Disney has led to a certain cultural imperialism that cannot be escaped, especially with the advent of television and, subsequently, home entertainment (which is traditionally accessed through the mechanism of television). Both distribution methods have been exploited by Disney to their fullest, from the *Wonderful World of Disney* TV series onward, and it is likely that many young viewers' primary access to the Disney version of stories is through television and video viewings at home. Even those who are taken to the cinema to see a new Disney picture will often experience it again and again in future years through the secondary vessel of television. The result is a cultural caché unparalleled in the civilized world today. The educated children of a century ago would have known a variety of classic stories which, even if they had variant tellings, would have centralized around a specific, authored text; for example, *Bulfinch's Mythology* was the common source for Greek mythology stories for almost a full century. Today, a classroom of American college freshmen may not all be able to tell one common story from the Bible, mythology or classic literature, no matter how simplified or reduced. What they can tell, however, is a story "from Disney," or rather, a classic story as Disney has chosen to adapt it, such as *Cinderella* or *Snow White and the Seven*

Dwarfs. While this version may have some generalized similarities with older versions of the story, it will doubtless include aspects that are specific to Disney alone, including phrases or lyrics ("Bibbidi-bobbidi-boo," "I'm late for a very important date!"), names (Aurora, Jasmine, Dopey), and plot alterations (having poisoned Snow White with an apple, the wicked queen is chased off a cliff by the dwarfs and falls to her death). To many modern Americans, the Disney version of a story *is* the story, and that hegemony is imposed on other cultures by the dominance of American media. A generalized viewpoint, from the outside looking in, might even equate American entertainment at large with the characteristics of the Disney model: saccharine stories, simplistically told, devoid of the history and culture that bring flavor to tales from around the world.

Up to this point, this introduction has taken the position that the changing nature of the West's cultural relationship to stories lays waste to a rich landscape of inherited literature. It is easy to suggest, for instance, that Disney has "ruined" stories or that American media "misunderstands" what stories are supposed to do. This viewpoint has validity, yet it is limited in scope. An alternative perspective is that these media entities preserve the cultural heritage in some form, perhaps more than it would be preserved and unified if they did not exist. The fact that two children from wildly different economic and sociocultural backgrounds can play out the Disney version of *Peter Pan*, without the need of direction or assistance from adults, is representative of the positive force of Disney in that it can effectively bridge cultural and societal differences. Like storytellers of old, Disney uses contemporary language, pop culture references, and appealing plot additions to make stories relatable to its modern audience. Its popularity at doing so proves that Western culture still has a need for shared stories during childhood – and,

more intriguingly, it indicates a desire for something that a story like *Peter Pan* provides to us in *any* variation of its telling. That this and other authored stories can be rendered down to such an extent and still remain potent forces hundreds of years after their origination is a testament to their power.[4] The exact structures of the individual stories change. Sometimes, the meanings are altered. Yet something enduring and graceful abides.

This thesis attempts to build in some small part on the work of Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation*, which suggests that adaptation is primarily a form of translation that provides a new audience with a method to engage with a story. Hutcheon asserts that examinations of adaptations should move beyond issues of strict accuracy to the original text and concern themselves more with the manner in which an adaptation is experienced by the audience – that is, what the mode of engagement privileges, when, why, how, and to whom. Although television adaptations of classic children's stories are, perhaps, toward the more simplistic end of Hutcheon's range of 20th and 21st century examples, it seems clear that they function as examples of her theory. They privilege certain iconography of familiar stories to achieve the specific effect of reaching a modern audience, and while the chosen iconography and process of adaptation is different for each story, it is my belief that charting the "progress" of a story through adaptation can offer insight into why these stories remain relevant.

Although television adaptations of classic authored stories are often at variance with the original text, they are a vital and important part of the perpetuation of what little

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[4] This concept is explored at length in *Neverending Stories: Toward a Critical Narratology*, edited by Ann Fehn, Ingeborg Hoesterey, and Maria Tatar. The collection examines the narrative patterns that recur with fiction and become meaningful to audiences aside from or in addition to the original authorial intention.

cultural mythology holds Western civilization together. In fact, Western culture is probably all the better for as many different versions of the classic stories as it cares to produce. In this way, authored stories can become something akin to the oral fairy tales of history: ever-changing, ever-shifting, and impossible to fully pin down. There should be not one *Peter Pan*, not three *Peter Pan*s, but a *multiplicity* of *Peter Pan* until the core concept has entered the culture just as much, and largely separate from, individualized window-dressing. A child should be able to say, "I love 'Peter Pan,' and my favorite version of that story is the Disney one." It is crucial, therefore, to consider the importance of other adaptations besides the dominant one, for two reasons: to see how other adaptations react against or develop as a result of the supremacy of an existing interpretation, and to try to determine what iconography within the stories remains relevant to modern culture regardless of how the stories are retold.

A critical view built upon these multiple perspectives allows these stories to be examined in their most advanced form: intertexts. Thomas M. Leitch's *Film Adaptation and its Discontents* makes a compelling argument for the adaptation's function as part of the intertext, suggesting that what was originally intended by the source text and its author is only of limited importance. Leitch states that "when we focus on fidelity as the central problem of . . . adaptation, we overlook the problematic nature of source texts that makes them worth studying in the first place" (17). In fact, focus on a dominant model of any kind impedes this progressive viewpoint. For a more developed examination, it is necessary to look outward and bring less-privileged adaptations to light.

This thesis ventures outside of the dominant model of both Disney and American commercialism to examine adaptations produced and intended for broadcast in Great

Britain. On the one hand, British adaptations are prime targets for analysis by this thesis

(the author of which is, herself, American) through sheer ease of use and access; they are

produced in the same language and reflect some of the same cultural values as the

dominant American adaptations. Like American properties, they are often sold

internationally, although they tend to attract only a niche audience in the United States.

Most intriguingly, Great Britain is a rare country that can boast both a history of oral and

written stories stretching back more than a thousand years *and* one of the earliest and

most institutionalized television production cultures, which is respected throughout the

world. Watching how the British re-appropriate classic stories for their own audience is a

fascinating counterpoint to the more familiar American model.

In part, my interest is enhanced by one of the great differences between British

and American television culture. British "telly" simply doesn't work like American TV,

and understanding the fundaments of the process through which it has developed is

integral to understanding the function of any adaptation it produces. Just as Disney's

development has led by degrees to the establishment and dominance of the Disney model,

the British model represents an entertainment landscape that has been maintained for

almost a full century. In truth, however, there is no singular "British model"; it is a meal

of three courses, and each one comes in its own unique, complementary, and competitive

flavor: the BBC, ITV, and Channel 4.

Radio and television broadcasting has always been strictly regulated in Great

Britain, basing its foundations in a framework of public service to serve the national

interest. At first, only one broadcasting entity was licensed by the government: the British

Broadcasting Company, established in 1923. This entity gradually developed into the

British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in 1927, beginning its long ascendancy and dominance over the radio waves. In 1936, the Corporation debuted a short-form television service; which was suspended with the outbreak of World War II and not resumed until 1946. Since then, the BBC has diversified into a variety of radio and television channels, each with distinct, albeit evolving, guidelines for content (McCavitt 232-37).

The evolution of the BBC is doubtless a result of its public service mission. As discussed by Paddy Scannell in his article, "Britain: Public Service Broadasting, from National Culture to Multiculturalism," the BBC is funded by the licenses paid by radio and television owners throughout Britain, and they are specifically mandated by the government to represent the people of Britain and their culture. From its inception, the BBC has been tasked to cover relevant news, sports, and public affairs topics, although its relationship with entertainment is somewhat more controversial. There has always been disagreement as to how much and to what extent the BBC should produce drama and comedy content, especially on television, and to what degree that content should resemble more commercial product. In the past, a significant criticism of BBC programming is that it favors white, middle-to-upper-class views that focus on the central environment of London, including the depiction of characters and storylines within entertainment (Scannell 25-38). Famously, actors and presenters were trained to speak in "Received Pronunciation," a distinct form of "the Queen's English" designed to be heard without accent. At the beginning of the 21st century, however, the BBC has shifted its goals to push multiculturalism. In 2008, director-general Mark Thompson publicly stated his desire for an increase in the variety of regional accents and views to come out of the

Corporation's programming (Martin). Most recently, in 2011, the BBC relocated its primary production centers out of London to Manchester in the north of England and Cardiff in Wales, which have traditionally been seen as lower-class, "working man" areas.

The chief reason the BBC has been forced to move forward is Independent Television (ITV). As described by William E. McCavitt's *Broadcasting Around the World*, ITV was initially established in 1954 to break up the BBC's hold on the British television landscape. ITV is designed specifically to function on the model of private enterprise, providing a commercial, ad-based alternative to the BBC's public service approach (McCavitt 237). Although ITV is overseen by the Independent Broadcast Authority (IBA), which regulates content and provides specific guidelines, programming is actually developed by a variety of individual companies and broadcast on individual, region-specific channels. The result is a largely homogenous schedule with some variation across regions (McCavitt 242). Additionally, ITV programming – of which a great portion is drama – is more aggressively marketed throughout the world; while the BBC focused on distribution to British territories in the 1950s and '60s, ITV managed to accrue a number of significant worldwide hits, most especially with their famous adventure series developed by the Incorporated Television Company (ITC). *The Saint*, *The Avengers* and *The Prisoner* were among the first British television exports to break into the American mainstream in the late 1960s, while in contrast, BBC programming was limited to exposure on American public broadcasting channels. In fact, while many Americans regard all British programming as "the BBC," it is likely that this is due to the early monopoly established by the Corporation and the fame of their name. Very little of

the British television most Americans ever see is actually produced by the BBC; even on PBS today, a majority portion is produced by ITV companies.

Finally, there is Channel 4. As Scannell elaborates, Channel 4 was created in 1980 as a response to growing concerns that the BBC and ITV reflected an increasingly stolid, middle-class culture that failed to move with the times. Devised to showcase minority interests and programming, Channel 4 follows a certain public service interest while maintaining a commercial, advertisement-funded existence. As a result, it tends to feature a wide-ranging spread of content, much of which is sold overseas, but which is intended within its home country to stand against the perceived mainstream (Scannell 29-31).

Naturally, the boundaries of one thesis cannot allow for a judgment of the relative merits of the BBC, ITV, or Channel 4, of their exact similarities or differences from other television production models, or even a systematic overview of the sheer bevy of adaptations they have produced. Instead, this thesis looks to examine a small cross-section of British adaptations that can be seen as highlights of a greater continuum. Therefore, the contents of the following chapters are devoted to three texts. "The Snow Queen" (1845) is a fairy tale by Danish author Hans Christian Andersen, which has been adapted by retellers from countries as diverse as the United States, Poland, and Russia, with two television productions made by the BBC in 1975 and 2005. Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking Glass* (1872) are not a singular text but are treated as such here because they have been combined and collated within entertainment media almost since their original publication. Although the *Alice* books are among the most adapted stories in cinema and television history, the two productions examined here are of the BBC's *Wonderland*, from 1966, and Channel 4's

Looking Glass, from 1998, which are representative of a relatively small crop of *British* television productions and reflect two very different stylistic approaches. Lastly, Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* (1908) has found lasting popularity with child readers but has only ever been adapted through British and American productions or co-productions, and then, almost entirely within the last thirty years. The versions examined here hail from ITV in 1983 and the BBC in 2006.

Although the selection of these stories may, at first, appear arbitrary, they fit a series of categories that eliminates other potential candidates. First, they are authored stories, ensuring that there is a set text from which adaptations choose to adhere or deviate. Second, they derive from Great Britain or Western Europe, demonstrating the shift in cultural viewpoint between British adaptations and any dominant American one. Third, have each been adapted to television multiple times in a variety of international markets, including the United States, with at least two adaptations of sufficiently distinct vintage produced in Great Britain; a generational gap of time is preferred in the sample productions to demonstrate some progression of British adaptations as they are increasingly forced to compete at the international level. Finally, the similarities and differences apparent in each pair of adaptations work to reinforce both the progression away from authorial authenticity and the establishment of each story's iconography, showing the path each story has followed as it has entered the culture and giving some indication of what each story's future may resemble.

With all of these requirements in mind, a relatively small list of potential titles can be quickly defined. Some might have dubious origins as children's literature even if they are often considered acceptable for children today, such as Shakespeare's *A Midsummer*

Night's Dream. Other, more recent potential texts may have extant and rigorous copyrights that keep them from being adapted too differently from the original source, such as C.S. Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Ultimately, a list of truly viable candidates spans a little more than a century of published works, from Hans Christian Andersen's earliest fairy tales in the 1830s to Mary Norton's *The Borrowers* in 1952. Intriguingly, many classic children's stories that are currently adapted for television are those that emerged from the Victorian and Edwardian time period (including some that were not originally intended for children but have since been embraced by that audience), including *The Secret Garden, Anne of Green Gables*, the Sherlock Holmes stories, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, and *A Christmas Carol*. They were of sufficient popularity to inspire theatre productions, early cinema films, and other pre-television forms of visual entertainment which, in many cases, began the influence of how audiences think of the stories today. This thesis attempts to cover a small range of these texts, both to demonstrate their diversity and show some of the patterns in their development for a modern television audience.

The restrictions of a master's thesis cannot allow every aspect of these six adaptations to be considered, nor is it possible to offer a blow-by-blow examination of the specific techniques and processes used by writers and directors to bring these classic stories to the screen. The intention is merely to begin a conversation that respects the plurality of classic stories' existence across a multitude of forms and an awareness that literature begins with the written page but can extend well beyond.

As our human culture continues to evolve, we will continue to supplant our existing media with additional forms, methods and modes of communication. We will

keep what is important to us and build on the remnants of what we have left behind. As long as we need the classic stories, there is value in examining the many ways in which those stories are interpreted, especially as the generations move ever onward. *Something* about these stories is important. They hold some essence that appeals to our shared cultural intellect, and the more we tell these stories – in any form – the closer we may come to understanding what truth they hold.

CHAPTER I

A DARK REFLECTION IN DISNEY'S MAGIC MIRROR:

HOW THE DISNEY TRADITION WARPS AND MISINTERPRETS HANS

CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN'S "THE SNOW QUEEN"

It's not safe to be a fairy tale anymore.

Fairy tales are mutable: they change and shift with the passage of time and culture. Not only does reinvention keep a fairy tale alive, it ensures relevance to the current audience; like the foundations of evolutionary biology, a story "stays alive" through adaptation. Social codes and lessons that were perfectly appropriate for a child reader in 1910 might not have been so relevant by 1960 and almost certainly will not be for the child of 2020. There are no exceptions to the rule: "Snow White," "Hansel and Gretel," "Beauty and the Beast," "The Frog Prince," and many, many other oral tales have remained at least somewhat current because of endless radio, film, television and stage productions.

The reason behind these productions is clear; the stories are familiar, and there are no copyright fees to be paid. In essence, these are the stories we have used to compose a modern, Western mythology. There are no Greek heroes or animal-headed deities in our shared national religion. There isn't a Genesis, Ecclesiastes or Revelations, either. Instead, we have men trapped in the bodies of beasts; women who fall into a deep and dreamless sleep from poisoned fruit or poisoned spindles; magic pathways that emerge from a handful of beans. These are the stories known *throughout* Western culture, and because we know them so completely, we claim the right to reinterpret them – endlessly. There is no problem at all in retelling or reimagining a classic folk or fairy story that has

no known author. When a story is known to have been authored by a single individual, however, its transition into modern iconography becomes more complex. So it is with the work of Hans Christian Andersen, the 19th century Danish author and poet. To the modern mind, it seems easy to skip lightly from the Brothers Grimm to Andersen and back again, but the source of their stories is completely different. The Grimm brothers collected and modified their tales; Andersen *invented* his straight from his imagination. There is one true version of "The Ugly Duckling," one "Thumbelina," one "Little Mermaid" with a distinctly morbid ending. Although the works are in the public domain, Andersen's authorship is inviolate; a conscious decision has to be made to move away from the published source.

Andersen's "The Snow Queen," one of his most popular fairy tales, has had a particularly strange history of adaptation in the century and a half since its publication. First published in 1845, Andersen's "Snow Queen" is the tale of Gerda, a young girl who sets out to find her friend, Kay, when his heart is pierced by magic glass and he is taken away by the mysterious Snow Queen. As with other Andersen tales, the story has an unusual narrative voice meant to resemble the oral storytelling tradition, while the backbone of the plot is reinforced by aspects of Christian piety, sacrifice, and death.

In today's society, it is unsurprising that most adaptations of "The Snow Queen" choose to downplay the more melancholy and religious aspects of the story. The newest adaptation, however, looks set to leave Andersen behind almost entirely. Walt Disney Animation Studios' *Frozen*, set to release at the end of 2013, boasts a plot filled with derring-do, magic, musical numbers, and a sibling rivalry between two royal sisters, all set in a world where it is always winter (Keegan). In this case, Disney isn't just

interpreting the story to fit modern needs, it is changing the concept outright to suit audience expectations. There is no expectation from Disney's audience that the story match Andersen's because the majority of that audience will not have *read* Andersen. If they've heard of the story, they'll probably only remember the kernel of the plot – a boy, a girl, an evil Snow Queen, a talking reindeer. Instead, their expectations will be based entirely on what they assume a *Disney movie* to be, which has in turn come to define what children's entertainment should be. This remarkable shift in cultural thinking has only come about in the last seventy-five years, but its iron grip cannot be denied. To be successful as an adaptation for young children, a story must be "Disneyfied" – and for an Andersen story, that's an enormous challenge.

The first complication of "Disneyfying" is one that strikes the heart of any Andersen adaptation. There is always an attempt made to treat Andersen's story as a "classic fairy tale," and thus, an unspoken requirement is that the plot, characters, and other details should resemble those we expect from a homogenized fairy story. Modern mass-marketing encourages the assumption that all fairy tales for children "work the same way" and provide the same basic result. Both producers and audiences commit the fallacy of expecting "The Snow Queen," an authored Danish story of considerable length, to function in the same way as a two-page story that made the rounds of France, Germany and Italy. However, as Erica Weitzman points out in her article "The World in Pieces," this is a problematic expectation for "Snow Queen," even when it is compared to Andersen's other work. "The strangeness of 'The Snow Queen' in Andersen's canon may be due to the fact that it is in a certain sense a fairy tale *against* fairy tales [because] Andersen's tale resists its own premises in the [. . .] refusal to bring its fragments of

experience into a unified whole" (1121). She calls particular attention to the story's lopsided structure: "The seven 'stories' that make up 'The Snow Queen' are indeed anything but identical, neither in size or in tone nor even in narrative focus [. . .] It is, in a word, not classical" (1107). Already, then, it is apparent that "The Snow Queen" exists *outside* of the prescribed normality of fairy tales. Any adaptation must either embrace these peculiarities or attempt to rework them into a more digestible whole.

The other vital issue is that of the message in "The Snow Queen." Western audiences like fairy tales to have simple sound bite messages they can grasp and repeat, especially when they are viewing a TV or film production; for parents, it is often essential that their children "learn something" from a video they choose to watch again and again. When an existing story fails that quick test, producers and audiences tend to boil the plots down as much as possible. "The Frog Prince" is about keeping one's promises, for instance, while "Beauty and the Beast" has transmuted into a reinforcement of the adage that "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder." Weitzman suggests that "The Snow Queen" is "all too patently an allegory of despair and its overcoming, of the various failures to mourn [. . .] and of the subsequent recoveries" (1106), but the tale offers nothing so obvious; typical of an Andersen story, "Snow Queen" offers no easy answers. Many commentators have trouble discussing the concrete themes of Andersen's work as a whole, depending on generalities, theories, or even turning to (negative) comparisons with reinterpretations. Jane Yolen talks neatly around the issue in "From Andersen On," mostly noting the autobiographical aspects of his tales: "Andersen took the good, the bad and the truly ugly in his life and made it beautiful within his stories." The stories themselves, she says, are "by turns earthy, anarchic, fatalistic"; they "touch on the human

condition" and are "all done in the common, colloquial language of the day" (343).

Andrea Immel takes a related approach, noting "the tendency of modern reinterpretations

and refashionings of Andersen's tales to flatten the originals out by distancing the

narrative structure from the distinctive style of telling" (151). Yolen imagines "that

Andersen would have been horrified at how bowdlerized over the years his stories have

become" (341), and Jack Zipes invokes Danny Kaye's Hollywood portrayal in his

assertion that, to Americans, "Andersen is still a congenial, happy-go-lucky storyteller

whose reputation is dependent on the Walt Disney marketing of 'The Little Mermaid'

and sanitized versions of 'The Snow Queen' and 'The Little Match Girl'" (236-37). None

of these critics' articles provides succinct meanings for the Andersen stories, and as a

result, the idea must be put forth that his tales are simply too complex to render down in

the "preferred" manner. Naomi Wood probably manages it best when she says that

"Andersen's stories, which describe broadly human fears, wishes, and nightmares, should

not be classified into sunny tales appropriate for children and dark tales for adults. [. . .]

Far from being 'inappropriate' for children, Andersen's tales might actually offer

children who need it relief from the hearty good cheer that pervades ordinary kiddie-

lit(e)" (194).

What accounts for the modern inability to pin down the core of an Andersen tale

like "The Snow Queen"? Some of the problems can be put down to the wavering plot, but

a closer examination reveals an aspect to Andersen's stories that is completely distasteful

to modern, commercial interests: the author's predilection for distinctly Christian morals.

In his "Critical Reflections" article, Jack Zipes touches on the Christian methodology of

Andersen, saying first that religion "plays a major role in his tales from the beginning to

the very end" (228) and, more specifically, that "all of his novels and many of his tales [. . .] are variations on the same theme that can also be found in 'The Snow Queen': trust in God's design, and you will fare well, even if you should die" (229). While Zipes' criticism boils down Andersen's storytelling to a level that is, perhaps, overly simplistic, it is true that a significant aspect of the stories works against the commercial interests of modern productions. The reliance on a higher power, despite the probability or even *inevitability* of certain death, is an important Andersen trope that has no place in a modern, secularized adaptation. Additionally, Christianity provides an undercurrent to "The Snow Queen" that, when removed, may make the story more palatable to the mainstream but robs it of much of its meaning. The Snow Queen herself is not the Devil incarnate, but she does stand for Godlessness in that she represents a cold, rational lack of warmth, kindness, and other spiritual qualities. Her bewitchment of Kay leads him down a road of intellectual rigidity; he forgets how to say his prayers and can only "remember his multiplication tables" (Andersen 31). He is only saved by *Gerda's* prayers, and in the closing paragraphs of the story, they both gain a deeper understanding of a hymn that is recited throughout the story: they must retain the wonder and awe of childhood to enter God's kingdom (68). Stripped of the distinctly Christian moral, the ending of "The Snow Queen" flounders, and adapters are usually forced to add a concluding message that focuses on friendship or true love – even though these concepts cannot truly stand in for Andersen's intention.[1]

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[1] Removing Christianity also renders some of Andersen's plot almost impenetrable. In the story, the Snow Queen promises Kay "the whole world and a new pair of skates" if he solves a puzzle that will give him an intellectual grasp of eternity (Andersen 64). Most adapters seem to want to keep the puzzle, but they are at a loose end as to how to present it or what it should mean.

With concerns that a product can reach not only every family in middle-class America or Britain but as many other territories as possible, however, a film or television producer hoping for commercial success must be willing to alter a story to produce safe, expected results. Religiously fueled entertainment only reaches a certain percentage of the population; relatively few viewers will be willing to sit through a television special that hangs on the Christianized correlation between life, fate, and impermanent death. As Zipes points out, Andersen's reliance on religion could be disagreeable even to the modern *reader*: in an Andersen story, "it appears that children either should not have agency, or if they have agency, they must carry out God's will, not their own. Their accomplishment is the Lord's accomplishment – a message [that makes] many of his stories ponderous and pathetic" (231). The concept of a governing, Divine hand may be alienating to many audience members, including some who are religious, regardless of the medium in which it is delivered.

The obvious solution to adapting an Andersen tale is to secularize it, removing all religious aspects in favor of. . .what? It is at this point that "Disneyfication" first rears its ugly head. The removal of religious content and preference for a classic fairy tale structure and easy-to-understand message leads inexorably to homogeneity. In our modern society, what we expect from a family film and what we expect from a fairy tale converge neatly into the tried-and-true Walt Disney formula: bright colors; musical numbers; funny sidekicks; a so-called "fairy tale" romance. Just as it is easily apparent that our impressions of classic fairy tales have been irreparably altered by Disney images – Snow White's dwarves are eternally cast as Doc, Grumpy, Dopey and their friends, while her stepmother is a beautiful glamour queen in a cowl and crown – so too is our

understanding of what this type of story involves at the story level. Indeed, any fairy tale that doesn't conform to the Disney standard falls to the wayside, either half-remembered or totally obscured. Popular culture is no longer shaped by oral tales or storybooks but by the ubiquity of Disney images. "Only the best-known stories, those that everyone has read or heard, indeed, those that Disney has popularized, have affected masses of children in our culture. Cinderella, the Sleeping Beauty and Snow White are mythic figures who have replaced the old Greek and Norse gods, goddesses, and heroes for most children" (Lieberman 383-84). If that assertion is true, it makes sense that each new adaptation tries to be a little bit more "Disney" to try to gain success.

With that in mind, looking at any adaptation of "The Snow Queen" offers some genuine food for thought. The chief goal is rarely to bring Andersen's story to a new generation; instead, writers and producers appropriate his general concepts to tell stories that will appeal to each successive generation's popular culture. The result must satisfy a number of masters. Andersen's original work is involved because there is cultural familiarity attached to his name, the title of the story, and some of its general features, and that familiarity translates into sales. Yet as time has gone on, any popular adaptation of Andersen's tale has had less to do with the original story's relevance to society and far more with what we might expect from a family-friendly entertainment called "The Snow Queen" – and here, finally, is revealed the long shadow of the Walt Disney Company. Relevance has been gradually supplanted by marketability, and Andersen's imagination has been deemed inadequate for the challenge.

There is no way to better demonstrate this increasing shift in approach than to look at two television adaptations by the British Broadcasting Corporation. Both the 1976

and 2005 productions of "The Snow Queen" were devised as Christmas specials for the entire family. Each is an English-language production of approximately one hour in length, boasting the latest in special-effects technology to bring the story to life, and to their credit, both have more in common with Hans Christian Andersen than Disney's *Frozen*. However, the two versions represent distinctly different styles of translation to the small screen. What they emphasize – and how they choose to emphasize it – shows an inexorable slide down the path toward the inevitable "Disneyfication."

The BBC's 1976 version is the easier of the two adaptations to consider because it applies a "heritage" perspective to the story. Heritage television became popular in the Britain of the late 1970s and early 1980s; instead of looking back on history in anger, as more rebellious projects had been apt to do in the 1960s, heritage productions emphasize an idealized, sometimes barely extant "golden age" of Britain.[2] The long-running *Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* series casts the detective in the perfected Victorian London of costume drama; the acclaimed *Jewel in the Crown* portrays a British Raj where the "good" Caucasian characters are obviously on the side of the oppressed Indians. Other acclaimed dramas reinforce the positive qualities of the British national character, from the steadfast servants of *Upstairs Downstairs* to the weary but diligent government agents of *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*. Many scripted television dramas of the period attempt to convey a pride in traditional British values that offsets the economic

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[2] The concept of heritage television is a small-screen version of heritage cinema: a style of British filmmaking that became popular in Margaret Thatcher's Britain, and is, perhaps, most closely associated with lush adaptations of novels by such 19th and early 20th century British authors as Jane Austen, Henry James, and E. M. Forster. Dianne F. Sadoff's *Victorian Vogue: British Novels on Screen* identifies heritage cinema as a product of middle class instability and "fears about the future of high culture [and] the nation-state's continuing preeminence," allowing viewers to both celebrate the triumphs of the past and express concern about the old order's relevance in the future (2).

difficulty of the early 1970s, as well as the continuing decline of Britain as a global power.

The 1976 *Snow Queen* doesn't necessarily set the story in Britain, but it does employ a heritage treatment in its adaptation; the idealized settings and soft, almost tender telling of the story represent a celebration of the children's literature tradition familiar to most British schoolchildren of the 20th century. Furthermore, British heritage productions tend to stick as closely to authorial intent as possible, within the limits of budget and time, and this *Snow Queen* is no exception: this is Andersen's story, albeit with a few stylistic concessions. Both Gerda and Kay are clearly no more than ten years old and very plain little children at that. No attempt is made to glamorize Gerda into either a sexual object, as in some versions, or as a "winsome" little heroine, as will be seen later in 2005. This is a perfectly normal little girl, searching for her perfectly normal friend in a typical fairy tale quest story.

Perhaps the greatest criticism that can be leveled at the 1976 version is that aspect of the "typical fairy tale," which starts the adaptation snowball rolling down the hill toward "Disneyfication." This *Snow Queen* suffers none of the detachment or harshness of the Andersen story; instead, it is sweet, pleasant, free of any real terror, and even a little bit soporific. It's a homogenized, bowdlerized Andersen for a nation of parents anxious to shelter their children from harm. The story is just that: a *story*, almost Brechtian in its presentation; which attempts to present a fairy tale atmosphere while highlighting its own fictionality. The characters speak like characters in a fairy story, using non-naturalistic sentence structure, and an overall sense of play nullifies any fear that Gerda will really fail. None of the obstacles Gerda faces on her quest seem especially

threatening; from the Old Woman to the Robber Girl, toy soldiers to whispering flowers, Gerda seems remarkably blasé about every encounter, and occasionally even put out, while the other actors respond with broad theatrics more suited to the stage than television. Whether or not the effect is intentional, everyone appears to be play-acting. Only the Snow Queen herself – a figure whose face is represented by eyes and a transparent mask, and who is treated with appropriate fear by both Gerda and Kay – transcends the boundary between what is obviously real and obviously artificial to create a suitably unsettling effect.

By highlighting the artificiality of the piece, the television medium creates a liminal world that, in part, makes up for the relative temerity of the script. Director Andrew Gosling takes the unusual step of filming live actors against blue screens, which allows him to place the characters in a world of illustration and two-dimensional animation. It is only a few steps away from the storytelling technique of *Jackanory*, the long-running BBC series in which guest celebrities told famous stories straight to camera, often with animated or hand-drawn backgrounds. Again, the compositions create a sense of safety and gentle wonder for the viewer, and as a result, *The Snow Queen* becomes just the latest story in the cozy *Jackanory* tradition.

In hindsight, placing human actors in artificial sets presages the CGI work of the 2005 version, but the intent here seems less to present a visual spectacular than to simply place Gerda and Kay in an appropriate fairy tale world. The blue screen process – known as chroma key, or in BBC jargon, "Colour Separation Overlay" – was a common tool the BBC utilized for science fiction, fantasy, and children's productions in the 1970s (Irvine 21-23). The BBC's 1973 *Alice Through the Looking-Glass*, for instance, was able to

place its eponymous heroine in a variety of illustrative landscapes, along with special "floating" effects. *The Snow Queen* is one of several productions to follow suit.

The ability to create fantasy worlds naturally indicates beauty and wonderment, but there is very little that is beautiful about this version of Andersen's story. Everything is slightly comic and grotesque, from the Spring Witch's portrayal as a drag character to the Raven's German accent and name, "Klaus." The summer coach is even depicted as an anachronistic 1920s trolley, with stereotypical wigged coachmen from an earlier age. Gerda is therefore thrown into a world that is distinctly *unlike* her own, comfortable space. By creating a contrast between the simplistic illustration of Gerda's grandmother's sitting room and the active animation of the fantasy scenarios, Gosling clearly indicates the boundaries of the story. This is not a technique that will be seen again in later adaptations of "The Snow Queen."

Admittedly, the 1976 production is still a *secularization* of Andersen's story, and it is here that we see the crux of the problem with the soft-sell approach. Telling Andersen's story without the Christianity aspect effectively alters it to such a degree it might just as well not be Andersen at all. The theme of the tale appears to have been recast as that of true friendship conquering all, and there is no concluding moment of "growing up." What once was an affecting and slightly cruel story has been made rather gormless, and worse, somewhat lopsided. For instance, the production still opens with Andersen's initial tale of the Devil's mirror. His students take the mirror up to heaven to reflect the faces of the angels, but here the Christian aspects of the story are cut short. By removing the message of Christian piety, and of age and death leading to the ultimate

reward of Christ's beneficent love, the 1976 *Snow Queen* not only omits an essential element but fails to satisfy the initial scenario.

To the casual viewer, the alterations made to the 1976 *Snow Queen* may seem insubstantial. After all, the core plot is relatively untouched, and most of the modifications are made to fully utilize the entertaining properties of the television medium. What is already clear, however, is the significant progression toward "Disneyfication." With even these changes from authorial intent, the adaptation of *The Snow Queen* has taken the first few steps toward its conversion into a homogenized, secularized and modernized piece of entertainment.

A much stronger set of alterations is to be found in the BBC's 2005 *The Snow Queen*, which must surely represent one of the most egregious exaggerations of Andersen possible. This television special, broadcast twenty-nine years to the day after the previous BBC adaptation, boasts a peculiar history, finding its basis in a series of 2003 concerts by composer Paul K. Joyce. According to the brief documentary on the film's DVD, Joyce created his English-language opera of *The Snow Queen* as a tribute to a dying friend, the lyrics reflecting his desire to feature "love's triumph over death" ("Making"). This creates a fundamental split from Andersen that no amount of authorial intent can possibly disguise as insignificant. Maria Tatar believes that Andersen's story is "an allegory [. . .] illustrating the dangerous seductions of science and reason and predicting their defeat by the life-giving forces of Christian salvation" (Andersen 17). Her assertion is based in a reading of the conflict between Gerda's pure, prayerful love and the Snow Queen's rationality as one between Godliness and Godlessness, which is supported by the symbolism scattered throughout the text. Joyce's opera, however, is a cut-and-dry fable

of love conquering lifelessness. The narrative focus, then, is already skewed: what started

as a story about the conflicting viewpoints of Gerda and Kay and developed, in the other

adaptation, into a story about true friendship, has finally transitioned into a story about

Gerda and a corpse.

This shift in focus is not, perhaps, immediately apparent in Joyce's opera. His

treatment of *The Snow Queen* is a 45-minute musical overview, punctuated with

sequences that have no lyrics at all. Whole sections of the story are told in the broadest of

strokes, as in Gerda's encounter with two wise, nurturing figures: unless one is already

familiar with the Andersen tale, listening to a choral repetition of "The Lapland Woman

and the Finland Woman" – the only lyrics for that sequence of the story—isn't going to

be very informative. In the transition from opera to one-hour Christmas TV special, then,

there is every opportunity to work in the finer details through dialogue and visuals, as

was done for the 1976 version – at least, as far as money would allow. The problem is

that the BBC doesn't take up the challenge. Kay remains a metaphorical, if not literal,

dead body, used only as a weight to pull down one side or another of the audience's

emotional scale: first, sadness at his homelessness; happiness at his new-found friendship

with Gerda; sadness at his possession by the Snow Queen; and, finally, happiness at his

eventual recovery. The actor portraying Kay has two lines of dialogue in the entire film,

so the audience can be forgiven if they never form any real attachment to the boy.

Kay at least manages two lines of dialogue. The Snow Queen herself is an even

greater casualty; she never has any lines at all. The only way the audience knows that she

is a villain is because they are so *informed*. Instead of dialogue, the Queen has a slinky

cabaret outfit, a small fleet of swans to draw her sleigh, an unusually modern make-up

job, and some very exciting special effects. The audience needs to remember the very exciting special effects because they're nearly the only visual evidence we have of the Snow Queen's power. In her article, "The Ugly Duckling's Legacy," Naomi Wood comments on the popularity of the Snow Queen as an archetype of evil: "Clad in fur and coldly beautiful, [she] appears repeatedly in nineteenth-and twentieth-century fantasy from George MacDonald's North Wind to C. S. Lewis's White Witch and Philip Pullman's Mrs. Coulter and Serafina Pekkala" (196-97). In this production, the audience is expected to translate that existing knowledge of the traditional figure into an automatic hatred for this particular Snow Queen, despite the fact that aside from carrying Kay away, the 2005 villain never does anything that can be taken as truly evil or even unseemly. She never kisses Kay nor leaves him to solve an impenetrable puzzle in her castle. In the film's earliest scenes, she does appear briefly as a hypothermia-induced hallucination, doubtless to be interpreted as a portent of death. When Gerda finds Kay in the castle at the end, he has been left cold and breathless on a stone slab; again, the corpse imagery can't be denied. None of this earmarks the Snow Queen as truly malicious, merely dangerous to human life. It is only through other characters' statements that Gerda – and, thus, the audience – learns of the Snow Queen's terrible powers. Yet the filmmakers clearly understand that we do, finally, require *some* small, visual demonstration of evil, so they employ the only remaining avenue left to a mute, phantom-like villain: they give the Snow Queen the ability to propel energy bolts from her fingers.

Silly as they may be, the energy bolts are important because they truly typify the shortcuts this version of "The Snow Queen" forces itself to take, all in the name of a one-hour, mainstream television production designed for a Christmas Eve broadcast.

Although it was created with a specific charter designating a goal to inform and educate

as well as entertain, the BBC has, since the early 2000s, begun to look for ways to

reinvigorate their modest library of worldwide exports. The classic BBC drama, once so

much in vogue among a certain audience, has drastically fallen in popularity; dialogue-

based dramas are no longer in fashion now that computer graphics have become more

affordable. A "heritage" interpretation of "The Snow Queen" like the 1976 version

simply wouldn't be made today.

The idea that *The Snow Queen* is actually designed to showcase continuous,

gorgeous effects is one that has to be kept in mind to even begin to accept the production

on its own merit. Unlike American TV, British television has a long history of producing

specific content to be shown on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. These specials are as

heavily promoted as any "very special episode" of an American series, with whole

magazines given over to the Christmas schedules or special, behind-the-scenes Christmas

fun. Traditionally, the actual content takes the form of extra-long, Christmas-themed

episodes of popular sitcoms, soap operas, and family dramas like *Doctor Who*, along with

one-off adaptations of children's classics, including versions of *The Wind in the Willows*

and *Through the Looking Glass* discussed in later chapters of this thesis. Although the

British television industry would probably claim that these productions are treated with

no less dignity than regular programming, the emphasis is definitely on providing a feast

for the senses with bright colors, broad emotions, and loud, loud music. Sitcom

Christmas specials are broader and brighter, soap specials usually require a wedding or a

funeral; *Doctor Who*, not content to save the galaxy from the dreaded alien Daleks,

usually has to stop all of time and space from imminent implosion. The idea behind it all

is that Christmas is a time for family togetherness, for emotion, cheer, and a hot toddy. British Christmas television never, *ever* expects the viewer to *work*. It's no surprise, then, that the BBC's production of *The Snow Queen* is less interested in giving a profound moral and more on taking the audience on a ride.

As a high-octane, Andersen-flavored fantasy ride, *The Snow Queen* works well because the original story provides a lot of images and concepts with which to play. That the final result sometimes only barely resembles the original fairy tale is probably, in the creators' minds, largely incidental. Indeed, it is arguable whether Andersen's original story of "The Snow Queen" is all that well known to British youth, especially in comparison to home-grown children's literature. It's possible that it exists more in the hazy cultural memory invoked by Naomi Wood's comparisons to *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and *His Dark Materials*: the bare framework of a story, featuring a female protagonist in search of a brotherly figure kidnapped by an icy, powerful woman.[3] True or otherwise, the BBC team seems to have come to a similar conclusion. With the loose structure from Joyce's opera already built in, including the sublimation of the Kay and Snow Queen characters, the film's story chooses to forego much of Andersen to follow the storytelling tropes of two other sources more familiar to modern audiences.

The first source of the 2005 *Snow Queen*'s structure is undoubtedly *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. There is probably no more beloved book in British culture, and no British child can possible have gone many years without hearing or seeing at least one version of the story.

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[3] This certainly seems to be the implication of some American adaptations. The *Faerie Tale Theatre* series, for instance, presented a particularly saccharine version of the story in 1985, with a haughty but kind Snow Queen teaching Gerda and Kay about true friendship. Unlike many episodes of the same series, the teleplay's connection to the original story is severely limited.

The Snow Queen borrows heavily form *Alice* in the idea of a quest punctuated by strange vignettes. Gerda's encounters with various characters, most of them demonstrating a type of kindness and compassion, have largely been replaced with the grotesques one tends to find inhabiting Wonderland. Andersen's "old woman who knows magic" has become a kind of hag, wheedling Gerda to stay for tea and chopping off the heads of roses when they betray her true nature. The flowers themselves, though certainly present in Andersen's text, are actually helpful to Gerda; like *Looking-Glass'* Garden of Live Flowers, they strain to speak with her and offer advice about a female authority figure. Later, Gerda meets other characters who are not what they initially seem, including a living stone statue and a kindly woman disguised in a menacing heap of furs. Each character is treated lightly as another highlight of Gerda's quest, another grotesque to meet along the way. Gone are Andersen's long passages of time as seasons pass; here, Gerda barely has time to arrive in one place before she's off on her way. The goal is undoubtedly to keep children entertained, but the technique has the unfortunate effect of making the audience treat these characters as story points instead of people. Only the King, an entirely invented character during the "summer" sequence, stands a chance of making an impact on the viewer, and it is entirely because Gerda stops to receive five minutes of his exposition.

Ultimately, the "Alice in Wonderland" effect is probably an inevitable consequence of the BBC wanting the film to fit a one-hour slot. The shortened adaptation is the inverse of the 2002 American *Snow Queen* miniseries by Hallmark Entertainment, which allows the audience to get to know Gerda's new acquaintances just a little too *well:* secondary characters who are little more than cameos in other versions suddenly

take on co-star status when the story is stretched to three hours in length. With the 2005 version, there is a deliberate choice to re-fashion *The Snow Queen* in what we, the English-speaking audience, might term to be a *proper* fairy tale. According to Joyce, the impetus to create a *Snow Queen* film was a combination of his opera and director Julian Gibbs' animated backgrounds, which played on a screen during the concerts. The idea presented to the BBC was to use these animations as the basis for the settings in the film, with the entire world of *The Snow Queen* to be created in a computer after actors were shot against blue screens ("Making"). The ultimate effect is overtly and intentionally that of a fairytale storybook, with processed, altered images that trap performances between layers of special effects and color filters. As if to heighten the "unreality," the frame rate of the piece has clearly been reduced in post-production, leaving every performance looking as if it was captured on a hand-cranked film camera of the early 1900s. For much of the film, the flickery, limited-palette result is quite beautiful and succeeds in transporting the viewer to another world. The filmmakers, however, seem to have taken this as their cue to present a full-on fairy tale come to life, so they turn back to that most obvious inspiration: the Disney film.

In "Disneyfying" *The Snow Queen*, the filmmakers have probably committed their most egregious injury upon Andersen's original story. Andersen's unique and inviting storytelling style, complete with open appeals to the reader, is abandoned in favor of a strict, familiar fairy tale narrative. For most of the film, the action is narrated by Gerda's friend, the Raven; in grand Disney style, his role has been expanded to companion and protector, while his voice is provided by an internationally bankable "name," Patrick Stewart. Gerda's reindeer friend, though voiceless, has been imbued with

special powers that mostly serve to complete Gerda's work for her; instead of relying on her power of prayer to defeat the Snow Queen's snowflake army, the reindeer takes on an army of giant polar bears that instantly shatter into shards of ice. The Raven starts Gerda on the beginning of her quest, the flowers tell her when to escape, and right in the middle of the narrative, a kindly king sits Gerda down to tell her everything she needs to know about the Snow Queen. In what might be the strangest moment in the entire film, the Finn woman prophesizes the rest of Gerda's journey, which we see in quick flashes: Gerda trudging up a mountain, Gerda and her friends caught in the terrible "tunnel of sound," Gerda hopping from ice floe to ice floe while avoiding the snapping jaws of leaping killer whales. These are pretty if increasingly bizarre images, but the final consequence of buffeting Gerda from one protective character to the next is that she never really seems to do anything for herself. Although Andersen's original story indicates a Divine power guiding Gerda in her quest – it could, for instance, be said that she cannot truly fail as long as God is on her side – she still at least makes her own decisions and must, at different points, choose to sacrifice her own desires to find Kay. This trait is not to be found in the television Gerda, whose role is entirely more passive. Thanks to "Disneyfication," then, what might otherwise have been a perfectly reasonable secularization and condensation of Andersen's work becomes a spectacularly shallow spectacle that is much harder to justify.

Hans Christian Andersen's "The Snow Queen" has completed its transition from an unusual, earthly little fairy tale to a Disney wannabe. It remains to be seen what choices Disney itself has made in adapting the story, but regardless, it seems inevitable that Andersen's original tale will be left far behind. No matter how classic they may be,

long, wayward stories with overtones of death simply aren't very commercial. With the heart and soul of Andersen's story turned, like Kay's, to ice, viewers will have to look for new avenues of interest in any new treatment of the tale; perhaps there will be singing and dancing polar bears instead. A new film may be a perfectly entertaining production, but like the recent televised "event" it will inevitably be a machine: an automaton in Andersen's clothing, meant solely to put rear ends in seats. It will operate on that setting and that setting only, while—unknown to the majority of viewers—Andersen's rich, original fairy tale will continue to satisfy at a multitude of levels.

CHAPTER II

MR. TOAD PRESENTS MR. TOAD STARRING IN A MR. TOAD PRODUCTION:

WHY ONE CHARACTER OVERWHELMS *THE WIND IN THE WILLOWS*

As the most recent of the three texts examined by this thesis, Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* is a product of the transition into the 20th century. By 1908, when the book was published, literature written exclusively for children was an established market in both America and Britain, and films based on children's stories were at the very beginning of their long ascension. (Indeed, the first *Alice in Wonderland* film from 1903 still exists.) Elsewhere, the automobile supplanted other forms of transportation, and the next European military conflict – not so very far away – would find the game of war irrevocably changed by armored tanks and other mechanical terrors. Like the children of those Edwardian years, *Willows* was born into a world in flux, and it reacted by idealizing the past and lampooning the future.

Unlike the "The Snow Queen," *Willows* does not boast an easily identified plot motivation, nor, like the Alice books, a central child protagonist. The book is a game of two halves. The first storyline, privileging the experiences of Mole, is an often poetic tribute to the simple idylls of the natural world and the comforts of friendship and home. These themes are the focus of Chapters One through Five, along with Seven, and Chapter Nine – "Wayfarers All" – is clearly related in tone, despite the brief shift in attention to the Water Rat. These are also the chapters that have a strong connection to an idealized Britain, and to a world where technology is of very little concern. The riverbank home of Mole and Rat has a calm broken only by the soft sound of oars on water, offering readers

a portrait of a golden age where natural beauty has been untouched by progress or industry; later, a spiritual element to nature is identified, while "Wayfarers" looks wistfully at a life upon the sea. Chapters Six, Eight, and Ten through Twelve center strongly on Toad and his more grandiose adventures, often revolving around that most exciting and dangerous of modern technologies: the motor car. Toad's world is one of industrial progress, abandoning each new trend in transportation as a newer, shinier, louder one comes along, and only his world demonstrates the punishments that progress has inspired. Although the two halves sit alongside each other, they are often in competition for the focus of the book.[1]

Why one plot is so distinct from the other is, perhaps, made clear by the knowledge that they come from two different sources. The Mole chapters were written specifically for the novel, and they are often quite "writerly," using prosaic language and long descriptions to offer a breath of warm nostalgia to any adult who has lived in the country, encountered little woodland creatures, and heard the quiet babble of a brook far from the bustle of business and industry. The Toad chapters, on the other hand, are adapted directly from letters that author Kenneth Grahame wrote to his son, Alistair (Gauger, "Preface" xxxii); they are lighter, funnier, and far more action-packed than most of Mole's adventures. It might even be reasonable to think of Toad's as the half of the book meant to appeal to children, with its preference for comedy, action, and adventure,

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[1] The division of the book into parts has been addressed by many scholars and critics. In *The Wind in the Willows: A Fragmented Arcadia*, Peter Hunt suggests that there are actually *three* sections: five chapters focusing on Mole, five on Toad, and a "two-chapter coda" that unifies them at a distance that privileges neither animal (44-45). David Rudd, in turn, argues that the two halves are unified in their pursuit of the spiritual, as personified by Pan – a hybrid and natural god that rises above the false god of machines (namely, the motor car). Additionally, Deborah Dysart-Gale dissects at length the conflict between technology and nature that is demonstrated in the main characters' individual pursuits.

while Mole's is more appealing to adults who fondly remember childhood. A reader

might even shift their interest from one plot to the other over a lifetime of reading. The

two plotlines do merge occasionally, especially in the more light-hearted Chapter 2, "The

Open Road," and the dénouement, when Toad also learns the values of home and humble

friendship.[2] However, by so clearly aligning his readers with different protagonists for

different sections of the story, Grahame does not provide the audience with a single,

unobstructed focus. By largely eschewing concurrent plotlines, he expects readers to

transition from one to the other – and back again – without any indication of which will

be more important to the overall story.

For adapters, that lack of clarity can be a serious issue. Passive media require

characters and ideas the viewer or listener can quickly identify, and such simplicity is

often seen as especially critical for entertainment designed for children. At a more

practical level, the animal-based cast of characters forces any film or television producer

into the expense of animation or the compromise of puppets or actors in funny costumes.

A combination of these issues may well be what kept a feature-length film or television

adaptation from appearing until 1983 – fully seventy-five years after Grahame published

his book.

Instead, *Willows* bypassed the emergent cinema and went straight for the stage.

The first major adaptation was A. A. Milne's stageplay, 1929's *Toad of Toad Hall*

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[2] Critics disagree whether or not Toad actually learns anything, and although the discussion is largely outside the scope of this thesis, their arguments make for compelling reading. Jonathan Mattanah suggests that this point is "one of the major unresolved issues of the novel" (88), although he personally comes down in favor of the idea that Toad is changed "through the compassionate care of his wise friends." Lois R. Kuznets feels that Toad comes to appreciate the security of his home. Bonnie Gaarden, however, draws attention to Grahame's description of Toad as "altered," not "reformed," while Mark West simply doesn't believe in Toad's change at all.

(Gauger, "Illustrators" lxxviii), which chose to embrace and accentuate the absurd elements in Grahame's novel. In the published version of his play, Milne addresses the complicated issue of adapting Grahame's characters and situations: "Of course, I have left out all the best parts of the book . . . and for that, Mr. Grahame will thank me," he says (Milne ix).

> We are not going to add any fresh thrill to the thrill which the loveliness of
> *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn* [sic] gave its readers. . . it seemed clear to
> me that Rat and Toad, Mole and Badger could only face the footlights
> with hope of success if they were content to amuse their audience. There
> are both beauty and comedy in the book, but the beauty must be left to
> blossom there[.] (x)

What Milne does not discuss openly is an aspect that surely became pronounced in the generational gap between Grahame's work and his own. Read through post-Edwardian eyes, *The Wind in the Willows* has definite class issues. None of the animals have paid jobs, but all of them appear able to support themselves; Rat is seen to handle money and claims that "Toad's rich, we all know; but he's not a millionaire" (Grahame 54). Mole speaks in soft but distinct working-class dialect, while Rat bears the affectations of the upper middle-class, and Toad is even a step above. Neither Rat nor Toad think anything of over-packing for a picnic, but Mole is made uncomfortably aware that his own home is a "shabby, dingy little place," unlike the other animals' larger abodes (70). Hints of class run throughout the book, although very little lasting conflict results from them, in part because most of the characters either do not recognize their class differences or choose to ignore them, finding value in each other despite their

separate backgrounds (albeit with occasional unintentional condescension). Rat, for instance, is only too glad to let Mole share his home, and Toad is always eager to include his friends.[3]

Class conflict is obfuscated, in part, by Grahame's own bewildering personifications. As Milne points out, "It is necessary to think of Mole, for instance, sometimes as an actual mole, sometimes as such a mole in human clothes, sometimes as a mole grown to human size, sometimes as walking on two legs, sometimes on four. He is a mole, he isn't a mole. What is he? I don't know" (Milne x). While a reader would naturally never expect a badger, rat or mole to weasels and the magistrate, Grahame's characters are almost bafflingly kind to each other despite class differences. More than once, Mole forces Rat to realize his condescension, and Rat's generosity sets things right. Toad uses his friends dreadfully, but they forgive him almost at once. Even the weasels are treated with basic kindness once they have been defeated.

Modern readers might find even these little conflicts distressing because of their overly simple solutions, which appear to sweep real class issues under the carpet and out of sight. Rat, for instance, seems to solve all disagreements with Mole with a little money and a symbolic pat on the head, a trick Mole himself has basically adopted by the end of the story. In part, these attitudes are a product of the time in which the book was written; *The Wind in the Willows* would have been targeted specifically for middle-class children, whose parents would not only understand but endorse the "importance" of the class

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[3] Catherine L. Elick discusses class conflict at some length in her article "Up [and Down and Back and Forth] We Go!": Dialogic and Carnivalesque Qualities in The Wind in the Willows," drawing special attention Grahame's Edwardian "Us. Vs. Them" approach to social strata and the "suppressed voices" of the Wild Wooders (including, but not limited to, the weasels). Her work extrapolates ideas of class conflict first posited by Peter Green in his critical biography of Grahame.

hierarchy to a free and powerful Britain. They also assume that the central characters are meant to represent adult human beings.

A visualization of the animals of *Willows* as representative of children, with a child's concerns, emotions, solutions, and incomplete view of the world, is easier to swallow. It also easily allies itself with the idyllic, romanticized depictions of the Mole chapters of the book; there are no cares or worries in a child's world, after all, and problems with friends are quickly solved and arguments forgotten. A reader could very easily dismiss the class issues as unimportant if they chose to view the story through that lens. However, casting the characters as children ultimately favors the comedy and absurdity of the Toad chapters, allowing a layered interpretation where the class divisions of Grahame's era can be both acknowledged and gently mocked – even beyond Grahame's original intent. Milne certainly takes this approach with *Toad of Toad Hall*, which he intended to stand against the "horrid realism" of the stage. He suggests that the human characters "have a hint of the animal world about them," with the washerwoman's niece "in a ballet skirt or something entirely unsuitable . . . pirouetting absurdly about the prison" (Milne xi).

Proving very popular with the public, *Toad of Toad Hall* introduced some aspects to Grahame's story that we often take for granted today. The shift of Toad completely into the protagonist role, with his comedic adventures given full prominence, is the most obvious and all-consuming change. Milne also gives Toad's horse a name – Albert – as well as dialogue, and he expands Toad's day in court to a full-scale comic set piece, something that nearly every film or TV adaptation has copied. Such changes broadly

affect Grahame's entire intent, subsuming the themes of humility and friendship with simple comedy and a spirit of thrilling adventure.

The changes don't stop there, though. Thrust completely into the glare of the footlights, Toad himself is more foolish than ever before. His new dialogue reflects his increased absurdity, not just in his heroism but in his total lack of awareness of his own privilege. When Phoebe, the washerwoman's niece, asks him if Badger, Rat and Mole live at Toad Hall, he tells her they are "excellent fellows all, but hardly, how shall I put it, hardly (*With a wave of a paw*) well, hardly. They come to pay me a visit now and then, naturally; always glad to see them; but – well quite frankly, they wouldn't be comfortable at a big house like Toad Hall, not to live. One has to be born to it" (108). Milne's goal may be to reject realism, but with lines such as these, he pokes fun at real attitudes. Toad's behavior is no longer buffoonish merely because of its childishness but because he holds outmoded and naïve perspectives of his class. Milne doesn't circumvent the issue of class; recognizing it as an inherent part of the *Willows* story, he treats it with a more knowing humor than is found in the original work, thus making the outdated sensibilities more palatable to his audience. In doing so, he sparks off a trend. As decades pass and British culture moves further and further away from the class perspectives of the early 1900s, the comedy of *Willows* becomes emphasized more and more in adaptations to take the edge off of the Edwardian attitudes and maintain a focus on the positive values of Grahame's work. By the end of the century, Toad's beliefs won't just be depicted as comical but as laughably and exaggeratedly stupid.

Toad of Toad Hall is hardly the first theatrical play to alter the public perception and increase the popularity of a famous tale. However, *Toad* lacks participation from the

original author, who died within three years after the play's debut, and it is unusually influential for having been staged two full decades after the novel's publication. In essence, it was written by a "fan," albeit a famous author in his own right. When he was approached to adapt the book for the stage, Milne replied, "*The Wind in the Willows* – now you're talking! . . . I will do it. And I shall love doing it" (Thwaite 226). Grahame, for his own part, enjoyed the eventual play as an audience member; Milne reported that he "sat there, an old man now, as eager as any child in the audience" (Thwaite 363). By adapting a work he loved during his own childhood, Milne may have saved Mole, Rat, Badger and Toad from the obsolescence suffered by other popular works with old-fashioned views. At the same time, however, he changed the way audiences saw them forevermore.

Adaptations of Grahame's story were thin on the ground for the next several decades, perhaps in part because of Walt Disney, who first announced his own version in 1941 (Maltin 91). The first television version was the BBC's take on *Toad of Toad Hall*, presented as a live teleplay in 1946, which is not believed to have been preserved. Walt Disney used up his film option in 1949 to make *The Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad*, one of the wartime "package films" produced in lieu of full-length animated features (Gauger, "Illustrators" lxxx). Although the characters are identifiable, the half-hour plot has only a passing similarity to Grahame's story: Toad runs up debts, first through his obsession with caravanning, then with motor cars. Although his friends Mole, Rat, and Angus MacBadger attempt to keep him in the clear, Toad foolishly trades Toad Hall to an innkeeper for his motor car – and the weasels take advantage of the situation. Despite the limited relationship of the short to the original work, the ubiquity of Disney's

merchandising – including storybooks, records, a famous theme park ride and later television broadcasts – probably cemented *The Wind and the Willows* as being "about Toad" for future generations.

Up to this point, it might be expected that *Willows* would follow the rough trajectory of other Disney-adapted works such as *Peter Pan* and *The Jungle Book*, with a famous book replaced in the public consciousness by the popular Disney version. However, *The Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad* has become relatively obscure within the Disney canon; it is probably best known now through Walt Disney World's "Mr. Toad's Wild Ride" attraction (Gauger, "Illustrators" lxxxi). The merchandising has always focused on Toad and his motor car obsession, often telling the Disney adaptation's actual plot in only the broadest of strokes, and thus, *The Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad* has fully never overtaken the original book. It merely presents a variation on *one aspect* of Grahame's own work, simplified and skewed for the preschool audience, so there has never been a significant need to save the denizens of the riverbank from Walt Disney. Instead, the looming figure – the villain of the piece – is none other than Toad himself.

It is obvious by now that if any part of *The Wind in the Willows* has become iconic, it is not really Grahame's story itself. It is Mr. Toad: his childish fascination with fast cars, his jailbreak adventures as a washer-woman, and his easily imitated and insouciant cry of "Poop-poop!" have all become cultural touchstones. Mole, Rat and Badger all fade into the background, simple "straight men" to Toad's comedy. As with "The Snow Queen" and "Alice in Wonderland," what the culture deems important about *The Wind in the Willows* has warped and changed over time, with certain elements drawn

out and emphasized to keep them interesting to modern audiences. In those examples, however, there is more willingness on the part of adapters to either discard the original text (as in the case of "Snow Queen") or treat it as a "given" (as in the case of "Alice"). Adaptations of *Willows* occupy different territory, in part because they are relatively uninspired either positively or negatively by a single dominant adaptation – a void often occupied by a popular Disney adaptation.

It is curious to note that Disney's version of *Willows* is rare in altering Grahame's plot to a great degree. Most adaptations are content to keep the original storyline in place, only with additional emphasis given to the Toad adventures, or with the conflict between Toad and the weasels worked more heavily into the plot. Terry Jones' 1996 film (distributed in the United States as *Mr. Toad's Wild Ride*), for instance, gives the weasels motivation to take over Toad Hall; they want to make it into a highly modern dog food processing factory, leading to an action-packed climax as Toad and his friends battle the machinery. By and large, though, the structure of *The Wind in the Willows* remains much the same as Grahame wrote it, with the same core characters, events placed in roughly the same chronological order, and the same themes and outcome. The focus has simply shifted to Toad, which is peculiar: there is no intrinsic need to *keep* the opening chapters with Mole and Rat. The actual book – or the memory of that book – must bear a special, inimitable, and potentially *commercial* quality for those who translate it to other media. The theory follows that *Willows* offers something specifically and intrinsically of value to Western culture which producers of adaptations hope to retain.

Any commercial quality that *Willows* boasts must go well beyond the confines of the plot; too many adaptations play fast and loose with the details of the story while

adhering to the same overall structure. The relative rigidity of the storyline indicates that there is something important about those early chapters that make them worth maintaining. Aside from establishing Mole and Rat's characters at the outset – which, as the Disney adaptation shows, needn't occur on the riverbank at all – the only obvious element worth preservation is one of theme: the idylls of nature, the lure of a lazy afternoon on the river, and the warm camaraderie of two friends having a picnic. This is a portrait of Britain itself: not the Britain of 1927, 2013, or even 1908, but a golden, idealized Britain that exists mostly in the hearts and minds of those who summon it.[4] It is a Britain of unencumbered youth, never beset by worry, care, or anxiety. This is completely contrary to the nowhere-fairytale-land of "The Snow Queen," or the cold, disassociated realms of "Alice." The world of *Willows* is one to treasure alongside, and as part of, cherished childhood memories, and the further Britain's reality gets from unspoiled valleys, fields and riverbanks, the more essential the illusion is to maintain. It is, however, *only* an illusion, and one that dissipates with any concerted thought. A return to "England's green and pleasant land" (Blake 492) would mean a return to outdated values and class separations that would only privilege a tiny portion of the population, so it is really only in a fantasy story – where such divisions are, themselves, idealized – that the illusion can be maintained. It therefore becomes the purpose of any *Wind in the Willows* adaptation to juggle the issue of outmoded and distasteful sensibilities with an idealized setting that, while equally outdated, will present an attractive fantasy to many members of the audience.

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[4] The dichotomy present between the attraction of the idealized, storybook image and the need to constantly question and re-address the novel's content for each new audience is central to Peter Hunt's work *The Wind in the Willows: A Fragmented Arcadia*, which examines the question of the book's shifting readership and its relevance in a world increasingly divorced from Grahame's own.

It seems appropriate that the first significant television adaptation of Grahame's own novel would be a heritage production, made at a time when British television was attempting to introduce audiences to the wide canon of the national literature. 1983's *The Wind in the Willows* is a feature-length, stop-motion animated film by Cosgrove Hall Films. The animation group led by Brian Cosgrove and Mark Hall was created in the 1970s by Thames Television, an ITV company. Among other achievements, Cosgrove Hall created the popular *Danger Mouse* series and, later, *Count Duckula*, both of which were standard, hand-drawn series. Smaller, more literary pursuits were usually reserved for stop-motion animation, including award-winning, half-hour adaptations of *The Pied Piper of Hamelin* (1981), *The Reluctant Dragon* (1987), and *The Fool of the World and the Flying Ship* (1989). *The Wind in the Willows* was a large enough success to serve as a pilot for a running half-hour series, maintaining the same stop-motion style and most of the same vocal cast. The series ran from 1984 to 1988, followed by a one-hour special and a revamped final year, titled *Oh! Mr. Toad*, in 1989.

Twenty-three years later, the 2006 telefilm *Kenneth Grahame's The Wind in the Willows* is no less idealized, but it appears less a heritage production and more one that attempts to view nostalgia from a modern cultural perspective. Although developed for the BBC, the film was made as a co-production with the Canadian Broadcasting Company (CBC) and WGBH-TV, the major producer of original programming for Public Broadcasting in the United States. It was promoted as a Christmas special for the BBC (although it was actually broadcast at the end of the Christmas period, on New Year's Day 2007), but the film debuted on CBC two full weeks earlier. With a cast of television and film actors familiar to an international audience, as well as a fast pace and heightened

comedy, the film is clearly designed for a broader, family viewership as opposed to pure children's programming.

As with productions based on the Alice books, it has become commonplace to employ a certain degree of "celebrity casting" for adaptations of *The Wind in the Willows*, and no exception is to be found here. The celebrity actors have been carefully chosen both to inhabit the characters and to bring a measure of familiarity to their personalities; adult viewers who recognize their names will immediately understand what type of role they will play. For *Willows*, there is no more crucial role to fill than Toad, and both productions cast popular comedy actors whose personas inform their characterizations of the aristocratic amphibian. In 1983, David Jason was best known for *Only Fools and Horses* (1981-91), a BBC sitcom that follows a wheeling-dealing Cockney family and their attempts to get rich quick. Jason's character, Del Boy, often lies, cheats and uses the sheer force of his personality to get what he wants, as well as pretending to be much smarter and more in control than he really is. All of these qualities are to be found in the 1983 Toad, only rendered more childishly, with the addition of an upper-class accent. Clad in his loud red-and-white check suit, Toad is nothing so much as a scheming little boy; at various points, he squints his eyes and – as is obvious to the viewing audience – considers what form of emotional manipulation he must utilize to win over his opponents. He is arrogant, brash, over-confident, and more than willing to crow about his every triumph, even in situations when it would benefit him to stay silent.

The 2006 Toad is more naïve, and thus, displays even more horrifying behavior. Matt Lucas has utilized his large size and bald head to embody a string of completely infantile comedy roles, most especially as one half of the team behind the BBC sketch

comedy show *Little Britain* (2003-06). His characters are grotesque, unrealistic, and often frequently absurdist caricatures of different types. They are often boisterous, self-absorbed, haughty, and physically overwhelming – but they rarely display much guile. Lucas' Toad is cut from the same cloth, resembling nothing so much as a giant toddler playing dress-up. His costumes are all highly exaggerated, with trousers going up to his chest to emphasize his Toadish stomach, and their bright colors and loud designs suggest a child's impression of how grown-ups dress. Like the 1983 version, he can attempt to manipulate, but his endeavors are usually totally transparent, and his moods turn on a dime. When forced to entertain himself, Toad gets rid of his excess energy by personifying his possessions, his clothes, and even his body ("My foot is attacking me!"). This Toad doesn't just lack self-awareness, he's an outright imbecile, and he likes it that way.

The characterization of Toad is complemented by the characterization of his closest friends. Mole and Rat are interesting characters to consider because, as they carry so much of the story, they function as moral and temperamental gauges for the entire world of *Willows*. It is also intriguing to see how these characters have changed over time, often in less obvious ways than Toad. In 1983, Mole is portrayed as a reserved and rather fussy animal, indeterminate of age but kind and softly spoken, while in 2006, Mole is younger and distinctly lower class. His clothes are shabby, and his Northern accent reinforces a British stereotype of impoverishment and lack of social grace. The characterization is light and pleasant, however, with a child-like awe that serves as counterpoint to Toad's total self-absorption.

In both productions, Rat exists somewhere between the characterizations of Toad and Mole. In 1983, he is depicted as a stern older brother figure, projecting a persona of reason and stability. Rat may not be the character a child audience relates to, but he is clearly meant to be the moral center of the group. He is, however, somewhat condescending and proud, albeit in a more "adult" way than Toad; his is clearly an arrogance that the film's creators find acceptable. The 2006 Rat is often clueless and a bit cowardly outside of the strictly social realm. He can organize a Christmas feast for the local field mice, but his battle at Toad Hall at the end of the film consists entirely of him rushing around with a fencing epee, shouting "En garde!" and failing to actually engage any opponent. Along with Toad, the 2006 *Willows* uses Ratty as an opportunity to criticize the class divide and social complications of the story with a heavy dose of comedy.

Intriguingly, changing the personalities of Toad, Mole, and Rat completely alters their relationships to each other. In 1983, as in the original story, they are steadfast friends; Rat may have more experience than the other two, but their interactions are based in an assumption that they are relatively intellectually equal. The 2006 film makes them almost into a makeshift nuclear family unit, with Toad distinctly less mature or comprehending of his predicaments than Rat and Mole. Instead, he is a spoiled child, his feelings often protected or spared by the "grown-ups." Mole, who possesses a child's innocence for most of the film, gains a sense of social embarrassment by watching Toad, who is totally oblivious; in fact, many of Mole's responses to Toad seem to shift him to the role of a worried mother, with Rat a benevolent but "hands-off" father. When they talk about Toad's confinement in prison, Mole's worry is countered by Rat's calm

insistence, "The rules that apply to you and me somehow just don't apply to Toad. You'll see." Rat may be effete, but Mole is openly effeminate, regularly expressing concern, fear, a wide-eyed desire to please others and a generally submissive attitude. He apologizes to the weasels he knocks out in Toad Hall, and he routinely cajoles Rat into abandoning his set ways – first to visit Badger in the Wild Wood, and later, to go out on the river and follow the Piper's music. Some of their scenes together could even be interpreted to have a slightly romantic quality, at least in terms of modern conventions.

The 2006 *Willows* respects the original book's dual structure not through completely slavish adaptation but by providing the "emotional" storyline of Rat and Mole to play against the "comedy" one of Toad. In this version, only Mole is shown to grow over the course of the story – *not* Toad. In fact, if the 2006 audience is ever asked to identify with a specific character, it is always Mole. His development – constantly assisted by the Water Rat – is the backbone of the adaptation, and the Rat and Mole pairing are the figures that function as moral and emotional barometers for the entire story. Whenever the audience needs to know how to feel or what response will drive a scene, they need only look to Rat and Mole. Indeed, the audience's first clue to the excess of Toad is through the weary attitude of Rat and the overwhelmed reaction of Mole. It is, perhaps, one of the downfalls of the adaptation that it never follows through on Mole's story; although the audience is invited to see Mole's growth reach its fruition in the Toad Hall sequence, he and Rat are not allowed a final scene to bookend the story they started. After the successful defeat of the weasels, all attention turns firmly to Toad, and they are merely left to react to him.

It is always Toad who dominates in these adaptations – in nearly every scene, and with considerable aplomb. If Mole and Rat are meant to function as moral and emotional barometers for the audience in these adaptations, Toad doesn't fulfill nearly so intellectual a role; he is there almost solely to be *entertaining.* Both his tragic and comic moments are meant to make the audience smile, perhaps in the knowledge that they acted just as outrageously when they were younger – even if they are still fairly young children. A parent might see glimpses of their eight-year-old in Toad, while the eight-year-old is reminded of their four-year-old sibling. At the same time, Toad makes the viewer feel more mature, and it is here that a major difference in class representation can be recognized.

The 1983 *Willows* opts for a straightforward approach: Toad is ridiculous, primarily because he doesn't think his words or decisions through. The filmmakers take their cue from Milne, emphasizing Toad's careless bragging and lack of empathy. In fact, several pieces of dialogue have been lifted straight from *Toad of Toad Hall,* without any credit to the original author. As in the play, Toad is charged with calling a policeman "Fat Face," but it is also clear – unlike the play – that the audience is supposed to regard Toad as something of a victim. The entire jury has been populated by the same weasels who earlier orchestrated several of Toad's motoring accidents. The owners of the stolen motor car are depicted as upper-class twits with affected lisps. Toad even receives his twentieth year of imprisonment for "being green." Toad makes the wrong decision in stealing the car, but the film seems to imply that his punishment is too harsh, with his major failing being that he gives in to temptation. Later, the sequence with the washerwoman's niece is presented without any irony or post-modern commentary; the winsome young girl with a

lower-class accent – a rare occurrence in this version – takes pity on him and helps him to escape. The siege of Toad Hall is a portrait of Toad's oblivious nature. He swings on a chandelier for effect while his friends do all the work, and he only administers the final blow to the Chief Weasel by accident. Yet it is here that he finally demonstrates a changed nature. "I didn't do anything! You fellows did it all!" he says emphatically to his triumphant friends.

The lesson presented here is that even if the audience doesn't relate to Toad directly, they could easily become him if they aren't aware of their own behavior. Toad is given prominence in the film so that viewers become endeared to him and understand the arc of his character. At the end he has completed his transformation to become like his good-hearted friends, and therefore "like" the audience. Those who are "not-like," such as the various snobby humans, have reduced roles or are omitted from the film entirely. Partly, this is to emphasize Toad and his accomplishments all the more strongly; the Christmas scene is cut short, and the "Piper at the Gates of Dawn" and "Wayfarers All" episodes are entirely absent (both of the latter would become early episodes of the TV series). The depiction of the weasels, however, demonstrates a less innocent attitude on the part of the film toward the "not-like." The weasels are clearly meant to be working class; alongside regular hisses and snarls, their few lines spoken in broad Cockney accents are nothing like the "proper" accents of Toad and his friends, and their clothes are far removed even from Mole's modest suits. The Chief Weasel boasts a leather vest, studded leather bracelet, spotted neckerchief and a single earring. He resembles the early 1980s stereotype of a young punk in his teens or twenties. Another weasel, dressed in a wife beater, blue jeans and a flat cap, resembles a builder or other manual laborer. They

cause Toad to crash a car more than once, and when they invade Toad Hall, the camera

angles and direction misdirect the audience to believe they may have killed Badger. The

implication is clear: lower-class types, especially those who look and sound suspicious,

are not to be trusted. No amount of comedy can hide the disparity between Toad and

these creatures. One is foolish, but the others are outright malicious. The point is driven

home at the end of the film, when Toad takes to the sky in a bi-plane in a moment

seemingly lifted from the Disney adaptation. The plane stalls, drops out of frame, and the

sound of the crash is heard – but almost immediately, under the closing credits, the

audience hears the happy chatter of Toad: "You're just the chap I wanted to see, Ratty –

and you too, Mole! Ha ha ha!" As foolish as Toad may be, it seems, they will continue to

help him because he is good at heart.

The 2006 *Willows* takes a different approach on both fronts. Toad's character is so

exaggerated that there isn't a chance of the audience identifying realistic and imitable

behavior. He is a total figure of fun and an imbecile to boot. Viewers might take pity on

him for his sheer stupidity, but his problems are of his own making and his punishments,

while harsh, follow logically as consequences of his actions. He is utterly blind to his

failings and continuously expects to talk his way out of situations when he really can't.

This is, perhaps, most explicit in his encounters with lower-class characters both during

and after his incarceration, starting with the washerwoman's niece. Unlike the earlier

version, there is a lot of comedy to her character: she has tangled, stringy hair and rotting

teeth, and she openly admits, "I really like rats, me." Her poverty is even accentuated in

her conversation with Toad; after he waffles on and on about Toad Hall, she reveals that

she shares "a room upstairs with my father and six brothers and sisters." ("We can't all be

Toads," Toad condescends.) Yet she is quickly shown to be the smarter of the two

characters. Toad doesn't understand her when she initially outlines her breakout plan, so

she makes the chasm of wealth between Toad and her aunt very clear: "You are very rich,

as you endlessly tell me, and she is very poor." The washerwoman is perhaps even

cleverer than her niece and just as proud as Toad; although he thinks he will trick her into

giving him her clothes for a simple sovereign, she holds out until he increases his offer -

twice. At the same time, though, she is the least couth character in the production, wiping

her nose on her sleeve and spitting into Toad's chamber pot. Later, the barge-woman – a

character absent from the 1983 adaptation – corners Toad in one of his own lies. He is

rapidly shown not only to be incompetent at washing but unable to even hold a bar of

soap without dropping it. All of these scenes are a severe commentary on the uselessness

of Toad and his class; he is (and by extension, others like him are) unable to manage for

himself, relying on those who are born to the lower, poorer classes to do the work and

receive little or no pay simply because of their station. Additionally, Toad assumes the

lower classes to be foolish and easy to trick, which is shown not to be the case – indeed,

he is the foolish one, time and time again. Some of this commentary is present in

Grahame's original text, but the 2006 adaptation gives it an edge by exaggerating both

Toad's stupidity and the coarseness of the characters he encounters.

The end of the film offers the final indictment of the upper class. First, there is the

siege of Toad Hall. In this version, the weasels remain Cockney teenagers and young

men, but they are shown to be play-acting young posers. Most of them are dressed in

odds and ends of clothing and have slicked-back hair, more *Peter Pan*'s Lost Boys than a

vicious gang, and they have converted Toad Hall into a makeshift pirate ship. Yet despite

the ineffectual nature of the weasels, Toad is barely able to fend them off, while Rat is lost in his own world of Douglas Fairbanks-style fencing moves. The vast majority of weasels are dispatched by Mole (mostly by accident) and Badger (entirely by design). Although all four friends celebrate their victory together, Toad – as in the book – wants to hold a party with a speech and a song. His friends talk him into a calmer afternoon tea without any grandiose displays, and at first, it seems as if he might be a changed character. This time, when Toad walks away on his own from the party, he witnesses a bi-plane flying overhead. Struck by a new mania, he runs back to the party, narrowly avoiding guests as he pretends to be a plane in flight. Eventually, he climbs astride a table and belts out the final verse of his song, returned once more to the full glory of his idiotic ways. Startlingly, however, his friends don't rally round, and it is here that the cultural shift in attitudes toward Toad's upper-class tomfoolery is most transparent. Rat, Mole, and Badger give each other disgusted expressions and, in one choreographed move, set their drinks down and walk away. They are done trying to save Mr. Toad from himself – and he doesn't even notice them go.

In the end, everything seems to come back to Toad, and it seems likely that if audiences are still discovering *The Wind in the Willows* centuries from now, it will be through media that puts Toad at the forefront of any abridgement, adaptation, or re-interpretation of the story. His comic adventures are universally appealing because they relate strongly to a reader or viewer's inner child, gleefully breaking rules and prioritizing fun at all costs. This element, along with the idealized British setting, offers a light, storybook adventure that is simultaneously appealing to genuine children and a welcome escape for nostalgic adults. With each passing generation, however, the more subtle class

commentary offered by Toad and his relationships with his friends becomes increasingly pronounced, and adaptations must change to address it. It is no longer socially acceptable to present the Edwardian values of *The Wind in the Willows* as "the way things should be," so some mechanism must be employed to acknowledge and exaggerate the ridiculousness of their inequality well beyond Kenneth Grahame's original intention.

That mechanism is Toad: Toad the boastful, Toad the entitled, Toad the eternal child. As long as there is comedy to be found not just in Toad's adventures, but in his manners, he will persevere within the culture. It will be interesting to see how *The Wind in the Willows* will continue to be adapted now, over a century after its original publication, but one thing is very sure: no character will be more prevalent, no performance more attention-grabbing no personality more hogging the limelight than the incomparable Mr. Toad.

CHAPTER III

THE WHITE KNIGHT IS TALKING BACKWARDS: WHEN ADAPTATIONS OF

LEWIS CARROLL'S ALICE BOOKS GO WEIRD

The preceding chapters have examined two separate methods by which an

adapted story can veer away from its authored source. The first, as exemplified by

adaptations of "The Snow Queen," demonstrates a belief – intentional or otherwise – that

an expected type of story can be more important to the audience than the actual original

content. Adaptations of *The Wind in the Willows*, on the other hand, eschew

categorization of the plot to focus on a specific, familiar character and his exploits. In

both cases, the adaptations are the victim of a streamlining process: complexity of

narrative or focus is discarded to provide viewers with an easily digestible entertainment.

Such streamlining, however, can only occur if the story offers some element with which

the audience can quickly identify or relate. "The Snow Queen," at its most basic, is a

quest story, with an identifiable goal that the protagonist succeeds in obtaining. *The Wind

in the Willows* has an amusing character everyone will recognize as someone they have

either known or been. What happens, though, when a story rejects easy cultural

shorthand? What happens when a story is so strongly *disassociated* from relatability or

easy identification that it is viewed as wholly iconoclastic?

Throughout his life, the Reverend Charles Lutwidge Dodgson – better known as

author Lewis Carroll – enjoyed playing with the familiar phrases, images and cultural

references of his time in his writing. His letters and stories routinely satirize aspects of

Victoriana to entertain his audience: the result is sometimes amusing, sometimes

melancholy, and sometimes purely symbolic.[1] This ability to look at and reinterpret the world in a slightly skewed way is never showcased better than in his two children's books, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*, and since their publication in the mid-1800s, they have been known as examples of quirky nonsense and abstract logic *par excellence.*

What happens, though, when the basis of nonsense is rendered insensible by age? Dodgson's stories originally functioned by turning the familiar on its head and making light of serious, recognizable systems within the Victorian world, but that relevance is lost upon the modern child reader. There is not much with which Alice and her adventures can be compared in modern life: aside from Alice's basic curiosity, there is little to relate to in the stories, with few sympathetic characters and almost no familiar situations. Today, it seems likely that a child's own personality will dictate whether or not they enjoy the fantastical lunacy of the Alice books more than anything else. The Alice stories have simply lost their original meaning, and as a result, child readers are left to accept them – or reject them – totally at face value.

If children no longer understand the Alice books' original meaning, then, they must have remained culturally relevant for another reason. Perhaps, it might be assumed, they are representative of a popular subset of literature. Jan Susina argues in his work, *The Place of Lewis Carroll in Children's Literature,* that the Alice books are clear examples of a specific sub-genre: the Victorian literary fairy tale. Susina believes that the

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[1] Although scholars have debated the extent to which the Alice books' characters are based on figures from Dodgson's own life, many have successfully proven that individual elements and dialogue are satirical takes on Victorian politics, the educational system, popular songs and poems, and even advertising slogans. Martin Gardner's career-spanning work *The Annotated Alice* documents dozens of these references and explains their provenance.

Alice stories "should be read as . . . Victorian literary fairy [tales] for children" because

of the author's familiarity with and regular reference to his work as that type of story.

Susina says that "placing [Carroll's] text within a literary and cultural context, as well as

suggesting the way in which the book was received by its initial audience, enhances an

understanding of its place within children's literature" (26-27). However, Victorian

literary fairy tales are no longer commonly read by children and have been totally

forgotten by mainstream Western culture. The average consumer today is *totally* unaware

of Charles Kingsley's *The Water Babies*, George MacDonald's *The Princess and the

Goblin*, and other classics of that sub-genre. While Susina's argument is cogent, without

educating the wider public about these stories, it can really only apply to academics and

enthusiasts. For the mainstream readership, it is much harder to put the Alice books in a

pre-existing sub-category. The books certainly reflect certain characteristics of the quest

novel, the moral-based story, and even the Grimm's fairy tale, along with many other

types of children's fantasy story, but they do not fit easily into any of these pre-existing

boxes. Just as the Alice books have been stripped of their cultural meaning by the

vagaries of time, so have they been isolated from the framework of literature that

spawned them.

Without these cultural connections, readers conceive of the Alice books as more

unusual and unique than they really are, no longer shaped by the literary and social

environments in which they were generated but seemingly devised without precedent or

predecessor. This approach creates an awkward assumption: it suggests that the Alice

books exist in a vacuum. Depriving the stories of their cultural history robs the Alice

books of any anchor. Although a few general concepts remain relatable – the fear and

imaginative capacity of a young child, the ludicrous logic of lawmakers and

bureaucracies – there is really nothing left in the characters or situations for audiences to

find familiar, except in contrast to other versions of the same story. To most viewers or

readers, a hatter is *the* Hatter. Tweedledee and Tweedledum only exist as denizens of

Looking Glass Land. A Mock Turtle is a concept relating not to gastronomical couture

but to a lonely, sobbing figure on a beach. The iconography is empty and lacks any

deeper meaning, and the Alice books are interpreted wholly by the mainstream audience

as dissociative, idiosyncratic, and most importantly, very, very strange.

While it may be doing Dodgson's original intention a disservice, this thesis would

like to suggest that it is, in fact, the quality of *strangeness* that has kept the Alice stories

alive. Their lack of an easy, objective cultural relevance forces the reader to create

relevancy and make a new meaning; in effect, each reader must interpret the stories at a

very personal level. What one reader finds off-putting and cold another may find

"speaks" so personally to his or her own view of the world as to be unforgettable. This

strangeness is not limited solely to the original texts, and is, perhaps, even emphasized by

the iconography generated by adaptations. Unlike, for instance, "The Snow Queen," even

children who have never read the Alice books are familiar with many of the basics of the

stories. It is that iconography that has been so thoroughly disseminated into Western

culture, and the images and ideas provided to audiences are so striking – so strange – they

inspire the imagination even without an obvious "meaning." Many elements of the stories

have become immediately familiar: the initial scenarios of Alice falling down a rabbit-

hole or climbing through a mirror; many of the colorful characters and their attributes,

including the White Rabbit, the Mad Hatter, the Tweedle brothers and the Cheshire Cat; and the waking-up endings that reveal everything to be a dream. There are even phrases and dialogue from the stories that have entered popular usage, including "Curiouser and curiouser," "Drink me," "Off with her head," and "I try to believe six impossible things before breakfast." There are hundreds of illustrated, condensed, and reinterpreted editions of both books, with more published every year, and a consistent merchandising presence across all kinds of media: films, television series, games, and more, all making use of the familiar iconography.

Yet it is that iconography that is both desired and feared by producers of television adaptations. They clearly want the benefit of the familiar images, but it becomes a real problem if the images do not have a wider meaning that will relate to a broad viewership. *Some* kind of meaning has to be injected into the plot – and as it turns out, very nearly anything will do (or so producers seem to believe). Speaking broadly, there seem to be two solutions favored by producers. One, where an adaptation of the Alice books focuses on making Alice herself "learn something," is seemingly favored by American productions. The 1985 Irwin Allen miniseries features the internal plot device of Alice "growing up" enough to take tea with her mother. The 1999 Harry Harris miniseries casts Alice's adventures as a series of situations in which Alice gains confidence to perform a song at a garden party. Most recently, the 2010 Tim Burton film forces Alice to slay a literal dragon so she can break free of Victorian social codes for women, reject marriage, and take the reins of her father's shipping company. These adaptations want, sometimes desperately, to draw parallels with classic quest stories where a plucky heroine changes and matures across the course of the story. To achieve

this, they have to impose feel-good character growth beyond any ever found in the original Alice books. Alice's goals in both books are selfish, and while both end in nightmarish sequences, she does not demonstrate any significant character growth from her experiences. Unlike Dorothy, the protagonist of L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz,* or Wendy, of J. M. Barrie's *Peter and Wendy,* she never once espouses a desire to return home and is only momentarily put out by adverse circumstances during her adventures. She is a small child, with a small child's feelings – curiosity, annoyance, obstinacy – at both the start and conclusion of each adventure.

The other solution is a little bit different and appears to be favored by British productions. Unlike American adaptations, British films and television productions seem not to worry about whether or not *Alice* fits into an identifiable or moralistic framework. Quite the contrary, in fact: they delight in and are even somewhat defensive of the idiosyncratic nature of their golden contribution to children's literature. They are more than willing to celebrate *Alice* as a series of essential images, a sort of Greatest Hits package that ticks all of the familiar boxes, including characters, phrases, and a general sequence of events. (They are also more likely to preserve the integrity of Carroll's original texts, separating one book's characters from the other, unlike the American adaptations that routinely combine them.) Instead, they tend to find their individuality through a sense of theme: the very act of presentation of the familiar characters and events is what gives each production its meaning, not the introduction of a message or alteration of structure. These adaptations can be seen to go for broke in that they rely not just on audience familiarity but on audience willingness to follow this classic story

wherever it cares to take them. Often, these adaptations are willing to sacrifice whole chunks of Carroll's dialogue, emotional involvement from the audience, and sometimes, even logical consistency from one scene to the other. Most divisively, they tend to be quite strange. They are knowingly, consciously, aggrandizingly *weird*, and – like the actual stories – leave the audience member to at least something of his or her own interpretation.

Intriguingly, Dodgson himself may be at the heart of this take on the material. Charles C. Lovett's work *Alice on Stage: A History of the Early Theatrical Productions of Alice in Wonderland* discusses many of the avenues Dodgson followed in his attempts to get his stories dramatized. He saw the Alice books' popularity – then, of course, in its infancy – as a positive sign of the stories' success, never once considering how commercialization might, in divorcing his stories from their original prose, flatten them into simple entertainment shows of sound and light. Despite his own prejudices against certain aspects of secular society, Dodgson had a lifelong fascination with writing, music, and the arts, and he clearly enjoyed how the Alice books made him into a literary figure of some stature. Almost immediately after the publication of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, he began to seek other ways to expand the popularity of his new work, although many of his ideas did not find purchase for more than twenty years. One of his earliest ambitions was to bring the Alice books to the stage, a goal he attempted to achieve through a variety of means (often initiated by his constant and rather hectoring letter-writing campaigns). His initial idea, in 1867, was to interest theatrical producers in

an Alice pantomime (Lovett 20-21), but he abandoned this plan after some amount of negative response. In 1872, he registered the dialogue from both books as dramas, attempting surety against copyright infringement until he could find the appropriate outlet for Alice on the stage (Lovett 22). Shortly thereafter, he began to actively court theatrical productions of his stories, and in 1877, he even sought to engage Arthur Sullivan, the famed operetta composer, to create a series of *Alice* songs for use in a "future production" (Lovett 27-31). All of Dodgson's attempts failed until he received a request from dramatist Henry Savile Clarke to produce what became a "dream-play," featuring two acts of characters and conversations from the two Alice books punctuated by comic songs. Although many of his own endless suggestions for the production were ignored by Savile Clarke, Dodgson threw himself into enthusiastic support for the venture and became friends with several child performers in the cast.

The "dream-play" was popular, running from 1886 to 1889, with revivals up to 1930. It is evident from several contemporary reviews, however, as well as Savile Clarke's original script, that the production was thin and lacking in substance, often consisting of little more than fleeting glimpses of popular characters before they sang an unrelated song and wandered off-stage again. (The White Knight, for instance, has an astonishing *two lines* of dialogue.) The term "dream-play," then, takes on an ironic meaning: not a qualitative "dream of a play" but quite literally the "play of a dream," a dozy, half-remembered memory of a child's favorite moments from the original books. The play isn't a drama or even a pantomime in its own right; it's just a flashy reminder of stories the audience already knows too well. Here, then, the British *Alice* adaptation may find its origin.

What is curious about the phenomenon of the 1886 "dream-play" is that,
generally speaking, it is what the original author wanted: a commercial, theatrical
entertainment that reminded its audience of how much they enjoyed the books (and,
doubtless, that they should buy additional copies for the nursery). An avid follower of the
theatre, Dodgson would have had a clear, if somewhat prudish, understanding of the
elements of a good show, and looking at *Alice* from that perspective reveals an interesting
truth: structurally, the stories are "better" pantomimes than they are novels. Famously,
neither *Alice* book has much in the way of a plot; they are disjointed, episodic, often
totally nonsensical, and as previously stated, Alice never "learns" anything from her
experiences. For many child readers, the lack of plot or emotional characterization is
irrelevant because they enjoy the strange characters, fun wordplay and imaginative
situations. Sometimes the events in the stories are funny, sometimes they're a little bit
scary, and Alice never stays in any one scenario for too long. That sounds exactly like a
pantomime: a free-wheeling family entertainment with comedy, songs, familiar
references and tropes, wordplay, and even familiar characters from fairy tales.[2] Whether
or not Dodgson intended such similarities, he certainly recognized them in his own work
and was quick to exploit their commercial appeal.

No matter his intention, however, Dodgson may have helped doom his literary
work to the ivory tower where it now resides. The "dream-play" clearly indicated both

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[2] Pantomimes are traditionally performed in Great Britain at Christmas, providing a family entertainment
outing during the festive season. They are usually based loosely around a familiar fairy or folk tale, such as
"Cinderella" or "Jack and the Beanstalk," with stock characters children will easily recognize. Plots are
loose and easily restructured to accommodate comedy sequences, song parodies, and celebrity cameos,
and audience participation is often encouraged (including the famous audience responses of "Behind
you!" and "Oh *no* it isn't!").

the path that future Alice adaptations would take, as well as many of the obstacles they would often fail to overcome, both on stage and well beyond. Since then, cinema and television have totally taken over from theatrics as a mainstream entertainment, but some of the legacy of those early stage versions remains: in either British or American adaptations, there is a propensity to cram in as many of those familiar images as possible, even when it stretches the boundaries of speed, taste or credulity to do so.

Up to the middle of the 20th century, adaptations appeared content to present an abbreviated "light and sound show" that trotted out Alice characters and incidents like models from a fashion collection.[3] It is Disney that shifted the goalpost, though not in the way Walt Disney probably ever intended. In a 1946 interview, he claimed that the story "fascinated [him] the first time [he] read it . . . and as soon as [he] possibly could . . . [he] acquired the film rights to do it" (Sibley 143); whether that claim is truthful or mere promotional propaganda, it appears certain that he was developing *Alice* by the early 1930s, only to be put off by the Paramount picture, which he disliked intensely. According to historian Brian Sibley, pre-production on Disney's *Alice* formally began in 1938, but the resultant picture did not emerge until 1951 (145-47). Walt Disney himself dismissed many of his writers' early ideas, saying "the book is funnier than the way you guys have got it" (Sibley 149), and even considered a film version that would have combined animation and live action during World War II (Sibley 156-57). In the end, the final picture was a critical, financial and personal disappointment. Leonard Maltin's *The*

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[3] The single-reel *Alice in Wonderland* (1903), the earliest known film adaptation, presents characters and situations from the first book with minimal intertitles and no attempt at a plot, implying that the creators anticipated the foreknowledge of their audience. The first talkie, Paramount's all-star *Alice in Wonderland* (1933), blazes through almost the full contents of both books in a scant 90 minutes, including a three-minute opening sequence designed solely to show off the cast and the roles in which they are so heavily costumed that most can't be recognized.

Disney Films quotes animator Ward Kimball, who says the film "degenerated into a loud-mouthed vaudeville show . . . [that] lacks warmth" (103). Michael Barrier's *The Animated Man: A Life of Walt Disney* quotes animator Frank Thomas and Walt Disney himself, documenting the long gestation of the project and dissatisfaction with the result. Ultimately, the budget ballooned to over three million dollars, and after the 1951 theatrical release, Disney "wrote off a million-dollar loss" (229-30). In 1954, Walt Disney attempted to ameliorate his expenditure by making it the first of his animated features to broadcast on television (Maltin 104).

Disney changed the landscape of Alice adaptations not by succeeding but by creating a very memorable failure – so memorable, in fact, that it persisted. According to Maltin, the film was rediscovered as part of the drug culture of the 1960s and '70s, and becoming popular via 16mm rental before it was withdrawn and finally rereleased theatrically in 1974. Disney continued merchandising the film, and today it enjoys an enormous presence as one of the products of the Disney golden age, penetrating video game, toy, and collectible markets, along with solid visibility at all of Disney's worldwide theme parks. Despite all of this, the actual *Alice in Wonderland* film is rarely regarded as one of Disney's great successes; it isn't one of their top tier sellers, and it never commands the respect of the any of the other Disney features from the 1950s (*Cinderella*, *Peter Pan*, *Lady and the Tramp*, and *Sleeping Beauty*).. The result is a strange extension of the same phenomenon from Dodgson's own lifetime: it's not the story that is well-known, it's the *images* - only this time, the images have a bright, colorful Disney gloss.

The familiarity of those Disney images tends to blend with the original John Tenniel illustrations to create surprisingly familiar combinations that casual fans may be surprised not to find in the actual books. Although Alice is clearly blonde in the Tenniel drawings, the distinct yellow hair/blue dress motif is a Disney invention that now functions as cultural shorthand for the character of "Alice." The White Rabbit is often given an over-sized pocketwatch, and the Cheshire Cat is frequently striped in outlandish colors. Although it is amusing to note the level at which Disney has influenced audience interpretations of these characters, the same issue remains from earlier approaches: these are just images, and although they are fun and visually interesting, they have no deeper meaning or symbolism. What is more interesting to observe with the prevalence of the Disney images is the way they force later adaptations to make a choice.

American adaptations tend to be trapped in their desire for the Alice stories to be something they are not. In this case, it's not even like "The Snow Queen," needing to follow the structure of a traditional, Grimm's fairy tale; here, the only requirement is that an Alice adaptation be suitable, Disney-like entertainment for children. This is surely what forces the imposition of heavy morals and developing characterization upon the stories. British adaptations, on the other hand, simply fly to the other extreme; they want to resist the dominant Disney association as much as possible, perhaps in part because of national pride. They are seldom aimed directly at children and, as in the case of the 1966 BBC *Alice in Wonderland*, may be intended for a different audience entirely.

The 1966 *Wonderland*, directed by Jonathan Miller, assumes familiarity with the text to the point of exclusion. An already brief film at 65 minutes, Miller's *Alice* disposes of most of Carroll's dialogue, yet it expects audiences to continue following the plot

through long, disassociated sequences that belong more in a nightmare than a child's fantasy. Dialogue occurs in short bursts or is whispered as Alice's internal monologue, and only three sequences – the Mad Tea Party, the Mock Turtle's Story, and the Trial of the Knave of Hearts – come close to being "traditional" interpretations of the book's scenes. There are no fantastical costumes, with well-regarded actors of the day suggesting characters through attitude and language alone: the White Rabbit, for instance, is nervous and shrill; the Mock Turtle and Gryphon are old men with grand voices for oratory; the Caterpillar is a fussy public school master or don. The film depends on the associations informed adults would make between these figures and the characters of Carroll's text. A casual viewer – and most especially, a *child* viewer – wouldn't even know where to begin.

In his book, *Alice's Adventures: Lewis Carroll in Popular Culture*, scholar Will Brooker examines six adaptations of *Alice* from across the world. Of the Miller adaptation, he says, "Miller's film seems quite clearly to be exploring the reading of Alice as a fable of growing up, with Alice passing through and engaging with the customs of the adult world on her route to maturity" (209). Brooker is correct to focus on Alice's engagement with the adult world as the eponymous *Wonderland*, but whether she matures or not is debatable. Anne-Marie Malik's stoic interpretation of Alice almost never smiles and speaks in blunt, sharp tones, leaving the audience to interpret her emotional growth – if there is any – for themselves. Malik's Alice appears always to be escaping something unknown, running from room to room of the abandoned building and grounds where most of the film is set, and although the audience is often privy to her thoughts, they are delivered in the same cold, expressionless tones as her speech. One

rare glimpse of emotion comes at the very end of the film, when Alice awakes from her dream and looks straight into the camera with the slightest hint of worry. What is she trying to indicate to the viewer? Is it wistfulness? Is it fear? Miller never gives an answer. Only the Indian-tinged music of Ravi Shankar, which runs throughout the entire production, may give the viewer some indication of an emotional climax.

The Miller film is intriguing – even haunting – but it is rarely "fun" and could only be called an entertainment in the loosest possible sense. Miller's intent seems to have been to work actively against the dominant interpretation of a light, child-friendly story. In his DVD commentary, recorded more than 30 years after the original production, Miller reveals that he found the animated Disney film "absurd" and wanted to make an *Alice* without "the japing fun and games which people have always introduced into the productions." Explaining further, he suggests that "like many children, [he] was slightly disturbed, disconcerted, and even frightened by [the Alice books] when [he] was young, and [he] . . . was struck by the strange melancholy of it and also by, of course, the brilliance with which Lewis Carroll captures the quality of dreaming." He also describes a "strange lingering sadness about the work." These are not typical phrases used in conjunction with the *Alice* stories; rarer still are they to be found in discussions of an Alice adaptation. Miller has introduced his own interpretation of the story through his depiction of theme – the Victorian child's encounter with the frightening and disorienting adult world - but he has left it up to the viewer to decide what his melancholy, fragmented dream-world *means*, and whether or not that reflects back on the original text.

Another dream-world is to be found in John Henderson's *Alice Through the Looking Glass*, produced for Channel 4 in 1998. Unlike Miller's film, which was

intended for a specific strand of adult drama programming on the middle-class BBC, Henderson's *Alice* found worldwide commercial distribution and clearly desires a wider audience. In some regards, the film might even be the antithesis of Miller's; it is full of bright bursts of color and golden outdoor locations, zany costumes, and a constant score of "dreamy" music that seems to emphasize fantasy, magic, and a spirit of playfulness. The adaptation zips from one scenario to the other, showcasing familiar celebrities in what amount to glorified cameos. In 85 minutes, there is even time to include "The Wasp in the Wig," a sequence Carroll cut from the original *Looking Glass* manuscript.

Alternatively, Henderson's film may be seen to attempt a modern variation on Miller's theme of dreaming. It is detached and frenetic enough that, despite the assurance of various elements that the production is intended for families, small children might well find this *Alice* scary. Sometimes, the weirdness is quite literal – the goat and the horse on the train carriage have become *actual* animals – but on other occasions, it seems deliberately disorienting. Alice's costume and hairstyle change with each major scene, in subtle enough variations that a casual viewer might not even notice. Certain characters, such as the Gnat, appear first as puppets; in one moment, Alice will be talking to a two-foot papier-mâché model, and in the next, it's suddenly become celebrity comedian Steve Coogan (complete with zany "antennae" moustaches). The Tweedle brothers, whose design appears to have been loosely based on Malcolm McDowell's protagonist in *A Clockwork Orange*, don't sing or even attempt to keep a meter on the famous "Walrus and the Carpenter" poem. They just *say* the words, as if telling an off-handed anecdote, while the visuals spasmodically cut between real animals, puppet models, actors, and grainy, 8mm-style "home movie" footage. It is, truly, an exhausting 85 minutes.

What condemns the Henderson film, however, is not its attempts to do too much, but its lack of cohesion around any particular theme. Looking Glass land is dream-like…why? The framework of the production gives the audience a very literal reason, setting up the adventure as a bedtime story told by a Kate Beckinsale's grown-up Alice to her daughter. Various toys and books line the room that will clearly inspire the dream (a trick seen in many an *Alice* adaptation). Alice goes through the looking glass at her daughter's behest, and it is only at the end of the film that the audience learns she fell asleep telling the story. While that attempts to give some "reason" to the disorder exhibited in Looking Glass Land, however, it doesn't do much to salvage the film's intent. Like so many other adaptations, it just boils down to a light and sound show that will only be entertaining to those who already know the story well (or, perhaps, those who like very surreal television). It exists to contrast any more traditional adaptation, but it doesn't give viewers any explanation as to why they should actually care. To use a Carrollian term, the Henderson film does not "say what it means," it only "means what it says." By clearly wearing its prejudices on its sleeve, the 1966 Miller adaptation – even if it is stifling, slow, and more of a lecture than a drama – is clearly the more effective of the two productions.

In the end, although the loss of its cultural mooring appears to leave *Alice* bereft of significance, its altered status as the most idiosyncratic and interpretable of stories may make it the ultimate source for adaptation. Brooker puts it well when he suggests that "the many faces of Alice . . . only make her more fascinating and vibrant. [They] seem to channel a broader way of seeing and responding to the book and its central character" (201-02). Quite aside from personal taste, the two British adaptations examined in this

chapter are just as valid as the Disney film or any other more or less dominant version. *Alice* has already taken the first few steps away from the strictures of the authored story and into the realm of pure iconography, and while it may not provide audiences with the morality of classic oral stories, it does provide a toolbox through which inventive storytellers can create infinite new possibilities in infinite combinations. Through its selection of familiar but disassociated images, *Alice* offers cultures across the world and multiple generations a rare opportunity to invest their own meaning on a classic work. It does not matter that the images, in and of themselves, no longer mean anything; what matters is only that they *can* mean something, and that cultures have a way to interpret them that reflects their own needs and concerns.

CONCLUSION

HUNTING THE SNARK: WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN AND WHERE DO WE GO
NEXT?

As we have seen, there is no singular method by which British television
adaptations choose to bring classic children's stories to the screen. What can be
determined is a series of patterns that loosely indicate the issues such adaptations have
and will continue to have in the future. British adaptations tend to stand in competition
with more dominant, Americanized adaptations, often created by the Walt Disney
Company and the culture it has inspired. How they choose to position themselves is
frequently the result of a decision to reject a "Disneyfied" style in favor of one that is, if
not actually more authentic to the original story, certainly more European in appeal.
However, in recent years, adaptations have begun to include certain aspects of
Disneyfication, doubtless in an attempt to make their products more marketable to a
worldwide media audience. It remains to be seen if the increasing globalization of media
renders a separatist stance untenable and forces British and other minority adaptations to
become ever more increasingly homogenous in style.

With that said, it is perhaps all the more intriguing how much of a holdout the
British have been to their traditions of adaptation. Despite the generational gap present in
all three of the adaptation pairs considered in this thesis, there are certain qualities that
appear to be demonstrably consistent in how the British perceive and dramatize each of
these stories. Whether these qualities were developed independently or in response to a
more Americanized perspective the British find distasteful is largely unknown; after all,
in many cases, American film adaptations got there first. However, examining the British

cultural history of these stories, including stage adaptations, certainly suggests that the British may have been "doing their own thing" all along. Any future work on this topic might wish to delve deeper into the actual psychology of the British entertainment industry, both in terms of its relationship to American media post-World War II and the agendas of its individual outlets (the BBC, ITV, and Channel 4). Additionally, it could be useful to examine any existing documentation maintained for relevant productions by the individual companies, to get some indication of the intentions of the program creators.

As may be ascertained, what has made this thesis so hard to investigate is the lack of pre-existing study in the area – going well beyond the issue of specifically *British* adaptations, in fact. Adaptations of any kind are rarely considered within academic English works or scholarly journals, and when they are, they tend to warrant only a few lines of text; Disney adaptations are the notable exception, but even they are rarely considered within the context of adapted work, and any analytical insight is typically completely divorced from discussion of the original text. Furthermore, film and pop culture studies tend to only examine adaptations as part of a director's or writer's oeuvre, where – once again – they are often given relatively short shrift because of what they represent: independent, single works within a career that do not count as wholly original creations. Like the hunt for Lewis Carroll's eponymous Snark, then, the best way to proceed can be a little unclear. The researcher is left to form some independent theories about these adaptations and how they relate to their sources, follow the clues as far as can be managed, draw some inferences, and either stake a claim or recede quietly into the background. All good academia is based on taking such positions, but for the beginning

scholar, the need to make a stand without backup is more than a little daunting. One must put faith in the idea that one has actually found a legitimate Snark.

With so little existing material to draw from, then, the chapters of this thesis have only just begun to consider the literature of adaptations. Although the examples given have attempted to show a range of the productions that have been made and identify their relationship with the stories on which they are based, there is a much more extensive study that could – and should – be made of this exciting, frustrating, ever-expanding area. In identifying and briefly examining British adaptations of classic children's works, this thesis has attempted to utilize a very small specimen to represent a greater whole, and to suggest that when we only consider the most popular or well-marketed of these products, we are not only dismissing a huge number of creative and potentially artistic works, we are denigrating the future of the stories themselves. Too often, adaptations are seen as unfortunate byproducts of commercialization or the simplistic result of pop culture trends and interests; instead, the preceding chapters have attempted to view them through a more inclusive, sociocultural lens, examining their development from the original works, identifying societal needs for changes and alterations, and giving some broad indication of the path each story seems to be following as it evolves. Although the adaptation can never be fully divorced from its source, we as students and academics can continue learn more about the essential qualities of classic texts by appreciating and analyzing such reinterpretations; they form a viable, intriguing, necessary sub-genre of literature.

Of course, this thesis has only been able to brush the tip of the iceberg. Each of the three stories considered here could easily benefit from an individual study of its own – more, if the restriction of specifically British adaptations was removed. (Although

British adaptations are a fascinating starting point, adaptations become wilder, woolier, and excitedly non-American the farther you go: this author has seen some truly jaw-dropping television productions of the stories examined here from Russia, Japan, France, Brazil, and the former Czechoslovakia.) Including cinema films would cast the net still wider. *Alice*, which is edging toward one hundred documented film and TV adaptations, could generate a hefty volume indeed. The others, while perhaps more manageable, still offer their own share of patterns to be found in adaptations numbering well into the double digits. While in the eyes of the purist, many of these adaptations may fall simply into categories of "good," "bad," or "ugly," they each have an individual take on the original work that reflects the time, culture, and circumstances in which they were made. No one is just like any other, but they are all related.

A natural next step would be to consider other source stories that fit the same established criteria. Of these, a handful come immediately to mind: *Treasure Island*, *The Borrowers, Mary Poppins, The Jungle Book*, *A Little Princess*, and *The Secret Garden* all have a varied and extensive history of adaptation that would be fascinating to examine, and once again, that's just taking into consideration properties from Great Britain. Extending both sides of the analytical lens to the rest of the Western world would quickly offer up *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, *Tom Sawyer*, *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, *Pippi Longstocking* and others. While it is unreasonable to assume that a single academic would be able to cover every major work, there is opportunity rife for exploration here by interested writers from across multiple disciplines. A small book series, similar in scope to some critical and analytical treatments of seminal musical works, would be an excellent eventual goal in which to direct further, more comprehensive studies.

And why stop at films and television? As media marches on, adaptations will continue to broaden in horizon. There are video games and virtual museums based on *Alice*, as well as a recent interactive iPad book, none of which are fully representative of the original text but all clearly inspired by it. *The Wind in the Willows* is set to become a major 3D animated movie, which will doubtless set off websites, mobile applications and toy lines. "The Snow Queen" has even found itself inspiring part of two modern fantasy series, both of which sit in opposition to each other and look set to entertain and confound both readers and scholars for decades – perhaps centuries – to come. As long as a story has any sort of relevancy within our culture, its adaptations will never cease. It will just keep on adapting, changing its colors to fit new surroundings. And that's all to the good if we want stories to survive – isn't it?

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