

**To Adapt or Not to Adapt? – Writers and
Writing across Prose Fiction, Theatre, and
Film 1823-1938**

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work. It has not been submitted for the award of a higher degree elsewhere.

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Acknowledgements

I have often described my PhD process as a rollercoaster ride, experiencing both highs and lows, and although it can be very isolating, there have been many people who have helped me through my journey both academically and personally.

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the engagement of prominent British literary writers in adaptations of their works to theatre and film between 1823 and 1938 to understand how unregulated adaptations, new media, media rivalries, the variable position of writers within and across media, and other social, cultural, economic, and legal contexts within the nineteenth and early twentieth century worked together to create power struggles, binaristic boundaries, and cultural prejudices that both promoted and limited adaptation across media. Using an interdisciplinary, historical, cultural, and analytical approach, this thesis traces continuities and changes between theatrical adaptation of prose fiction in the nineteenth century and film adaptation of both prose and plays in the early twentieth century, focusing particularly on how literary writers adapted themselves and their writing to shifting media contexts, both over time and across media within the same period.

This thesis argues that dramatic adaptation practices in the nineteenth century, themselves shaped by cultural and socioeconomic contexts, shaped literary writers' engagement with early film adaptation practices. Whilst rivalries between writers and media were fuelled by medium specificity theories and Romantic theories of originality spurned adaptation, this thesis finds that some literary writers challenged hierarchies of adaptation through presenting adaptations as originals (and vice versa), while others defied medium specificity through experimental, hybrid, cross-media writing whose dismissal precluded promising intermedial collaborations and aesthetic innovations in film. The historical analysis of polyvocal dialogues thus informs critical and theoretical debates on writing, authorship, and adaptation.

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Introduction

In 1946, four years before his death in 1950, George Bernard Shaw, one of the most influential and celebrated playwrights and critics of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, declared: “Do not treat my printed text with blindly superstitious reverence. It must always be adapted intelligently to the studio, the screen, the stage, or whatever the physical conditions of performance may be” (*Letters* 780). Shaw’s insistence that his writing not only could, but also “must always be adapted” for representation by other media demonstrates not only an openness to writing across media, but also the notion that other media and arts could inform and mould his written works. Yet, the attitude Shaw displayed here regarding the adaptation of his works was by no means representative of his views generally, or even a decade earlier, nor was it representative of other writers at the time. This thesis investigates not only the writers writing within and between prose, theatre, and film in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but also the media, social, and cultural contexts that informed and shaped such writing. Adaptation is central to this study, since it highlights and intensifies both formal and cultural relations between these media, as well as raising questions regarding authorial ownership and literary originality. This historical study, contextualising literary writers writing about adaptation, as well as writing adaptations themselves, therefore, informs new critical debates on writing, authorship, film, and adaptation.

This thesis considers the engagement of renowned British authors in adaptations of their work to another medium between 1823 and 1938. These engagements vary: sometimes they write the adaptations themselves; sometimes they serve as consulting authority; sometimes they become opponents and critics of adaptations of their

literary writing. While my thesis is predominantly focused on writers' relationships with early film, and I did not originally intend to address adaptation from prose fiction to theatre, I found that it was impossible to understand film adaptation practices from 1895 to 1938 without some examination of the earlier modes of adaptation that so clearly fed into them, particularly adaptations of prose fiction to theatre in the nineteenth century. Indeed, my research finds that literary authors' understanding of film as a medium and of early literary film adaptation in the earliest years of film derived largely from prior discourses and practices of theatre and theatrical adaptation, not directly from the novel, as so many critics have argued.¹ The fruits of studying this time period, and doing so chronologically, lie not only in the highly charged debates over intermedial relations that unfolded in these years, but also in tracing the social, legal, and cultural evolution and progress, as well as the backward regressive glances of writing across media in these years.²

The principal focus of this thesis offers new insights into the roles that living authors played in shaping relations between literature, theatre, and film. Tracing not only their imaginative writing but also their critical and autobiographical writings about their experiences with writing across media has allowed me to trace not only the journey of adaptation from one medium into another, but also movements and changes within nineteenth- and twentieth-century culture and society with regard to adaptation, and conflicting attitudes to intermedial relations, in which convergences between media were both sought after and rejected. This thesis argues that despite, and because of, legal and economic obstacles to adaptation, as well as limitations set by media

¹ One of the earliest to propose these ideas was Sergei Eisenstein, see Chapter Five.

² The MLA style (7th edition), used in this thesis, is not a historical referencing system. As this thesis foregrounds historical contexts, dates have been added to both primary and secondary sources when necessary for cultural and historical situating.

industries and academic theories of medium specificity, literary writers were able to develop their writing by innovatively engaging in writing across media.

i. Prior Discourses and Gaps

As I inform my subject matter by situating it historically, I too must historicise my own study, situating it within a wider academic framework. This section of the introduction therefore identifies prior discourses of writers and writing across media in this period, as well as addressing gaps within the history of Literature and Film Studies and Adaptation Studies that my study seeks to fill.

That the figure of the writer is central to literary studies is needless to say. Yet, whereas in literary studies of this period the writer was considered to be the creative authorial force, this concept did not often carry over to the writer in film (Corrigan 443). In the context of Hollywood cinema, Steven Price has pointed out that “the very notion of authorship itself is questionable” (*Authorship* x). The reason for this, my chapters reveal, can be traced back to the beginnings of film, when writing was not necessarily foundational to film, and has remained secondary within film, ranked lower than technical contributions such as camera and editing.

Graham Murdock points to cinema’s silent origin as the reason behind the “virtual eclipse of the writer as a significant figure” (24).³ While following the period addressed in this thesis, the director was cast as akin to the literary author in *la politique des auteurs*, established by the French Critics of the Cahiers du Cinéma in

³ My chapters on early film history also confirm these notions. My study of silent screenwriting manuals particularly highlights that writing for the screen was underestimated in the professional filmmaking process as well, represented as not requiring much technical or artistic knowledge (see Chapter Three).

the 1950s, this theory proved detrimental to the role of the film writer and the study of writing for film, as it changed prior perceptions of film authorship by claiming that the director in most cases is the single most significant source of creativity as well as the utmost governing perceptible artist to a film (see Caughie 9-15). Thus, the (screen-)writer, who had previously at least been nominally regarded as the author of the film, was further obscured and displaced along with his or her writing (see K. Elliott 79-86). While scholars such as Steven Price have worked to restore the centrality of the screenwriter to the history and theory of cinema generally, Simone Murray has argued that the screenwriter's inclusion is crucial to adaptation scholarship more specifically, because it is through the figure of the screenwriter that the literary and filmic spheres are most closely linked (133). Yet, despite the centrality which the screenwriter should have had in the history and theory of Adaptation Studies, most scholarly and popular critics have overlooked writers and favoured comparative textual studies of adapted and adapting works that marginalise or occlude any consideration of writers and writing at all. Murray argues that the screenplay needs to be given its due attention in Adaptation studies, as the fundamental textual link between novel and screened film, by pointing out that screenwriting scholars are lamenting its position as "the forgotten intertext between the (often esteemed) novel and the (more widely known) screen adaptation" (153). Yet here too the focus lies on texts rather than authors and writers. Only in recent years have efforts been made to redress this neglect through works that have specifically addressed the history, theory and practices of the screenwriter and the screenplay.⁴

⁴ See, for example, Price; Kevin Alexander Boon; Jill Nelmes; Steven Maras; Kathryn Millard; Andrew Horton and Julian Hoxter (eds.). Jamie Sherry has recently addressed this neglect specifically with regard to Adaptation Studies.

Previous studies that have paid attention to the role of the writer within adaptation have been focused on the literary writer, rather than the stage or film adapter, and these accounts have often been limited in their interdisciplinarity by their biographical approach. Biographical accounts of authorial writing for other media frame them individually and chronologically, usually without setting them in dialogue with other similar encounters later or earlier in authors lives, and without contextualising them with regard to other contemporary authors and their experiences. My thesis seeks to redress this single-author focus by treating a variety of authors and setting their writings in dialogue with each other. My research finds that there were many interconnections between writers, as the majority of the writers discussed in it became part of the Society of Authors (formed in 1884). They also engaged in joined writing ventures, as when, for example Arthur Conan Doyle helped J.M. Barrie by writing the opera *Jane Annie* in 1893.⁵ Other collaborations and relationships between writers have been documented much more prominently in recent critical work, for example, the relationship between Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens has been studied by Lillian Nayder and, also, Richard Pearson (*Victorian Writers* 124-48). Correspondence between writers has also been published, but has generally been buried in edited letter collections and biographies. However, there is an edited collection exclusively featuring letters between G.B. Shaw and H.G. Wells (*Selected Correspondence*). Even here, however, a great deal of research has been required to locate specific exchanges on writing across media.

⁵ Doyle documented the process of this “unfortunate venture” and relayed how Barrie afterward wrote a short parody entitled, “The Adventure of the Two Collaborators,” which Doyle includes in his autobiography (102-5).

Prior research also requires a critical revisiting, since many biographical accounts are hagiographical, and although my research is indebted to them,⁶ biographers tend to side with authors in their contests with adapters over adaptations of their work and, worse still, sometimes they denigrate adapters and adaptations *against the published writings of the authors they address*, as my thesis makes clear. They also tend to value literature and its conventions over other media, even when the authors themselves greatly valued other art forms.⁷ My thesis seeks to redress this by locating these contradictions and, where possible, presenting viewpoints and experiences of writers and adapters in other media.

Unlike hagiographical biographies and adaptation studies revering the original writer, my thesis focuses more on the clash of ideas between literary authors, adapters, directors, producers, reviewers, and academic critics by drawing on biographies, autobiographical writings, works of fiction and non-fiction, industry and media reviews, academic criticism and theory, as well as play- and screenwriting manuals of the period to forge its arguments and analysis. Although these sources are often partial, in both senses of that word, setting them in dialogue with one another presents a more varied and fuller view of writers writing about and into other media than any prior study to date.

Not all studies of literary adaptation are biographically focused; many have been textual in their approach.⁸ Most textual studies, however, focus on the start and end products of adaptation – the before and the after – rather than the process of

⁶ For some authors, biographies had to be the main resource for this study. This is especially the case where primary material, such as letters, have been preserved within the biographies and are not available elsewhere.

⁷ This is exemplified throughout the thesis, most notably in Chapter Two's discussion of Dickens and Chapter Four's study of Barrie.

⁸ The textual approach was seminal to Adaptation Studies, initiated by George Bluestone.

adaptation and the writing between the start and end products. Whether a textual study engages formalist, narratological, political, ethical, or cultural theories of the transposition of a novel to a play or film, or a play to a film, few attend to the adaptation process that lies between them.⁹ The consequences of these intrinsic, textual approaches to adaptation are that adapting and adapted texts are often viewed as integral wholes without any interim stages, while the components that link the two works of art, such as the writer and the intertext, as well as other discourses that mediate between them, such as copyright laws and court cases, are ignored. Yet even when this is not the case, comparing novels, screenplays, and films can still unfold as a purely textual or contextual endeavour, without sufficient focus on the process of adaptation, which includes not only intertexts, but also other engagements between literary authors and playwrights, screenwriters, and theatre and film directors and producers. This thesis seeks to redress these imbalances.

While increased attention has been given to cultural and historical contexts of adaptations in recent years, for example by Deborah Cartmell (*Adaptations in the Sound Era*) and Gueric DeBona, literary authors engaged in writing about or writing actual adaptations of their work for another medium constitute a particularly illuminating middle ground through which to understand the neglected aspect of adaptation processes across media, but have been neglected for reasons discussed further below while other cross-media and contextual discussions of adaptation have flourished. For example, Karen E. Laird has sought to trace adaptation continuities between media practices and forms, while Greg M. Colón Semenza and Bob Hasenfratz have pulled away from paired case studies to trace the influence British

⁹ Sarah Cardwell conceptualises the “adaptation process” in *Adaptation Revisited* (9-29), discussing the various approaches in adaptation theory to date, and championing a non-comparative approach.

literature adaptations had on film historically. Essays within recent edited collections of Adaptation scholarship also demonstrate that increased attention is being paid to adaptation as a place of media convergence (see Grossman and Palmer; Dennis Cutchins *et al.*).

Recently, some scholars have studied historical periods and media to consider adaptation via changing censorship laws and technological innovations that stretched across prose fiction, theatre, and film.¹⁰ But there are further contextual issues to ponder when examining literary writers involved in adaptations of their works: the socioeconomic status of writing and writers was variably linked to the medium in which they wrote, informing and driving debates over adaptation, particularly regarding the legal ownership of literary texts and adaptations, which were fiercely debated in court cases and copyright reforms, which in turn influenced contemporary and later adaptation practices, as my thesis demonstrates.

These kind of writers and writing should have attracted far more attention in Adaptation Studies, yet they have been widely ignored along the way for disciplinary and theoretical reasons. In 1938 Shaw made the controversial statement that “the cinema from the very beginning has been of much greater importance than the theatre” (*Star*, 6 Dec 1938; repeated in Chapter Five). Despite this claim meriting a thesis of its own, its purpose here is to highlight the tensions and controversies between media and disciplines, which have more often been opposed than linked, as

¹⁰ Richard Pearson, in his recent study of Victorian writers and the stage, points out that nineteenth-century adaptation practices undermined the stability of the author-figure, with a lack of legal authorial rights posing difficulties for writers trying to establish their literary identity (124-5). Although the uncertainties regarding ownership of and authorial rights for nineteenth-century adaptations have been recognised, they have not received much critical attention, nor have they been historically traced alongside adaptation practices and writers’ attitudes to film, which my thesis rectifies.

well as to argue that, rather than continue to fuel this feuding dynamic, Adaptation Studies needs to locate more middle ground between disciplines and media to create more interdisciplinary discourses, where mutual connections and processes between media are further explored and shared, rather than producing binary or hierarchical oppositions.

Although interdisciplinarity has been encouraged under Postmodern theory, which sought to balance and depose the hierarchy of literature as the older art form over the upstart film, these new dynamics did not become prominent within the field of Adaptation Studies until the mid-1990s. Imelda Whelehan, alongside Deborah Cartmell, championed the postmodern approach, lamenting the fact that “the field of adaptation has in the past been dominated by scholars working primarily from an ‘English lit.’ perspective” with the result that “cultural assumptions about the relative worth of the literary versus the film medium are still deeply entrenched enough to be likely to influence our approach to adaptation” (*From Text to Screen* 17). Joining established cultural and industry hierarchisation, scholars have tended to favour their own discipline and medium in adaptation discourses at the expense of a multi-disciplinary, pluralist approach.¹¹

These hierarchically-led biases and imbalances within the field and across disciplines persist and further explain the neglect of writing across media during the adaptation process. Scholars who focus on words in adaptation remain predominantly literary-based rather than film-based or interdisciplinary, with film writing also ignored by literary scholars. The tendency of film studies to undermine and neglect words and writing resides in outdated notions of medium specificity theories, where in order to

¹¹ Cardwell argues that the consequence of the belief in literature’s superiority over film has not only affected the “‘content’ of adaptation studies, but also its form” (32).

establish itself as an art, film needed to distance itself from literary devices and forms. Yet despite critical efforts to divorce film from words (discussed, for example, by Kamilla Elliott in 2003), film has been unable to rid itself of words and writing. Discourses on medium specificity pre-date film, of course, and the discourses of differences between the novel and theatre also feed into similar discourses about the novel and film and theatre and film (discussed in Chapter Three, Four, and Five).

From the literary side of the divide, canonical literary authors writing across media violated new theoretical tenets arriving in literary studies in the 1970s and 80s. The reason for this is articulated in one of New Criticism's foundational texts, namely W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley's 1946 essay, "The Intentional Fallacy." Their central claim that "the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a literary work" (468), championed an intrinsic approach to the text that excluded the author completely. Trailblazing the way for Michel Foucault's "author function" (1969), and Roland Barthes defining post-structuralist essay "The Death of the Author" (1968), which put a temporary stop to identifying the author with his text by declaring the literary text as independent from any authorial intent or notion. In terms of an adaptation, the original author is intrinsically linked to it, so the consequence of Barthes's argument that "to give a text an author is to impose a limit on that text," (148) was to ignore the writer while the increasing influence of post-structuralism put a stop to further consideration of the author figure during this time where Adaptation Studies was trying to establish itself alongside other disciplines. James Naremore has pointed out that, "fearful of seeing literature's narrative role usurped by the movies, and under the sway of New Criticism's religious reverence for 'serious art,' these scholars from both film and literature fields typically used adaptation study to shore up literature's crumbling

walls” (46). Due to the ongoing requirement that high art be original and aesthetically pure, New Critics and aesthetic formalists fiercely defended literary texts from adaptation and decreed adaptations unaesthetic and unoriginal due to their hybridity and reliance on prior sources. It is no wonder that so little attention was paid to the film writers who did the adapting, even when they were the so-called “original” literary authors themselves. Despite the centrality of the text under New Criticism, the writer was still lost between the texts of the novel and the finished film, and his or her study was left instead to biographical or historical scholars. And when Adaptation Studies eventually turned toward intertextuality at the turn of the century, championed, for example, by Naremore, Thomas Leitch, and Robert Stam, scholars did not consider the screenplay as intertext nor the writer practices involved in the adaptation process. Postmodern cultural studies, pioneered by scholars such as Cartmell and Whelehan, were suspicious of the authoritative literary author, leading to his or her critical neglect under those purviews.

For these and other reasons, within Adaptation Studies, the figure of the literary writer involved with the adaptation process of his or her works remains understudied and deserves further consideration. Despite this neglect, this study responds to calls from prior scholars such as Christa Albrecht-Crane and Dennis Cutchins, who have championed a richer notion of intertextuality in adaptation allowing for cross-fertilisation by addressing *intentionality* (11-22; emphasis in original). It also responds to other suggestions, for example by Timothy Corrigan to look back at older, even anachronous, theories and theorists in order to re-evaluate Adaptation Studies from a historical contemporary perspective (1-11). I hope that my historical interdisciplinary approach, which includes writers as well as their writings in its purview, will not only fill a crucial gap within Adaptation Studies, but will also

uncover new dynamics regarding writing, authorship, and adaptation across disciplinary fields. This will enable us to move past historic notions of medium specificity which have inhibited a wider understanding of adaptation, film, and literary practices and studies. My thesis, therefore, offers a wider critical and historical scope of authorship and adaptation than existing criticism, extending to discussion of how social, technological, legal, and cultural changes influenced and reflected how and what authors wrote about adaptations within a historical period and across historical periods; within a genre or medium and across genres and media; within a discipline and across disciplines.

ii. Approach and Methodology

Precisely because of past theoretical tendencies, omissions, and overemphases, searching for documents attesting to living writers writing about or writing adaptations of their own work in prior adaptation studies, or within film and cultural history, has proven challenging. One finds very little that is critical rather than descriptive in the biographies or that is written with a balanced interdisciplinary view, or that considers the historical and cultural contexts in which they wrote. As a result, I have read thousands more pages than I have cited in this thesis in my quest to find pertinent materials, and it has been a difficult task to focus and organise this work into coherent argumentation. This is one of the reasons why I have chosen a historical, chronological focus to order the thesis as well as to both expand and restrict my historical purview to the years 1823 to 1938. (I had originally intended to study only literary authors writing in the early years of film.) Setting historical texts in dialogue with one another within a particular period, as well as seeking to create dialogue between periods, while remaining informed by recent theories and studies, has been

equally challenging. In the process, I have sought to create a more transhistorical, more interdisciplinary, less hierarchical and binary view of adaptation, writers, and writing across media in this period.

My methodology thus constitutes an interdisciplinary, trans-historical, cultural study of particular issues and trajectories surrounding adaptation practices across disciplines, over time, and within particular cultural contexts. Raymond Williams defines this methodology as one that attempts to understand “the nature of organization” via discovery of “unexpected identities and correspondences in hitherto separately considered activities” (*Long Revolution* 46-7). Where Williams focused on the social and ideological structures through cultural materialism – for example through the study of dominant, residual, and emerging cultural forms (see *Marxism and Literature*) – my thesis is less schematic and general, focused as it is on continuities and changes in cultural discourses and practices of literary writers in and about adaptations to inform the discourses of Adaptation Studies in new ways.

It is nevertheless influenced by the legacy that Williams’s work has had on Cultural Studies as a discipline and his framework of enquiry into the notion of culture in relation to society. For example, Williams identified five key words whose change in meaning could be read as a historical and cultural map to “wider changes in life and thought.” Alongside *industry*, *democracy*, *class*, and *art*, he declared the development of the word *culture* to be the “most striking,” constituting a special map of its own, as it not only represented changes in relation to the other key words, but also enveloped reactions to changes in our social, economic, and political life (*Culture and Society* xii-xvii). My work is inflected by his approach to culture in that it studies changes within the meaning and formation of the word adaptation, as well as examining the

profession of the writer and writing across media, situating these key aspects within a specified historical period and social contexts. My study pursues this approach in order to situate my research culturally and historically, contextualising the writer, writing, and adaptation practices in relation to historical aspects of other media formations through industry, economic, and other correlated social changes. Like Williams, my “terms of reference are not only to distinguish the meanings, but to relate them to their sources and effects” (*Culture and Society* xviii).

My sources are polyvocal, as I address my research questions from various points of view: those of writers, theatre and film practitioners, reviewers, theorists, critics, and sometimes audience members. My research draws on theoretical texts and criticism, novels, plays, (auto)-biographies, play- and screenwriting manuals, newspapers, interviews, letters, diaries and other relevant source texts from the period under discussion to construct a polyvocal dialogue and multi-faceted study, whose main purpose is not to favour one medium or discourse over the other, but to contribute to the fields of film, literary, and adaptation studies alike through interdisciplinary, interhistorical, and intertextual analysis.

Through carefully selected case studies, chosen from among many other possibilities, I probe the different kinds and levels of involvement that literary authors had in adaptations of their writing to the stage and/or film and the reasons for these variations, as well as the effect of their variable involvement not only on the adaptations themselves, but also on their public and critical reception, and on the authors’ developments as writers. Although many authors wrote about and for other media in the period, I have chosen to make my key arguments through: Mary Shelley, Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, Charles Reade, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Frances

Hodgson Burnett, Marie Corelli, Thomas Hardy, Arthur Conan Doyle, James Matthew Barrie, Somerset Maugham, Virginia Woolf, Elinor Glyn, Pelham Grenville Wodehouse, Herbert George Wells, and George Bernard Shaw. These authors have been selected for several reasons. First, and most importantly, they were all involved in some form of cross-media miscegenation. In addition, their writings, both public and private, display their thoughts on aesthetic, formal, technological, and cultural developments and experiences with different media, some of them bearing witness to how writers responded to the theatre, the advent of film, and the ongoing development of various media. Second, they and their works were all widely known, published, and circulated during the period under discussion. This meant that their status at the time abetted public interest and commentary on their involvement with authorised and unauthorised adaptations of their work, causing the discourse to proliferate further.

Far from being a study revering dead white authors posthumously, this study focuses on popular authors who were still alive when their work was adapted to theatre and early film, considering their reflective writings about the process of adaptation, their involvement with it, as well as cultural, social, and legal contexts for it. This is not to restore authorial intent as the cardinal factor in interpreting writing, but to study the contests over authorial authority, the process of shifting between writing for different media, with the view that authorial involvements in theatre and film adaptations of their work casts an invaluable light on the process of adaptation practices. That I have chiefly chosen canonical authors is not based in assumptions that their work has intrinsic or universal merit but rather because of the abundance of research materials addressing them and their prominence in discourses of adaptation. Moreover, in spite of the field's widespread turn to postmodern cultural studies and numerous attacks on canonical aesthetic formalism and humanism, a great deal of attention has been paid

and continues to be paid to adaptations based on the literary canon, particularly the plays of Shakespeare and the novels of British nineteenth-century canonical authors, so that my thesis has wider applications than its subject matter indicates.¹²

Charles Dickens is central to my discussion of adaptation in the nineteenth century, and the abundance of primary materials is usefully supplemented by criticism that had treated his relationships with adapters of his works.¹³ My thesis equally attends to the discourse of the “reviled” dramatic adapter of the nineteenth century, epitomised by William Thomas Moncrieff. Other authors such as Reade, Collins, Braddon, and Burnett occupy intriguingly ambivalent positions as both authors and adapters of their writings, and were also selected because they were influential in changing public opinion about copyright law, writing diatribes against the injustice of copyright laws for literary authors, bringing legal actions against unauthorised adaptations of their writings, writing their own adaptations to forefend against unauthor-ised, and some of them serving as both plaintiff and defender in various copyright court cases.

Some authors were chosen primarily because of their involvement with film adaptation. This is the case with G.B. Shaw, celebrated for writing original plays, in contrast to earlier nineteenth-century playwrights who wrote mostly adaptations. Although all writers discussed were born in the nineteenth century, Shaw’s writing career, dating from the 1870s to 1950, spans both centuries, taking various forms, including plays, fiction, criticism, and screenplays. In addition to his substantial and lasting contribution to theatre and active involvement in the staging of his plays and,

¹² Evidence of these trends can be seen in the tables of content for recent journal issues, such as *Literature/Film Quarterly* (Vol. 46, No.1), *Journal of Adaptation in Film & Performance* (Vol. 10, No. 1 and 2), and a special issue on Shakespeare adaptations from the *Journal of Adaptation Studies* (Vol. 10, No. 2).

¹³ The majority of these accounts defer to the prestige of Dickens, as I document in Chapters One and Two.

later, their adaptation to film, Shaw was an eminent literary critic who frequently theorised the relationship between fiction, theatre, and film, and whose essays, interviews, letters, and comments document his personal experiences with stage and film.¹⁴

The selection of writers represented in this thesis has been carefully made from a much larger research pool to “clarify, rather than merely register, the diversity” of writing and adaption practices in the period under discussion (Williams *What I Came* 134). Initially, my process was focused on particular writers like Shaw and Dickens due to their particular statements and experiences, which I then set in dialogue with both similar and contrasting experiences of and declarations by other writers. Viewed within particular historical and social contexts, these dialogues highlighted the many modifications and complications of adaptation and writings in and about adaptation constructed at the time, but which remain operative in contemporary discourses on adaptation. By creating a correlative approach linking various writers both chronologically and contemporaneously alongside one another, my study forms the basis for a wider contribution to Adaptation Studies and the position of the writer within it.

The majority of writers addressed in this study traverse the *fin de siècle* into the early twentieth century, and were therefore both participants in and bystanders to the social and cultural movements of this time, particularly in terms of changes to the theatrical landscape and the emergence of film as a new medium. Williams, who characterises the period of 1880-1914 as a kind of interregnum, widely dismisses writers of this

¹⁴ Many of these have been preserved in edited collections by Bernard F. Dukore (*Shaw on Cinema; Screenplays*), and have been a valuable resource for this study, since the primary sources have not always been accessible.

period, even as he acknowledges that “important links would be missing” if they were completely overlooked (*Culture and Society* 161). Contrary to his marginalisation or footnoting of them, my thesis champions the importance of literary writers in this period to understand cultural discourses and practices of media and adaptation. Many were not only involved in fictional writing, but also wrote on the social, cultural, economic, industrial, and legal contexts for the practice and profession of writing.

The writings of those writers who set themselves in dialogue with a different medium, my research has found, were shaped and developed by that writing across medium.

My initial hypothesis was that celebrated authors would be more likely to control and influence not only the adaptations of their work, but also relations between prose fiction, theatre, and film, not least, because these authors generally receive more credit and have more influence than “ordinary” screenwriters when it comes to writing film adaptations.¹⁵ However, my research found that this was variable: some literary authors were instrumental in dictating the ways in which adaptations were made, while others were dismissed or ignored, as they attempted to influence the direction of their work – even Shaw, arguably the most famous writer involved in early film.

Another surprising finding has been that the acceptance or non-acceptance of literary author input was not necessarily dependent on the quality of their ideas and creative potential for shaping film through their writing, as seen in the examples of Barrie and Wells. All too often, writing between and across media was opposed and obscured,

¹⁵ By contrast, ordinary screenwriters receive scant acknowledgement for adapting another author’s work to the screen, and there are few first-hand accounts of early screenwriters’ views and experiences other than what can be gleaned from film magazines and screenwriting manuals of the period, discussed in Chapter Three. More recent studies aim to rectify the neglect of early screenwriters, most notably Ian W. MacDonald’s study of screenwriters in early British film history.

and the ideas of literary writers for film were limited or ruled inappropriate for the medium due to rigid notions of medium specificity stretching across both industry practice and academic theory. Some experiments in film writing by literary authors offered themselves as hybrid forms, straddling the media divide, showcasing innovative writing for the time in which they were written. In addition, this writing challenges assumptions of media divides and interart theories still prevalent today and brings new contributions for the interdisciplinary study of writing across media. My research here, I hope, will contribute to established debates in Adaptation, Literature, Film, and Cultural Studies, while offering new directions for future research.

a. Chapter Outline

The historical chronology of my thesis offers not only local historical insights into the process and practice of writing across media, it furthermore illuminates how issues of adaptation, authorship, and writing evolved, regressed, and adapted over time. I trace the interplay and dynamics between media and writers as well as over time, focusing on contests and collaborations between authors and adapters, as well as on the reputational, economic, and aesthetic benefits that they and their industries and consumers sought in writing across prose fiction, theatre, and film. In addition, I query how social, cultural, legal, and media changes affected and influenced writers and their writing, and what ideologies governed and interfered with their writing.

Chapter One, “Copyright Law, Authorial Ownership, and Adaptation Between Novels and Plays in Nineteenth-Century Britain,” lays the foundation for tracing legal and economic continuities and changes governing authorship and ownership in adaptation practices, highlighting the problematic legal position of writers and the actions they took regarding unauthorised adaptations of their work. It demonstrates that

nineteenth-century copyright (f)laws regarding rights of authors across media were responsible for adaptation practices that obviated any crediting or economic claims that the adapted writer might have to adaptations of his or her work in other media. It finds that the inequity of the laws spurred many authors to adapt their own work in a bid to claim their own adaptation as “authoritative,” even when such writing could not prevent others from adapting it too, as well as instigating measures to circumvent the existing laws and ensure the greater authorial control over their works. As authors complained of copyright laws in fiction, letters, and the press, they began to change public and parliamentary opinion; they also banded together to protest the laws and collectively strengthened momentum to change them.

The profession of the writer is discussed further in Chapter Two, “Nineteenth-Century Stratifications of Authors and Media,” which focuses on the social and cultural aspects of theatrical writing, particularly adaptation, which had correspondingly been affected by copyright law. It finds that theatre’s status as primarily adapting rather than original domain of writing had been indirectly determined by the lack of legislation favouring original writing over adaptation, and the chapter further ponders the effect that adaptation had on theatrical aesthetic theory, as well as the cultural and social position of the English theatre and the dramatic writer. By studying and creating dialogues between prose writers and dramatic adapters, this chapter finds that the hierarchical values attached to different forms of writing and media were very much shaped by adaptation, and in turn shaped attitudes toward adaptation and authorship. These dynamics only started to abate in the final decades of the nineteenth century, when laws governing adaptation tightened and more original writing was produced and when cross-media writing became more acceptable.

My third Chapter, “Adaptation, Ownership, and the Birth of Film,” studies the arrival of film and its reception by literary authors. It finds that many legal, social, and cultural issues that had informed nineteenth-century relations between drama and prose were newly directed toward film’s relationship to both drama and prose, as film sought to establish itself as an art in the 1910s. The concerns and uncertainties regarding adaptation practices also continued nineteenth-century dynamics with one major contrast: literary writers were intrigued with the potential that the new medium of film (by contrast to the ancient medium of the stage) held for their writing. This chapter further investigates the role of writing within film generally, and finds some trajectories between the profession of the dramatist in the nineteenth century and the role of the emerging film writer in the twentieth.

Chapter Four, “Literary Writers and Filmmaking Practices,” investigates literary writers’ relationship with film in the 1920s and how the film industry itself displayed an ambivalent attitude toward literary writers, first courting, and then discarding them. Highlighting the expectations versus the realities that literary authors faced writing for film and the antagonism toward them from the industry, the chapter challenges the prevalent notion, expressed in critical academic studies, that literary writers were incapable of adapting their writing to film and were clinging to their words without regard for film conventions and technologies. It also traces how the rise of medium specificity in film theory, resulted in a devaluation of the written word within film and limited the contribution that literary writers could have made to film as an art form.

Chapter Five, “Literary Writers and Early Sound Film: Experimental Writing,” studies the industry re-evaluation of literary writers and their work in film with the introduction of synchronised sound, and the effect that sound had on the industry and

writing for film. It considers in particular how prior theories of film medium specificity were no longer valid or valued, and argues that, as a result, film was temporarily freed from the aesthetic limitations that had been placed upon it by silent film practitioners and theorists. These uncertainties produced attempts at cross-media fertilisation, in part through experiments by literary writers with film writing which, both successfully and unsuccessfully, crossed media boundaries.

My research finds that, overall, nineteenth-century dramatic adaptation practices were influential in shaping cross-media writing by literary authors and other early film discourses. It highlights how much social and cultural circumstances affected that innovations in adaptation and writing were already occurring prior to film. These continued with film, as nineteenth-century writers bridged the gap toward film writing by creating even more hybridity within their own writing and through adaptation, shaped by the aesthetics of film. My study challenges the notion that film and literature should not converge and argues that theories of medium specificity, adhered to by academics, critics, and media practitioners, limited and delayed the development of film as well as forms of hybrid writing, which from today's perspective seem promising and creatively interdisciplinary.

b. Limitations

The strengths of this thesis are also its limitations: its discursive methodology and its long chronology. Although these enable a fuller historical and interdisciplinary purview, gaps are unavoidable with potential to be filled at another time. This is most notable in the first two chapters treating writers in theatrical adaptation, since their main purpose has been to contextualise more detailed treatments of literary authors writing in and about early film.

My focus on writing also means that I have bracketed many other aspects of theatrical and film production and consumption, but this focus should not be taken as naïve equation of “theatre” with “literature” or a reduction of theatre to playwrights and playwriting. Similarly, my interest in writers writing about adaptation means that classifications of “popular,” “low,” or “high” art and culture in this thesis are not presented as totalising cultural theories of the period, but located specifically in writings about adaptation, such as Wilkie Collins’s non-fiction writing, and do not fully reflect the complexities of the cultural and social position of art and culture during this time. Industry aspects of both theatre practices and prose fiction publication are addressed as collateral factors, but not so extensively as to detract from my central focus on writers writing (about) adaptations of their writing.

Additionally, my focus on literary writers should not be misconstrued as implying that I consider dramatic writers to be intrinsically or essentially subordinate to prose fiction writers. While the writers and their cultures held opinions on this, my focus on literary writers derives largely from having written this thesis for a PhD in English Literature, within a literature department. In a related vein, using the term “literary writer” to encompass both writers of plays and prose fiction reflects the terminology of my home discipline, which studies both prose and dramatic texts as belonging to the categorisation of “creative” and “imaginative literature,” in congruence with Williams’s discussion of the term “literature” and the increasing specialisation of its meaning (*Keywords* 183-8). Williams further consolidates the classification of drama as a literary form through his own discussions of *Drama*: for example, in reference to G.B. Shaw’s own proposal that drama needed to re-establish itself as a literary form (245). Moreover, many of the writers I study wrote both plays and prose fiction. For example, J.M. Barrie, most celebrated as a playwright, also wrote prose fiction;

concomitantly, Thomas Hardy, known foremost as a novelist, and secondarily as a poet, also wrote a play. Theatre is here treated as “literary” not because it reduces to writing, but because the interests of this thesis lie in literary writers writing (about) adaptations.

Other exclusions and selections have been carefully considered. Many other writers could have equally informed my research; writers who are discussed could have received more attention. Yet in the interest of producing a diverse study, in terms of the issues addressed, choices had to be made and were made to select writers who were representative and who most illuminated key issues with their writing. Initially this study dealt exclusively with male authors; I have worked hard to locate materials about female authors, finding that there is a marked difference between the published material available for male canonical authors such as Dickens, Collins, Wells, Shaw, and so forth, and female writers such as Braddon, Burnett, and Corelli, so that any imbalance of treatment between genders arises from this pre-existing imbalance.

Although authors like Marie Corelli and Mary Elizabeth Braddon have not found the lasting popularity of their male counterparts, they were nevertheless amongst the most popular authors of their time and shed important light on writers involved in the process of adaptation. I neither seek to restore nor discredit any of the writers; instead I aim to establish a discourse which is not positioned around canonicity or gender but focuses on writers writing and their engagements with adaptations of their work in particular social and historical contexts.

While my project addresses British writers, it was necessary to include their involvement with American film practices, explained further in the introduction to Chapter Three. Authors published across cultures as well as media and wrote for

American as well as British film companies. Filmmaking and publishing practices were interconnected, despite reluctance to engage with American publishers and film companies and criticism of American filmmaking methods. The growing dominance of American cinema in this period influenced not only British film, but also film writing. The dominance of the American film industry over British literary authors has inevitably and regrettably limited attention paid to the general development of the British film industry within my thesis.

Finally, the thesis has been theoretically selective. In order to address writer discourses in their historical contexts, my research favours theorists contemporaneous with them such as Rudolf Arnheim, Béla Balázs, and Allardyce Nicoll, over present-day theorists. I am aware that theories of authorship and writing across media have changed significantly since then. Rather than explicitly and extensively applying later theories and movements to my historical materials, I have favoured historical and analytical methodologies and drawn on historical and analytical critics as my main secondary sources. However, I am myself a twenty-first-century interdisciplinary critic and will inevitably be levying contemporary perspectives upon older aesthetic theories and contexts. I intend to continue this research to the present day, studying the writings of literary authors involved in adaptation, setting each other in dialogue with the theories of their own time.

CHAPTER 1
COPYRIGHT LAW, AUTHORIAL OWNERSHIP, AND ADAPTATION
BETWEEN NOVELS AND PLAYS IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITAIN

[T]he stupid copyright law of England allows any scoundrel possessing a pot of paste and a pair of scissors to steal our novels for stage purposes
 – Wilkie Collins in 1888 (*Letters* 299)

In September 1823, after Mary Shelley viewed the first stage adaptation of her 1818 novel *Frankenstein* at the English Opera House,¹⁶ an unauthorised adaptation by Richard Brinsley Peake,¹⁷ she wrote to friend and fellow writer Leigh Hunt: “I found myself famous!”. Admitting that she had been eager to see the play, she expressed a mixed response towards it. On the one hand, it allowed her to experience directly her fame as an author and to view an audience responding to her story; on the other hand, she criticised its narrative structure,¹⁸ while praising the performance of one actor: “The story is not well managed – but Cooke played [the Monster]’s part extremely well [...] I was much amused, & it appeared to excite a breath[le]ss eagerness in the audience” (378). While most other accounts of authors responding to stage adaptations of their work in the nineteenth century emphasise their objections to them, it was common for authors to have mixed reactions to adaptations, seeing advantages and disadvantages to the process. Shelley recounts that *Frankenstein* had “prodigious success” as a drama and that she saw it, together with her father, on its twenty-third night. Her initial exclamation shows her dissatisfaction with the reworked structure,

¹⁶ *Presumption! or, The Fate of Frankenstein*, credited as the first dramatisation of Shelley’s novel, opened in July 1823. Douglas William Hoehn discusses this production.

¹⁷ Peake was “a commercially inspired popular playwright who aspires to no more than simple Gothic thrills,” thus sacrificing the intellectual rigour of the story for its elements of pleasurable horror (Cox 165).

¹⁸ The playbill marketed the dramatisation as “a new ROMANCE of a peculiar interest.” For changes made to the play, see Marilyn Butler (xlix). For other stage and screen adaptations, see Albert J. Lavalley; Graham Allen; Steven Earl Forry; Lester D. Friedman and Allison Kavey; Diane Long Hoeveler; and Mark Jancovich. For information on the first film adaptation in 1910, see Frederick Wiebel.

but also her awareness of how a stage adaptation could bring a written character to life, her excitement at seeing an audience respond to her character, and how a popular adaptation could enhance her authorial reputation.¹⁹

The play also benefitted her financially. Following the popularity of the stage adaptation, Shelley's father, William Godwin, immediately commissioned a new edition of the novel, fully crediting her as author,²⁰ in the hope that it would revive sales of the original. It did. Indeed, throughout the nineteenth century, whenever new stage versions were produced, and into the twentieth century, when film adaptations such as *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) were released, interest in the novel revived and sales increased. William St Clair demonstrates that the stage adaptations were largely responsible for keeping *Frankenstein* "alive in culture" in the nineteenth century (53-4).²¹

That adaptations extend an author's reputation and increase sales of the adapted work is well documented. However, accounts of adaptations inspiring changes to the source material are relatively rare. When Shelley reworked the novel for another edition in 1831, including an introduction by herself,²² Fred Botting suggests that the changes she made were in direct reaction to her experience of that first dramatisation in 1823 (190-1). If this was the case, it shows not only the influence, and even authority, that adaptations can hold over the writing practices of the original author,²³ but also their

¹⁹ The first edition of *Frankenstein* had been published anonymously, whereas the second publication credited Shelley (August 1823). Shelley wrote to Hunt: "On[] the strength of the drama my father had published for my benefit a new edition of F." (379).

²⁰ Charles E. Robinson (13-25) and St Clair (38-63) discuss the publications and copyright issues.

²¹ St Clair chronologically lists the book's various republications in relation to the main stage and film adaptations, arguing that they "conferr[ed] publicity and customers on one another" (51-53; 57-63).

²² Both versions are in circulation today. Oxford World's Classics publishes the 1818 version; Penguin Classics, the 1831 edition.

²³ I do not use "original" in any absolute sense in this thesis, understanding that no work is absolutely original, but according to nineteenth- and early twentieth-century conventions that invoked it to contrast an adapted work with its adaptation.

influence upon the author's relationship to that original text and, by extension, that adaptations by others can inspire adaptations of that text by original authors as well as other adapters.

This brief example of Shelley encountering an unauthorised stage adaptation of her work at the beginning of the nineteenth century and producing an authorised adaptation of it partly in response to it pre-empts and pre-figures some of the issues that I discuss in this first chapter of my thesis: (un)authorised adaptations, copyright laws that made unauthorised adaptations legal, authors' reactions to and involvement with adaptations of their work, and the effect of adaptations on authors and sources. I argue that copyright played a much more significant role in adaptation than has been hitherto acknowledged, leading prose fiction writers into debates with theatrical adapters over authorship and ownership, sparking legal disputes, prompting fiction and theatrical authors to adapt their own work to pre-empt adaptations by others, and generating lively debates about relations between media more generally.

We cannot clearly understand the ambivalent position of literary authors regarding adaptations of their work to early film without examining authorial writings regarding adaptations of prose fiction to the theatre before the birth of film, since film grew out of both media, and adaptation practices across the three media were also contiguous. Scholars have shown that many early film practices were heavily indebted to theatre (Nicoll, *Film and Theatre*; Manvell; Brewster and Jacobs; K. Elliott);²⁴ my study of literary authors' involvement in dramatic adaptations of their work locates further continuities between stage and cinema adaptations, as well as new issues of adaptation and authorship that arose with the advent of film. This chapter considers authors'

²⁴ Deborah Vlock and others have argued and illustrated how heavily prose writers were indebted to the theatre, for example via the example of Dickens.

relationships to the theatrical adaptations of their prose fiction that proliferated in the nineteenth century, focusing on copyright laws and the debates that they spawned regarding author's ownership of his or her writing in the context of stage adaptations. Beginning with an overview of changing and contested copyright laws in Britain, followed by illustrative case studies, Chapter One presents a vital prehistory to the study of authorship in adaptation during the early years of film.

Copyright laws governing stage adaptations of prose fiction were highly ambiguous in the nineteenth century, so that numerous battles were fought in and out of court between authors, adapters, publishers, theatre managers, and critics regarding literary ownership and rights. One major means of protesting unlawful and unauthorised adaptations was for prose writers to adapt their own work to the stage. Authors engaged in other proactive practices to claim ownership over their work, including lawsuits, published debates with adapters, collaborating with adapters, and more. My research finds that copyright laws and authorial responses to them shaped nineteenth-century literary practices, created new adaptation practices, and, at the end of the century, resulted in a greater degree of authorial ownership by both prose and dramatic authors (which had previously been more heavily given to publishers and theatre owners), which led to new adaptation practices and relations between fiction, theatre, and film at the turn of the twentieth century.

H. Philip Bolton points out that the concept of dramatic authorship in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries differed substantially from our concept today, as it was then so common to "alter" or "adapt" a narrative that "originality and proprietorship seem to be values and practices of a later time" (*Dickens* 14). In spite of this claim, in nineteenth-century Britain, authorship and ownership were nevertheless increasingly

canvassed and contested in legal copyright battles, public discussions, and political debates. The reasons for the rise in such discourses included the increasing popularity and profitability of the novel and its dramatic adaptations (Maunder, “Sensation Fiction”), the threatened economic interests of publishers (discussed in Jordan and Patten), and the relative, hierarchical social positions of novelists and playwrights, all of which I address in this and the following chapter.

By analysing the status and legal ownership rights of writers across media in the nineteenth century, I lay the foundation for tracing continuities and developments in these areas for literary authors writing within films in the early twentieth century. The questions raised and the arguments made in this chapter not only reveal some roots of early literary film adaptation, but also demonstrate how the issues themselves have adapted over time.

The livelihood and status of prose fiction writers via theatrical adaptations of their work was very much affected by copyright laws, which allowed for relatively unrestricted dramatic adaptation practices, requiring neither permission from nor remuneration of those who authored the sources of such adaptations. These laws generated fierce debates and legal suits among authors, adapters, and publishers, with larger challenges made to the laws themselves concerning the relative lack of authorial rights and remuneration. These contests had the effect of gradually strengthening the legal protection of original literary and dramatic works against uncredited and unremunerated adaptations, as well as authorial rights against publishers and theatre companies, who held copyrights to writings and profited from them. These changes resulted not only in changes to the cultural, social, and economic status of writers, but also laid the foundations for later adaptation laws and practices

that gave even more ownership to authors in the twentieth century. Changing copyright laws furthermore dictated the relationship between literature, theatre, and film in the early twentieth century, where, despite new forms of writing and writers, nineteenth-century laws and attitudes persisted until 1911, when, for the first time, copyright law included film, and the changes made to incorporate film had consequences for fiction, plays, and their adaptations.

i. **A Brief Chronology of British Copyright Law to 1911**

British Copyright Law sparked numerous legal, public, and critical debates, because it was complex, ambiguous, and unclear. Many histories and accounts of debates over copyright law in this period have been published; this chronology focuses specifically on debates over the law concerning novel-to-stage adaptations.²⁵

At the start of the nineteenth century, the legal position of the prose fiction writer in terms of ownership of his/her works in Britain had been given little attention by Parliament since the Statute of Anne in 1709, when the writer was first given a claim to copyright that had hitherto belonged to publishers alone, allowing a fourteen-year period of authorial copyright before the work entered the public domain. Publishers were now no longer able to control the dissemination of or profit from a work beyond that time,²⁶ and could be held accountable legally for printing variations of that work

²⁵ See Mark Rose and Laura Rosenthal for accounts of copyright and literary and dramatic authorship in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and Lyman Ray Patterson for information on copyright law pre-1800. For nineteenth-century accounts, see John Russell Stephens (*The Profession of the Playwright*). General histories of nineteenth-century copyright law were written by contemporaries Thomas Edward Scrutton, Richard Rogers Bowker and Walter Arthur Copinger; for a retrospective view on copyright law, see William Cornish (845-930), Catherine Seville (*Copyright Reform; Internationalisation*) and Isabella Alexander. For a wider historical overview of authorship, national, and international copyright, see David Saunders, Christopher May and Susan Sell, and Ronan Deazley *et al.*

²⁶ See Jordan and Patten for studies of how nineteenth-century publishing practices influenced the profession of authorship.

or crediting them to an author's name in publications without authorisation by the author. This meant that authors were in a better position than they had been previously to renegotiate contracts and ensure that they were paid royalties or to negotiate terms when moving to another publisher once their contract had expired.

Although this Act was a seminal triumph for authors, and was influential for modern and international copyright laws as well, it did not resolve all of the problems that it sought to redress and it ushered in new ones. Christopher May and Susan Sell argue that the Act introduced a “new struggle over the meaning of authors’ property rights,” as it separated the question of literary property from censorship by being primarily concerned with the printing trade and only “established a *potentially* common law copyright for authors” as a secondary concern (93; emphasis in original). In terms of unlawfully reproducing the work in print form, authorial rights were more safeguarded and authors’ work regarded increasingly as their property, although uncertainties about the provisions of this and other changes to copyright law continued to be manifested and clarified through legal cases over the eighteenth century.²⁷ These cases resulted in a 1774 decision by the House of Lords to declare perpetual copyright for publishers unlawful, which consolidated authorial rights further, allowing them to renegotiate their terms and conditions regularly. More indirectly, the abolition of perpetual publisher copyright resulted in the falling price of older books, which then directly produced a rise in reading within the public sphere, creating new consumers, even as publishers’ rights and profits declined. The main triumph for writers was that at the end of the eighteenth century, copyright was seen as a right belonging more to authors than publishers, who owned copyrights only

²⁷ Rose discusses landmark court cases such as *Pope v. Curll* (1741) and *Donaldson v. Becket* (1774).

temporarily, while authors never ceased to be named as the owner of their works, even after copyrights expired.

The nineteenth century continued to lengthen the period of copyright ownership, strengthening perceptions as well as legal rights of authorial ownership: the reform of 1814 extended the terms of the Statute of Anne to a term of 28 years, or, if the author was still alive at that point, until his/her death.²⁸ This was further revised by the Copyright Act of 1842, also known as the Talfourd's Act,²⁹ which gave all writers a 42-year right to their works once published and, if this expired during their lifetime, it would continue until seven years after their death. Financially, however, it was publishers who gained from the 1842 amendment, receiving greater control of access to and pricing of older books, which would now not be entering the public domain for a prolonged time.³⁰ These laws remained unchanged until 1911, when copyright laws were amended yet again. What is most important to my thesis on adaptation is that the 1911 law finally allowed all authors the exclusive right to dramatise their own work "by performance or otherwise," as well as the right for the authors of dramatic work to adapt it into novel form. The terms and conditions of this law will be addressed further in the third chapter of this thesis on film and literary adaptation.

Prior to 1911, adaptations of literary writing to the stage were not fully, or even clearly, regulated by copyright law. With regards to intellectual property, the fact that only the written word, not the spoken or sung word, was copyrightable meant that any kind of adaptation other than published print was legally permissible without

²⁸ Seville ("The Statute of Anne") assesses the impact of the Statute in the nineteenth century.

²⁹ Sir Thomas Noon Talfourd was a writer and a judge who championed copyright law and presented the bill to Parliament. Charles Dickens dedicated *The Pickwick Papers* (1838) to him.

³⁰ The benefit for the publisher emerges in the case of *Frankenstein*. As its copyright period expired in 1880, reprinting was cheap, so that in the first year of its reprint, it sold more copies than all the previous editions put together (St Clair 49).

authorisation or crediting of the source. The Lord Chancellor in the case of *Tinsley v. Lacy* (1863) claimed that:

The only way in which an author can prevent other persons from representing as a drama the whole or any part of a work of his composition, is himself to publish his work in the form of a drama, and so to bring himself within the scope of dramatic copyright. (*Law Journal* 172)

This was not actually the case. Whilst authors might deter others from adapting their work through an authorised adaptation that would eclipse the competition, in principle, anyone was allowed legally to adapt a novel to a play without acknowledging the original author or text, facing no financial or legal retribution, unless they printed or published the play script. Thus, as soon as a piece of original work was published, the writer retained only the print rights and lost any claim on stage dramatisations unless a dramatisation was also produced in print. One of the few prose writers who turned to adapting his own prose was Wilkie Collins (1824-89): close to the end of the serialisation of his novel *No Name* in 1862,³¹ he announced that he had written a dramatisation of it and had published and entered it at the Stationer's Hall according to the law, thus securing sole copyright to both the novel and the play. He continued to fortify his authority over his work in this manner by legally cementing his authorial right, avoiding piracy by orchestrating publications of his literary work together with his dramatic work.³²

³¹ *No Name* was published in the weekly literary magazine *All Year Round* (1859-95), founded, owned, and edited by Charles Dickens, replacing *Household Words* (1850-9).

³² Another example is Collins's short novel *The New Magdalen*, serialised in *Temple Bar* from October 1872, and published in novel form by Bentley the day after its premiere at the Olympic Theatre on 20 May 1873, an adaptation that Collins had also written.

Even so, copyright laws effectively blurred the distinction between adaptation and theft, legalising what in other domains was deemed criminal appropriation, creating outrage among prose authors. Charles Dickens writes of novel-to-stage adaptation in *Nicholas Nickleby*: “show me the distinction between such pilfering as this, and picking a man’s pocket in the street” (781). This sentiment is echoed in the epigraph to my chapter, in which nearly 50 years later Collins denounces “the stupid copyright laws of England,” which allowed “any scoundrel possessing a pot of paste and a pair of scissors to steal our novels for stage purposes” (*Letters* 299).

Yet not all commentators saw theatrical adaptation as piracy. In *The Law of Copyright* (1903), Thomas Edward Scrutton detailed one commonly advanced reason that playwrights should not have to credit the authors they adapted: “intellectual labour, alteration, [and] adaptation was necessary” to represent a novel on stage, and that labour should be recognised and rewarded (79). The literary source text was invariably transformed not only through the adapter’s “intellectual labour,” but also by practical interventions required to adapt it to the theatre, both by the adapter and others within the theatre, such as managers, performers, and technicians, as well as constraints imposed by external influences, such as the legal censorship imposed by the Lord Chancellor and other unofficial, but nevertheless potent censorship levied by social and cultural critics.³³

Although there was no copyright law governing the performance of theatrical adaptations, there were copyright laws governing the ownership of written plays. For dramatists, the most important legislation of the nineteenth century had been the

³³ Maunder discusses the impact of censorship, critics, and moralists on stage adaptations, especially those of popular sensation novels (“Sensation Fiction” 52-69). See also John Russell Stephens’s *The Censorship of English Drama 1824-1901*.

Dramatic Copyright Act of 1833, spearheaded by Edward Bulwer-Lytton,³⁴ which gave recognition to the profession of the playwright. Despite limitations of the Act, it brought, according to Allardyce Nicoll, the work of dramatists alongside that of literary artists (*A History 2*: 70). It further clarified the playwright's position by differentiating between the ownership of unpublished and published plays and performance rights of plays. Prior to this Act, plays had only received statutory protection when they were published as printed books. Now, the playwright was given the sole copyright to any unpublished play, printed or not, as well as "the sole liberty of permitting its representation" throughout the British Isles. This further secured the idea of dramatic property and performance/stage right for authors, though many terms, such as the definition regarding the "publication" of the play, were left unclear, meaning that dramatic work was still not effectively protected and the law was regularly tested in court cases.

Although this legislation was meant primarily for the benefit of dramatic writers, it had limitations, since the main financial beneficiaries were the copyright holders, who were usually the publishers if the work had been printed, rather than the writers or theatre managers. However, another impact of the Dramatic Copyright Act was the subsequent founding of the Dramatic Author's Society in 1833, which aimed to protect the newly established rights and secure greater profits for dramatists themselves.³⁵ A system was thereby established to protect dramatists' interests as far as possible under the current law: for example, through regulated collection and distribution of payments from managers directly to playwrights, more rigorous identification of copyright violations, and, most importantly in terms of copyright

³⁴ Chapter Two discusses the 1832 Report by the Select Committee on the Dramatic Arts further.

³⁵ Stephens (*Profession*) addresses the impact of the Act and the Society on the profession of the dramatist.

protection, through sponsoring the publication of plays under the Society's imprint (Stephens 91-3). The Society and its measures gradually established the profession of the dramatist with rights championed and secured collectively.

The subsequent 1842 Dramatic Copyright Act worked to make the performance of a play, not merely its publication, a copyrightable event, stating that "the first public Representation or Performance of any Dramatic Piece or Musical Composition shall be deemed equivalent, in the Construction of this Act, to the First Publication of any Book" (5 & 6 Vict. c. 45).³⁶ Plays could now be "published" through performance, although the performance needed to be registered at the Stationer's Office and placed under statutory protection.³⁷ Novelists and dramatists were thus in a similar position regarding copyright protection of their writings in performance; however, the unclear legal situation concerning dramatisations of novels *by others* continued,³⁸ causing great friction between literary and dramatic artists, as detailed in my case studies.

From 1886, following the Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works, laws on copyright were regulated internationally,³⁹ and that Convention remains the basis of international copyright protection today. The purpose of the Convention, as stated in the preamble, was "to protect, in as effective and uniform a manner as possible, the rights of authors in their literary and artistic works" (7).

Although the terms did not interfere with British law at the time, but merely extended

³⁶ Seville (*Literary Copyright*) provides historical background to the formation of the bill.

³⁷ The Lord Chamberlain's Play Collection contains manuscript copies of plays performed 1824-1968, both licensed and unlicensed. The collection is available at the British Library.

³⁸ Statutory protection only applied to Britain. If the play was published abroad, for example, in America, which did not have a copyright agreement with Britain until 1891, then the work had no statutory protection (Miller 164). This caused considerable transatlantic friction between writers, publishers, theatres, courts, and the press. See Seville ("Anglo-US Copyright") on nineteenth-century British and American international copyright relations.

³⁹ The countries represented in the Berne Convention were: Belgium, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Spain, Tunis, and Haiti. The protection extended to their colonies, spreading it across the globe.

each country's existing law to include foreign authors, they did have repercussions by setting how authors' rights were viewed in Britain in dialogue with how they were viewed in other nations. Vincent Porter points out that, whereas countries such as France, Italy, Spain, and Germany regarded an author's right as a human right, Britain "had entered into a convention based on a philosophy [of authorial as human rights] not yet properly accepted into British law" (3). Authors' rights were economically enhanced, since the Convention enabled them to negotiate contracts and agreements with publishers privately in an international market. Porter suggests that, from an economic viewpoint, the Berne agreement was emblematic of a "corporatist doctrine, protecting the interests of the authors and their employers against the interests of the consumers, and, ultimately, the wider public" (3-4).

This new law was aimed chiefly at preventing the previously widespread piracy of works on an international level. More pertinent to my research questions, as with prior laws, its main beneficiaries were the publishers, who were now able to develop, mediate, control, and regulate the international market for the works that they published, so that only the most popular authors had substantial bargaining power with publishers. Although the popularity of the authors commonly played an important part in the demands that they were able to make with regulating bodies such as publishers, theatres, and filmmakers, this was often unheeded once a contract had been agreed.

International copyright laws had a direct bearing on dramatic adaptations of other works. Stephens suggests that the "early Victorian legislation on international copyright actually inhibited the writing and production of original drama in the British theatre by actively encouraging adaptation from foreign models," mainly from French

novels and plays (*Profession* 102). Despite the new international law, not much had altered for British theatrical adaptation, as an anonymous dramatist, who laments “the disgraceful condition of our copyright laws” (95), points out in 1888:

[I]t has done away with a good deal of harassing detail formerly necessary to be gone through, especially by foreign authors desiring to secure copyright with us. [...] With respect to all other foreign countries except the nine named we can steal from them and they can steal from us with impunity. (101)⁴⁰

America was not part of the agreement in Berne, remaining subject to its own copyright laws, which were inconsistent with those of the Convention.⁴¹ In consequence, reprinting and adapting British texts without fear of copyright infringement was common in America, where native writers were also engaged in disputes with publishers and British-American copyright legislation was highly contested. For dramatists, it was therefore advisable not to publish their plays in print for fear of piracy from America. Obviously, novelists did not have that option, and their work was therefore still pilfered by American adapters, although the laws were improving the international situation elsewhere. The international difficulties of copyright essentially placed prose and dramatic writers in a similar situation in terms of unlawful adaptations and publications of their work outside Britain.

⁴⁰ Discussed further in Chapter Two, this is an extract from an anonymously published manual for aspiring playwrights. Jerome K. Jerome (1859 – 1927) has been identified as its possible author (Jackson 336; Joseph Connolly 78; Ruth Marie Faurot 100). Jerome’s 1926 autobiography does not refer to the manual, yet chronicles his dramatic and prose writing, including non-fiction writings such as “On the Stage – and Off” (1885), “Trials of a Dramatist” (1925), and “Chronicles of a Playwright” (1925).

⁴¹ The United States did not join the Berne agreement until 1986. See Saunders (149-66) and Seville (*Internationalisation* 146-252). Oren Bracha (335-71) shows that America’s copyright law was shaped by British and colonial copyright traditions, as he discusses the development from 1672-1909. American copyright law becomes relevant when British authors become involved in film adaptations (Chapter Three).

Although, overall, the changes in nineteenth-century laws resulted in more rights for authors regarding the ownership of their work, authors demanded still greater legal protection, adopting a variety of measures and responses to try to control adaptations of their work by others in its absence, and continuing to vocalise their discontent about adaptations by others without remuneration. Seventeenth- into eighteenth-century authors such as Daniel Defoe, Henry Fielding, and Samuel Richardson had fought for and championed their literary ownership rights within the establishment through public engagement and writing, as well as within their own fiction. Their advocacy was taken up by prominent eighteenth- into nineteenth-century writers, such as William Wordsworth, Matthew Arnold, and, on an international level, Victor Hugo.⁴² My case studies document re-actions by nineteenth century prose writers located right in the middle of the legal and social changes for which their literary predecessors had fought.

Amidst the range of theatrical entertainment in the nineteenth century, stage adaptations of popular novels were highly in demand for a variety of social and cultural reasons during this time. Nevertheless, not all of these works were deemed appropriate for dramatisation. Andrew Maunder points out that, despite appearances to the contrary, considerations regarding the suitability of a novel for adaptations were made (“Sensation Fiction” 57). Suitability included the themes addressed, censorship issues, as well as the genre of writing.⁴³ Wilkie Collins notes that not all novelists

⁴² Rose discusses Defoe, Fielding, and Richardson’s advocacy for authorial rights in the eighteenth century. Poets joined prose and dramatic writers in defending authorial ownership of copyright: William Wordsworth, for example, was a fierce advocate of perpetual copyright (see Seville, *Literary Copyright*, for his influence on the 1842 Copyright Act); Thomas Hood wrote public letters in 1837 entitled “Copyright and Copywrong”; Matthew Arnold wrote several essays on copyright in nineteenth century culture and society (see Saunders 122-5). Victor Hugo championed literary property rights and became president of the International Literary Association in 1878, forging the way for the Berne Convention (Seville, *Internationalisation* 60).

⁴³ While not all nineteenth-century authors had their works adapted to the stage, most popular nineteenth-century novels were adapted to film.

were affected by adaptive piracy allowed by copyright law and suggests to John Hollingshead in 1873 that, “if Disraeli’s books were dramatic enough to be stolen for the stage I should recommend (quite seriously) an immediate adaptation of one of them, without asking his leave” (*Letters* 2: 363). He reasons that, if Benjamin Disraeli, a prominent politician and prose fiction writer, had suffered from the adaptation of his works, then something might have been done to change copyright laws.⁴⁴ According to Collins, “the barbarous indifference of the House of Commons where the interests of Literature and Art are concerned” was to blame, and the “remedy” rested with them (*Letters* 2: 362).

The case studies of Dickens, Collins, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Frances Hodgson Burnett, and Marie Corelli that follow illustrate the impact of changing copyright laws on authorship in adaptation in various contexts, focusing particularly on the written and discursive strategies used by authors and their agents to challenge them, benefit from them, and change them. The writers discussed were all well-known writers whose work was widely published and circulated in the nineteenth century; their public commentary on their experiences with theatrical adaptations of their fiction unfolded through legal cases, public debates, press reports and private correspondence. Discussing the advantages and disadvantages of copyright law for writers, the case studies highlight the diversity and complexity of the issues surrounding authorised and unauthorised adaptations, legal suits, public complaints,

⁴⁴ Although Disraeli’s work was not widely adapted to the stage, he suffered from the lack of international copyright law: for example, the piracy of his 1870 novel *Lothair* in Canada. Petitioned by the newly formed Association to Protect the Rights of Authors, Disraeli’s government appointed a Royal Commission in 1875 to look into national and international copyright law, although a Bill was never passed, and the issue was sidelined by the new government in 1880 (Alexander 119-47). Records of the Parliamentary Debates surrounding Talfourd’s 1837 Copyright Bill, which led to the 1842 Act, also show Disraeli’s support for authors’ rights (14 December 1837), as does his signature on the 1837 Petition of British Authors to the United States Congress for exclusive rights to their own work within that country.

authors' reactions to and involvement with adaptations of their work, and the effect of adaptations on the literary sources themselves.

ii. **Author Responses to Copyright Law**

a. **The Author in Court**

Authors in court contesting copyright law made a marked difference, bringing about changes in the laws and practices governing adaptation. The confusions in copyright law resulted in many legal actions being taken by authors, with varying results; some of these would set precedents having lasting impact on the legal and literary world, whereas others would fail. Novelist and playwright Charles Reade (1814-84) claimed to have invented the term "stage-right" for his 1861 case, *Reade v. Conquest*, alleging that the term was "necessary" with regard to the "fallacious" phrase "Dramatic Copyright" (*Readiana* 148). The terminology of "copyright" was unclear and confusing, as Scrutton points out, the term being better limited to "the right of publishing in print," and using "Play-Right" or "Stage-Right" for performing or acting right instead (73). Reade features prominently in court cases; Barbara Lauriat sums up his variable roles "in the drama of Victorian dramatic copyright" as ranging between "hero, villain, wise counsellor" and "comic relief" (35). Reade's unparalleled concern with copyright law is evident in his own publication of non-fiction writing concerning copyright laws, morality, and authorial rights: for example, *The Eighth Commandment* (1860) and "The Rights and the Wrongs of Authors" (1875). While Reade's significance to copyright discourse is considerable, since his direct and indirect involvements with copyright law, cases, and debates have been widely

discussed elsewhere,⁴⁵ my studies of authors in court focuses on other, less-discussed popular authors for whom significant decisions regarding the legal treatment of adaptations had been made, with Reade's contribution limited to his participation in other case studies.⁴⁶

Many prose writers protesting in court argued that stage adaptations did not sufficiently credit them, either in terms of financial remuneration or by enhancing their public reputations. Mary Elizabeth Braddon (1835-1915) was an immensely popular and successful sensation fiction writer who received some remuneration from and control over authorised adaptations of her work to the stage, but not from the many unauthorised ones that sprang up in the wake of her enormous popularity (Carnell 176). In 1862, there were at least three licensed adaptations of *Lady Audley's Secret* on the London stage, and many more unlicensed ones across the country in provincial theatres.⁴⁷ The following year, stage adaptations of *Aurora Floyd* totalled five in London alone (Carnell 197). The serialisations of both novels had only just been completed and published in their entirety earlier in the same year. The only play version of *Lady Audley's Secret* authorised by Braddon was written by Charles Smith Cheltenham, the acting editor of Braddon's literary magazine *Belgravia*.⁴⁸ Due to copyright law not covering performances, Braddon was unable to prevent or profit

⁴⁵ See, for example, Lauriat; Sarah Meer; Robert Macfarlane 130-57.

⁴⁶ I return to Reade in Chapter Two's discussion of writing across media.

⁴⁷ Kate Mattacks argues that the theatre's remediation of the text uses the figure of Lady Audley as a metaphor for the theatre copyright and licensing at that time: "The bodily containment of the performative heroine with the strictures of feminine roles and, ultimately, within the confines of an asylum, reflected the regulatory processes of copyright and licensing and their dramatic effect on creativity" (5).

⁴⁸ Braddon was more nominal than actual editor for the magazine, owned by her partner, John Maxwell, from 1866-76. Cheltenham did most of the "real" editing work, according to Jennifer Carnell, who discusses Braddon's involvement with the magazine further (174-6).

from any of the unauthorised productions. She was only able to take legal action when one of them was published.

The 1863 case of *Tinsley v. Lacy*, as documented in 1870 by Walter Arthur Copinger in *The Law of Copyright in Works of Literature and Art*, has been widely cited as an exemplary case that highlights the weaknesses within copyright laws.⁴⁹ The case revolved around the stage adaptations of the novels *Aurora Floyd* (1863) and *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) and the subsequent print publication of these dramatic versions.⁵⁰ Edward Tinsley was Braddon's publisher, who owned the rights to both works for two years, having paid Braddon £500 for *Lady Audley's Secret* and, after its success, £1000 for the follow-up, *Aurora Floyd*. Thomas Lacy was the publisher of the play script and the adaptation had been written by William Suter.⁵¹

The case of *Tinsley v. Lacy* arose not because the plays had been printed, but because a large proportion of words from Braddon's novels had been reprinted verbatim in the so-called play scripts as dialogue and stage descriptions. Moreover, copies of the play had been distributed among the audience, purportedly to enable a better understanding of the performance, but effectively meaning that they did not need to purchase the novel, since much of it was there: "large part of the dramas, including the most striking incidents, and much of the language, had been taken bodily from the novels" (Rogers 119). The judge ruled that, although the defendant was entitled legally to

⁴⁹ Looking at the law report, the newspaper report, and the court record, Ayeley Ben-Yishai discusses this case from a legal point of view in *Common Precedents: The Presentness of the Past in Victorian Law and Fiction* 44-9. Surprisingly, despite the prominence and significance of the *Tinsley v. Lacy* case, Carnell fails to mention it in Braddon's biography.

⁵⁰ In "Regulatory Bodies: Dramatic Creativity, Control and Commodity of *Lady Audley's Secret*," Mattacks discusses some stage adaptations and their female performances as commodities.

⁵¹ Lacy was a prominent figure in theatre, adaptation, and publishing, engaging with several authors treated in this chapter: for example, he was involved in adapting some of Charles Dickens's works to the stage: firstly, unauthorised ones, but later, authorised ones. Fitz-Gerald, among others, discusses their relationship. Lacy also received an injunction for publishing one of Charles Reade's novels as a drama nearly verbatim in 1861 (see Stephens, *Profession* 99 and Alexander 221).

dramatise the novels, he was not permitted to publish a script containing so much of their sources, and this was where the infringement occurred (Copinger 161-2).

Although Suter had written the verbatim adaptation, he was not legally liable; publisher Lacy was made responsible, resulting in a permanent injunction that prevented reprinting the edition, as well as any further dramatic performances.

It is this last part of the injunction that was particularly significant for the copyright of performed adaptations. The prohibition on performance was due to Lacy automatically owning the performance rights after purchasing the manuscript from Suter. According to Kate Mattacks, who credits the case as a “landmark in the history of copyright, irrevocably linking *Lady Audley’s Secret* with a subversive creative product that could only be partially managed through statutory regulations,” Tinsley waived the costs, claiming a moral victory for authors that served as a precedent for similar cases (11). How effective the ruling was at suppressing the adaptation, however, is dubious. Although Suter’s adaptation was prohibited from being sold, the printed text was nonetheless still available whenever complete runs or single volumes of Lacy’s Lists were purchased.⁵² Indeed, the play text is still in circulation today.⁵³ Despite the verdict symbolising a significant triumph for the author and publisher against the unlawful publication of the novel posing as dramatic adaptation, the fact that the performance text is still readily available to purchase today demonstrates the problems of enforcing the terms of landmark cases in the context of mass print publication.

⁵² Popular play scripts were often published in collections, such as Lacy’s *Acting Edition of Victorian Plays* (1848-73). Lacy’s collection appeared in four volumes annually, each containing around fifteen plays. See Robert Pearson’s 2007 digital archive: “The Victorian Plays Project.”

⁵³ *Lady Audley’s Secret: A Drama in Two Acts* and *Aurora Floyd: A Drama in Two Acts* by William Suter (Sensation Press, 2008). Both editions feature an introduction by Braddon bibliographer Jennifer Carnell, explaining their contexts.

Twenty-five years later, a similar court case, that of *Warne v. Seebohm* in 1888, centred on another popular female author, demonstrates how authors used ambiguities in the existing law to their benefit, countering uncredited adaptations by adapting their own work. The dramatist E.V. Seebohm had started to adapt the 1886 novel *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, informing author Frances Hodgson Burnett (1849-1924) of his adaptation and asking for her sanction of the production and, on receiving her refusal, offered her a share of the profits, which she again refused (Powell 115). Burnett's side of the events is illustrated in a letter written to her friend, Dr. Owen Lankester, in 1887:

A thief has quietly dramatized Fauntleroy and I am engaged in fierce battle with him. [...]

The brigand, whose name is Seebohm, *knew* he was doing a miserable, dishonest thing, and knew I thought myself protected by the "All rights reserved" on the title-page. He kept his plans most discreetly secret until he was ready and it was too late for me to hurry *my* play and secure myself – and then he calmly informed me that he had "dramatized my charming book." Then, letters and telegrams and general excitement. Then I think he realized that he was in a rather glaringly ugly position and that public opinion would be against him, and after having told me I couldn't help myself, etc. etc. he finally telegraphed that he would give me half profits if I would sanction.

But I will not sanction any profits if my dear little boy is spoiled. (qtd. in Thwaite 108-9; emphasis in original)

Burnett viewed Seebohm's actions as calculated in their timing and as an attempt to take advantage of her by flattering her with praise for her novel. Labelling Seebohm a

“thief” re-echoes other discourses of the time regarding adapters, discussed further below. Furthermore, fearing that adaptation might spoil her novel, “her dear little boy,” indicates that, above any financial consideration, her concern lay with the quality of the dramatisation. She retaliated by beginning to dramatise the novel herself to protest against his adaptation. He continued regardless, informing her of his adaptation’s success at the Prince of Wales Theatre, which premiered on 23 February 1888.⁵⁴

Although he was legally allowed to adapt the play for stage performance, he had violated the law in another way, which allowed Burnett to take him to court through her publisher Frederick Warne and Co., and even prevent further performances of the play. Seebohm’s legal breach was that he had made four typewritten copies of the play text: one had been sent to the Lord Chamberlain, as the licenser of the play, and the others had been given to the players. These texts served as written evidence that he had “appropriated practically without change, large proportions of the dialogue, the names of the principal characters, the situations and plot, and that the explanatory and descriptive matter in the novel had been transferred to the play as dialogue and stage directions” (Rogers 120). In his judgement, Justice Stirling ruled in favour of Warne/Burnett, decreeing that the copies of the play had to be given up.⁵⁵ As this included the Lord Chamberlain’s copy, whose license was needed to perform the play, the performance ultimately had to be withdrawn.

⁵⁴ Seebohm, despite having the law on his side, went to great lengths to get Burnett’s approval for the adaptation, including travelling to see her in Florence. However, Ann Thwaite states that Seebohm “lost any sympathy” he had when he claimed that his play was only “suggested” by Burnett’s book, despite the “plot, characters and dialogue” having “all been lifted bodily” (110).

⁵⁵ The script cancellation order appears to have been carried out, as there is no known surviving copy and it is missing from the Lord Chamberlain’s record (Powell 120).

However, in his ruling, Justice Sterling stated that: “There is a possible mode by which, without infringing the plaintiff’s copyright, the defendant may be able to make copies of the play.” Although he does not explain what that mode might be, Edward S. Rogers proposes that, if the defendant had merely taken copies of the novel and “simply marked the passages he desired his actors to recite, he could not have been enjoined” (120). Whether this would have been a viable solution is doubtful, however, as a marked copy of the novel might not have been accepted by the Lord Chamberlain as a play script and it would pose further written proof of copyright breach.

Nevertheless, this case offered a precedent by which future authors could potentially prevent performed adaptations of their fictions. Whereas *Tinsley v. Lacy* concerned the distribution of the published play to the audience, this case concerned the distribution of play scripts to performers and the licensor, which was standard practice. The Lord Chamberlain would not license a play without having the accompanying text. The far-reaching consequences of this decision meant that the courts could order all copies of unauthorised theatrical adaptations to be destroyed making it impossible to perform them legally.

Burnett’s own dramatisation opened in May 1888, four days after the judgement, with the telling title, *The Real Little Lord Fauntleroy*, receiving more favourable reviews than Seebohm’s version.⁵⁶ Burnett even joined the actors on-stage for the curtain call, highlighting her position as author, not only of the original, but also as the adapter of the self-authored, self-authorized stage adaptation. Subsequently, also with Burnett’s involvement, the play was produced in America. The court case was regarded as a

⁵⁶ The *Times* review (15 May 1888) reads: “*The Real Little Lord Fauntleroy* [...] proved to be in all respects superior to the pirated version which Mr Seebohm has been restrained from performing. Better written, better balanced, more sympathetic in treatment [...] it] reflects in a great measure the fresh, delicate, exquisitely pretty sentiment of the book” (10).

victory for writers across Britain, and Burnett's perseverance in her right of ownership was widely acknowledged: for example, by the Society of British Authors in July 1888, who honoured her at a banquet, which was held "in honour of American men and women of letters now in England, partially in order to thank them for their efforts on behalf of international copyright." At the banquet, she was presented with a diamond bracelet and ring; the bracelet's inscription read: "To Frances Hodgson Burnett, with the gratitude of British Authors," and the present also included a scroll, signed by 84 writers, stating:

The undermentioned Men and Women of Letters desire to express to Mrs Frances Hodgson Burnett their appreciation of the great service they believe she has rendered to British Authors by so strongly attracting public attention to the unsatisfactory condition of Copyright Law in England. (qtd. in Thwaite 113-4)

Kerry Powell argues: "[n]ot only did Burnett become the first woman novelist to repel this textual violence with a play of her own [...] but she became the first also to erase, quite literally, the male playwright's adaptation" (119). There was, however, a tragic underside to the triumph: leaving London after the injunction, Seebohm appears to have committed suicide in New York a few months later, following news of Burnett's theatrical success reaching America (Powell 120-1).

The consequences of this case had wider repercussions for authors more generally, as the court cases fought by Braddon and Burnett through their publishers prominently highlighted the problems within the existing copyright laws, which, together with changing attitudes about literary ownership, set new legal precedents for dramatic adaptations at the end of the nineteenth century. These, however, were not fully

realised until the 1911 Copyright Act, discussed in Chapter Three.⁵⁷ Prior to this, and to Braddon and Burnett's victories in court, other means of protesting unauthorised adaptations were being established.

b. The Adapter Adapted

No one was immune from struggles with copyright and unauthorised adaptations, regardless of gender, financial status, fame, or social standing. Even Charles Dickens (1812-70), the most famous and financially powerful mid-nineteenth century novelist in any country, was unable to control stage adaptations of his fiction and frequently became involved in debates surrounding authorial rights in theatrical adaptations of his works. Like Burnett years later, he was not only outspoken in print about the injustices that he experienced as a writer whose work spawned numerous unauthorised theatrical adaptations and the laws that allowed them, he was also actively engaged in and with adaptations of his writings. Dickens's highly publicised and eloquent writings on the subject influenced public opinion. By 1910, one year before the 1911 copyright law that would make radical changes to prior laws, S.J. Adair Fitz-Gerald agreed that Dickens was often "robbed right and left of the efforts of his genius" (74). In his book, *Dickens and the Drama*, Fitz-Gerald documented the close connection and interest that Dickens had with the theatre, not just as a dramatic writer, but also as an amateur actor. In this and other accounts of Dickens's relation to theatre, it is clear that he did not always object to all adaptations of his work, authorising some, attempting to write others, and involving himself in adaptations in other ways, such as attending rehearsals and proposing suggestions in the process.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ After Burnett's death on 29 October 1924, *The Times* obituary credited the 1911 Copyright Act as the "natural consequence" of her 1888 court action (30 Oct. 1924: 16).

⁵⁸ Paul Schlicke and Grahame Smith have documented Dickens's enthusiasm for popular entertainment, despite his contempt for adaptive piracy.

Examples of his attempts included: arranging to adapt some of his Christmas works with Albert Smith (in Fitz-Gerald's view, to thwart the "literary purloiners") and proposing to dramatise *Oliver Twist* himself in 1838, albeit in vain (104).⁵⁹ Like many others before and after him, Dickens's objections to stage adaptations of his writings were not only financial and reputational, but also made to maintain authorial control over his characters and plots, most markedly when playwrights took to adapting his work before his serialisations had even been completed.

While court cases tend to highlight financial loss and remuneration, as audiences often chose to see plays rather than buy periodicals or books, Dickens was concerned about other negative consequences for authors, including adaptations undermining authorial control over a prose narrative prior to its completion and poor quality adaptations casting shade on an author's literary reputation. He therefore particularly objected to stage adaptations pre-empting his endings before he had written it and when they did not convey what he considered to be a favourable impression of his works and, by extension, of himself as their author. He wrote, for instance, to Frederick Yates, who managed the Adelphi Theatre where a dramatic adaptation of *Nicholas Nickleby* by Edward Sterling was being staged in November 1838 before he had finished writing the novel in serial form:⁶⁰

My general objection to the adaptation of any unfinished work of mine simply is, that being badly done and worse acted it tends to vulgarize the characters, to destroy or weaken in the minds of those who see

⁵⁹ The proposal had been made to Frederick Yates, but nothing came of it. In the meantime, between March and December 1838, five unauthorised adaptations of *Oliver* appeared (Slater 121).

⁶⁰ Sterling later adapted *A Christmas Carol* to the stage in 1844, which, according to the playbill, was "the only dramatic version sanctioned by C. Dickens." Stirling relates how Dickens even attended rehearsals, where he provided "valuable suggestions" (Fitz-Gerald 186-90).

them the impressions I have endeavoured to create, and consequently to lessen the after-interest in their progress. (*Letters* 463)⁶¹

Although, after viewing it himself, Dickens points out that “no such objection” existed with regard to Sterling’s adaptation, his general view was that an adaptation of an unfinished work reduced reader interest in the ongoing serialisation, thus potentially cutting Dickens’s profits and devaluing his work.

Of more interest to adaptation studies than this oft-made point, Sterling had pre-empted Dickens’s authorship and ownership of his own narrative by writing an ending for it before the “original” ending appeared. By adapting the serial before the original ending had been written, the adaptation perversely took precedence over the original. In the minds of theatre audiences and serial readers, this pre-emptive, and yet still secondary, ending might undermine the novel’s actual ending, not only diminishing consumer interest in finishing the literary serial and profits for Dickens and his publishers, but also constituting a potential disruption in the normal sequence of source and adaptation, so that the prose fiction “source” ended up being seen to adapt the adaptation.

The best-known dramatist to adapt many of Dickens’s novels for the stage before he had finished writing them in serial form was William Thomas Moncrieff (1794-1857),⁶² who was considered a “pirate” and a “hack” writer, not just in critical studies

⁶¹ This had also occurred during the 1836-7 serialisation of *The Pickwick Papers* in, among others, adaptations by Sterling and Moncrieff (Fitz-Gerald 73-96). In the playbill to Moncrieff’s adaptation, the “Adaptor” includes a deferential disclaimer that he was able to “bring Mr. Pickwick’s affairs to a conclusion rather sooner than his gifted biographer has done, if not so satisfactorily as could be wished, at all events quite legally.” Schlicke suggests there were at least seven *Pickwick* adaptations staged before the serial had finished its run (33).

⁶² In 1829, Moncrieff prosecuted a “fellow-conspirator for selling the copyright of one of his own unauthorised dramatisations of another man’s work” (Fitz-Gerald 83). It is not entirely clear to which incident Fitz-Gerald refers. It could relate to another dramatisation or unauthorised publication of Moncrieff’s *Giovanni in London* (1919), which Moncrieff was unable to prosecute in court due to financial limitations.

of Dickens (for example, in Patten 204; Bolton, *Dickens* 23), but also by Dickens, and even by Moncrieff himself.⁶³ Favourable accounts defending Moncrieff, however, have been written more recently: for example, Jacky Bratton calls for a more “sympathetic and indeed admiring evaluation” of Moncrieff’s adaptations, arguing that his reputation had been “fatefully tarnished by the abuse of Charles Dickens” (9). Moncrieff stood in striking contrast to the widely celebrated Dickens, and they had numerous public disagreements on the process of adaptation and the rights of the literary writer and the stage adapter.⁶⁴

Dickens, however, went further than other prose writers when he published a proclamation against adapters before the serialisation of *Nicholas Nickleby* began. Under his celebrated pseudonym, “Boz,” he stated:

Whereas we are the only true and lawful “Boz.” And whereas it hath been reported to us, who are commencing a New Work, to be called – THE LIFE & ADVENTURES OF NICHOLAS NICKLEBY That some dishonest dullards, resident in the by-streets and cellars of this town, impose upon the unwary and credulous, by producing cheap and wretched imitations of our delectable Works. And whereas we derive but small comfort under this injury, from the knowledge that the dishonest dullards aforesaid, cannot, by reason of their mental smallness, follow near our heels, but are constrained to creep along by dirty and little-frequented ways, at a most respectful and humble distance behind. And whereas, in like manner, as some other vermin

⁶³ “I [Moncrieff] was regularly engaged at the theatre [Drury Lane] as a sort of hack author” (*Selection of Reports and Papers of the House of Commons, Volume: Literary and Scientific* 32: 175).

⁶⁴ There are numerous accounts detailing the disagreement between Moncrieff and Dickens: see, for example, Cox (126-56), who also criticises the mistreatment of Moncrieff by Dickens and his friends; see also, Patten 204-5; Karen E. Laird 78-9; Renata Kobetts Miller (“Nineteenth-Century” 58-62).

are not worth the killing for the sake of their carcasses, so these kennel rats are not worth the powder and shot of the law, inasmuch as whatever damages they may commit, they are in no condition to pay any. (*Nickleby* 832-3)

Dickens charged adapters with dishonesty and dullness; he positioned them outside the mainstream in by-streets and below board in underground rooms; he diminished them economically (“cheap”) and intellectually (“mental smallness”), dehumanising them as rats and vermin. With regard to copyright, which is the main focus of this chapter, he explained the law’s failure to regulate them in terms of their inability to pay damages; like rats, they were not worth the law’s consideration.

Dickens also went further than other authors by adapting one adapter in his fiction. When Moncrieff adapted the serialisation before its conclusion (the monthly serial ran from March 1838 until September 1839), Dickens seized on the opportunity to fictionalise Moncrieff in a satirical portrait ridiculing him as a writer in chapter 48 of the unfinished *Nicholas Nickleby*, published on 30 May 1839:

[T]here was a literary gentleman present who had dramatised in his time two hundred and forty-seven novels as fast as they come out – some of them faster than they had come out – and *was* a literary gentleman in consequence. (632-7; emphasis in original)

Since Moncrieff had already pre-empted the novel’s ending, he had no chance of rebutting his portrait in this adaptation. Dickens thus managed to have the final word, even though Moncrieff had pre-empted his ending, authoring the adapter when he was not allowed to authorise the adaptation.

Dickens also wrote a diatribe for the eponymous hero of the novel, Nicholas Nickleby, to give to the “literary gentleman.” As a rare instance of an author commenting on his adapter in fiction, it is worth quoting in full:

[Y]ou take the uncomplete books of living authors, fresh from their hands, wet from the press, cut, hack, and carve them to the powers and capacities of your actors, and the capability of your theatres, finish unfinished works, hastily and crudely vamp up ideas not yet worked out by their original projector, but which have doubtless cost him many thoughtful days and sleepless nights; by a comparison of incidents and dialogue, down to the very last word he may have written a fortnight before, do your utmost to anticipate his plot – all this without his permission, and against his will; and then, to crown the whole proceeding, publish in some mean pamphlet, an unmeaning farrago of garbled extracts from his work, to which you put your name as author, with the honourable distinction annexed, of having perpetrated a hundred other outrages of the same description. Now, show me the distinction between such pilfering as this, and picking a man’s pocket in the street, unless, indeed, it be, that the legislature has a regard for pocket handkerchiefs, and leaves men’s brains, except when they are knocked out by violence, to take care of themselves. (633-4)

The work of the adapter is here described as being thoughtless and slatternly, suggesting how, especially with an unfinished work, the adapter savages the carefully crafted work of the original author. Although the direct address makes this impassioned discourse personal to Moncrieff, who had been identified by the press as the gentleman in question, it gestures to a much more widespread authorial attitude to

dramatisation of their novels. Writing adaptation is thus devalued as thoughtless and crude, as well as criminal; both charges are considerably worsened by an accompanying representation of the adapter boasting of his actions. Dickens used his fiction to attack not only the individual adapter, but also the immorality of the legislation,⁶⁵ as well as the theatres and publishers that allowed such thefts to occur, when the law prohibits, to his mind, much lesser thefts of pocket handkerchiefs.

Dickens contrasted the cost of creativity and labour involved in creating original fiction unfavourably to the lesser labour that he considers to be involved in adaptation, which he likened to criminal theft of a man's hard-earned possessions by those who did not work to earn the money to pay for what they pilfered. The outrage of the analogy is accentuated because, unlike pickpocketing and pilfering, literary crimes are protected by the law, devaluing artistic labour, while failing to protect ownership rights by comparison to laws regarding property.

Moncrieff had only just adapted *Nicholas Nickleby* to the stage ten days prior, premiering on 20 May. Since Moncrieff could not respond by recuperating the fictional literary gentleman in a stage adaptation, he wrote an open letter to the press and public defending himself and articulating the dramatist's view of adaptation and the disadvantageous situation of novel dramatisation at the time.⁶⁶ Dated 5 June 1839, the letter reads:

I could wish it were generally agreed that no original Novel,
Romance, or Tale should be made use of for dramatic purposes,

⁶⁵ An incident in *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1844) also creates an allegory for the theft of intellectual property: the dispute between Martin and his former master, who claims ownership over the architectural plans of the building that Martin had designed via a technicality – his idea of adding four windows (Adams, “Performing Ownership” 228).

⁶⁶ The letter and exchange between Moncrieff and Dickens is discussed further in Chapter Two.

without the original Author having an interest in such appropriation, but as such is not the case, and the works of novelists, etc., have at all times been considered fair game to the dramatist, without any complaint from their Authors, I do not perceive why I should be expected to become a solitary exception, and be debarred an advantage allowed to others. [...]

I willingly admit that the common practice of dramatising works before their original authors have completed them is an unfair and vexatious one; but it did not originate with me. (qtd. in full in Fitzgerald 121-6)

While Moncrieff objected to being singled out by Dickens, he agreed that authors should be remunerated for adaptations of their work, but that this was not the law or common practice. Where both Dickens and Moncrieff agreed was on how urgent the need had become for a fairer copyright law that would reflect cultural values held in common by authors and adapters. The textual exchange between Dickens and Moncrieff, involving various forms of writers writing, highlighted the growing consensus regarding the need for further reforms in copyright laws, even among adapters who, already economically disadvantaged by comparison to successful prose writers such as Dickens, stood to lose from such changes.

But there was more to this debate than issues of crediting and remuneration. It cannot be that Dickens was merely objecting to Moncrieff's claim to literary status by writing an original ending to his adaptation of another man's work, since other dramatists had already pre-empted Dickens's ending several months prior, including

Sterling.⁶⁷ Dickens's swift and virulent response to Moncrieff's adaptation may have arisen because Moncrieff had *correctly* guessed Dickens's intended ending for *Nicholas Nickleby*, where his predecessors had not, thus forcing Dickens to change his ending and, in the process, *to become an adapter of his own work* to reassert his identity as original author. The accusation that Moncrieff had stolen his "brains" (ideas) rather than his writings supports this supposition,⁶⁸ as does Moncrieff's letter to the public:

[T]hat I should unfortunately have hit upon the same ending of the history as that projected by Mr. Dickens, and thereby have caused him annoyance, I really regret; but there is a very easy way of making me "hide my diminished head." Let Mr Dickens – and he has five months before him – set his wits to work again and finish his "Nicholas Nickleby" better than I have done, and I shall sink into the primitive mire, from which I have for a moment attempted to emerge by catching at the end of his garment. (122-3)

Guessing and pre-empting the original author's ending, in turn, would have set Moncrieff on a par with the original author; hence, Dickens's scathing attack on his literary pretensions. Whatever Dickens's motives for singling out Moncrieff, it may be that writing the ending was a welcome liberty from adaptation, presenting a rare opportunity to write something original for the adapter. The larger point to stress here for adaptation studies more generally is that this adaptation ruptured conventions of original and adaptation by partially inverting the adaptation of another author's

⁶⁷ Patten suggests that, by the end of the serialisation, there were at least twenty-five unauthorised adaptations in non-patent theatres and in the provinces (204).

⁶⁸ Moncrieff had anticipated that Smike was Ralph's son, but had made his mother a relation of Sir Mulberry (Slater 134).

original writing with original writing by the adapter, conversely requiring adaptation by the “original” author.

c. The Author as Transatlantic Commodity

As the century progressed, authors increasingly challenged copyright laws, with Charles Reade and John Hollingshead founding the Association to Protect the Rights of Authors in 1875, supported by other authors such as Tom Taylor, Anthony Trollope, and George Eliot (Lauriat 28-9). In America, the Authors Copyright League (later: American Copyright League, 1883) included authors such as Mark Twain, Henry James, Louisa May Alcott, Harriet Beecher Stowe, as well as Burnett. Authors such as Reade, Collins, and Dickens were vociferous about the gap between national and international laws.⁶⁹ Collins wrote to Reade in November 1869: “If you and I could get our brethren to fight without being paid for it – and to agree together – we should have international copyright all over the world. But (except Dickens) who will take the trouble?” (*Letters 2*: 333).

These and other challenges began to change press and public opinion, putting pressure on lawmakers.⁷⁰ Although not always sympathetic to the plight of the author, whom the press believed benefited from adaptations, as many authors themselves acknowledged, twenty years on, the press concurred with Collins:

While we are not inclined to take a sentimental view of the grievances of adapted novelists, who get an excellent advertisement, by the way,

⁶⁹ International copyright was an especially contentious topic for British and American authors, who actively petitioned for international agreements and formed alliances to do so (Seville, *Internationalisation* 146-253).

⁷⁰ Laurel Brake and Julie F. Codell address the Victorian press as a place for debate between editors, authors and readers; Alexis Easley discusses the relationship of the Victorian press with female authors.

out of the fuss over their sufferings, we are willing to wax as indignant as their most enthusiastic champion could desire at the existing state of the law [...] Why do novelists not all “pull together,” agitate fiercely, and get the law altered? (*The Era*, 3 March 1888: 13)

More specifically, Collins expressed his opinions on the perceived faults of the Anglo-American legal system in two published articles.⁷¹ “A National Wrong,” written collaboratively with James Payn in February 1870 for *Chambers’s Journal*,⁷² was left unsigned by Collins, but he undoubtedly had a hand in its writing, because it includes a letter exchange between himself and a Dutch publishing house, published previously in the *Echo* “in [an] act of justice,”⁷³ and republished here with a framing commentary, attacking the “dishonesty of the publishers in Holland,” while also referring to the copyright conflict with the United States (107-10).⁷⁴ A decade on, another article, “Considerations on the Copyright Question,” published in the New York monthly *International Review* 8 in June 1880 (609-18), continued the arguments of “A National Wrong.” Here, Collins directly attacked the practices of American publishing houses and recounts the financial losses that authors such as himself and Dickens have incurred from the absence of international copyright law and defended the principle that authors should possess control over their intellectual property, their works, whether at home or abroad on the principle of moral right.

Burnett, born in Britain and emigrating to America at an early age, “spent her life as neither British nor American [...] straddling both countries’ opportunities and

⁷¹ Graham Law gives a comparative assessment of both articles, arguing that Collins continued to protest the lack of legal protection for novelists from adaptation after Dickens’s death in 1870 (“Collins” 178-95).

⁷² Payn was editor of the *Chambers’s Journal*, as well as a novelist.

⁷³ This extract is from his aforementioned letter to Reade (1869).

⁷⁴ Andrew Gasson *et al.* also reprint this article with annotations.

attitudes” (Gerzina x). She thus provides a particularly apt case study to investigate British copyright law in an international context. After her literary success in both America and England, unauthorised reprints of her work were widely published in both nations: these included legitimate and illegitimate re-publications of her work. Initially she left herself vulnerable in both nations by not sufficiently copyrighting her work in either. Gerzina argues that “the struggles over copyright to her own work in England and America awakened in her a desire to protect her work and outwit those who sought to cash in on her labour and hard-earned profits” (76). But Burnett herself was not solely focused on financial issues; she was equally focused on another kind of credit: her reputation as a writer, hard-earned over a long career.

In a letter to her American friend Mary Bucklin Claflin, dated July 1882, she expressed reluctance to have her early, less accomplished stories republished: “I was a very unripe little girl when I wrote [*Dolly*] & it makes me feel queer to read it, in these my worldly & sophisticated days” (qtd. in Gerzina 71). Indeed, reviews such as those in the *Literary World* in 1878 agreed with Burnett’s reluctance to have these stories resurface, writing:

We can well understand why Mrs. Burnett might wish that her *Kathleen*, which first saw light, we believe, in *Peterson’s Magazine*, should have been left there buried and forgotten, for, though in no way discreditable to her as the effort of a young writer, it is wholly lacking in the picturesque power which she has manifested in her later work.

(VIII.11: 193)

My concern in this chapter, however, is less with the international republication of fiction than with dramatic adaptations of fiction. In 1878, almost simultaneously, four

unauthorised dramatic versions of Burnett's first novel *That Lass o' Lowrie's* (1877) had appeared in London. One of them, by Joseph Hatton and Arthur Mathison, had claimed falsely in the script, entered at the Stationer's Hall in 1877, that it was "the only version of Mrs Burnett's Novel authorised by the author. It cannot be performed without the express permission in writing of Joseph Hatton and Arthur Mathison,⁷⁵ of the Dramatic Authors' Society" (qtd. in Bolton, *Women* 106). In light of Burnett's concerns about her reputation, Hatton allegedly wrote to the *New York Times*, claiming that, but for his play, people in Britain would have never heard of the book (Thwaite 62), possibly basing his assertion on the premise that Burnett was better known in America.

Another dramatisation of *That Lass o' Lowrie's*, written by Charles Reade, performed under the title of "Joan"⁷⁶ in Liverpool in August 1878, instigated a widely publicised debate based on Burnett's transatlantic copyright and on international differences between the copyright laws governing theatrical adaptations. In the *New York Times*, Reade defended his decision to adapt her work without her permission on the basis of the British copyright laws and conventions:

There was no earthly reason why we should not do so. The authoress in her book has shown a natural and proper desire to retain *copyright* [of

⁷⁵ Hatton and Mathison dramatised other Burnett novels. In 1879, their play *Loved and Lost* was based on Burnett's *Haworth's* (1879). *Haworth's* became a test case for international copyright law. Her English publisher Macmillan informed her that "some publishers in London contemplate reprinting *Haworth's* for the purpose of testing how far an American author's books can be protected in England. We are of course sorry that any book of ours should be chosen for a test[,] as we are peaceable people and don't like lawsuits but, if we find ourselves being robbed, we shall do what we can to protect ourselves." According to the law, Burnett was advised to be within British dominion on the day of publication (Thwaite 60). The uncertainty regarding international copyright, then, led to the law being trialled in the courts in these and other ways.

⁷⁶ "Joan" was the name of the titular *Lass* in Burnett's novel. Hatton's adaptation was entitled "Liz, or, that Lass O' Lowrie's" (Bolton, *Women* 106-7). Both "Liz" and "Joan" were characters in the original novel. In Hatton's version, Thwaite points out that "Joan" in the book is now called "Liz" in the play, with Liz as "the poor wronged girl with the bastard child" in the book being "obviously considered too strong meat for the stage" (61).

the novel] in both countries. But she has not printed one syllable to lead one to suppose she desired to retain *stage-right* in it. And, as it is not the habit of novelists, unless they are known dramatists, to dramatize their own works, she has left this entirely open, especially as the law of England gives no novelist *stage* rights in his work, but only copyright, or the right of *printing* and *publishing*. (31 October 1878: 4; emphasis in original)

Reade reminded readers that the only stage rights accorded British prose fiction authors lay in the publication of their own dramatic adaptations of their fiction.

Although this did not deter other playwrights from adapting their work, as we have seen, it did secure the prose writer some dramatic, adaptive rights. In contrast, American copyright law gave novelists the option to reserve dramatic rights to their work within a specified time period after initial publication.⁷⁷

When Burnett, as Collins had done, subsequently appealed to Reade on the grounds of moral right, demanding that he stop the play even though the law permitted it, he relented, withdrawing his adaptation in England. However, having already sold the dramatisation abroad, an American adaptation of his adaptation was staged. Reade offered payment to Burnett for both versions,⁷⁸ which he was not required to do by law. However, as a novelist and a playwright who had, without authorisation, both adapted and been adapted, and who maintained an avid interest in copyright proceedings and authorial rights, he understood and likely sympathised with Burnett's

⁷⁷ Derek Miller provides an overview of American copyright law and British novelists staging adaptations. For more information on American literary law and the internationalisation of copyright, see Saunders 149-87.

⁷⁸ There are varying reports of Reade's involvement with that adaptation. Thwaite states that Reade received remuneration of "just £20" for his dramatisation which he gave to Burnett, further sending her paper documentation for that payment to verify that he was "punctilious in dealing with that gifted woman [Burnett] and her rights" (62).

position, crediting her both financially and reputationally. In spite of Reade's efforts, Burnett was still dissatisfied, and therefore determined to dramatise her own novel, discovering, in the process, a love of writing for the stage which she continued to pursue throughout her career.⁷⁹ She also took steps to protect her work more strenuously in future.⁸⁰

d. Author-ising Adaptation

Authorising adaptations in order to establish some degree of control over the dramatisation of fiction, however, could lead to further complications, including financial, performative, and narrative disagreements between authors and adapters.

Authorised stage adaptations were liable to turn negative and result in a loss of control and respect for the prose author, as was the case with Marie Corelli (1855-1924), who had been asked to turn her novel, *The Sorrows of Satan* (1895), into a play, but had declined to adapt it herself. She subsequently gave permission for it to be adapted by the unknown Captain Herbert Woodgate and Paul Berton, albeit with the condition that "nothing was to be done respecting this play without my distinctly declared approval" (qtd. in Ransom 87). When the final version was read in her presence, it was declared "unactable" by Herbert Beerbohm Tree, a renowned theatre actor and manager,⁸¹ who was also present. Corelli agreed with him, and even offered to rewrite parts of the play herself, an offer that the adapters rejected, determining to revise it

⁷⁹ Her own subsequent dramatisation (autumn 1878 in New York), co-written by Julian Magnus, did not receive much financial or critical acclaim (Gerzina 74).

⁸⁰ *A Lady of Quality* (1896) was released simultaneously in both the US and Britain, and the copyright performance in Britain took place on the same day (Gerzina 191).

⁸¹ Tree was an early participant in film, involved in the first filmed Shakespeare play, *King John* (1899), and three other early Shakespearian adaptations: *The Tempest* (1905), *Henry VIII* (1911), and *Macbeth* (1916), all of which are lost. Discussing the one-minute film of *King John*, of which only one of four scenes has survived, Luke McKernan argues that film was utilised to enhance theatre and showcase stage performance rather than develop film art.

themselves. Her belief in their ability was so marked that Corelli wrote to the Grosvenor Theatrical Syndicate, who planned to produce the play, indicating that:

[She] left the matter to Messrs Woodgate and Berton, trusting to the knowledge and experience they professed to have of the stage that they would alter and revise the play not only to make it worthy of the admitted success of my book, but also of the prestige of my name. (qtd. in Ransom 87)

After the revised version of the play was given to the Syndicate without Corelli's approval, she was invited to be present at its first reading in the theatre where, in her own account, two of the leading actors (Evelyn Millard and Lewis Waller) left abruptly, informing Corelli later that they were not willing to risk their reputation by acting in the play, echoing Corelli's own point about the adaptation being reflective of her reputation. Considering this version to be worse than the first, Corelli wrote: "I was entirely of [the actors'] opinion, and the whole incident gave me the greatest pain" (qtd. in Ransom 88). Yet there was nothing that Corelli could do to stop the production, despite refusing the proffered £500 cheque for the theatrical rights.⁸² Proclaiming that she could not see "anything ahead of the proposed production but disastrous failure," she declined to attend any more rehearsals or performances. As predicted, the play was condemned in reviews and it was assumed by the public that Corelli, mortified by the failure, was the author, or that, at the least, the play had been sanctioned by her.

Corelli's involvement in the initial agreement and her direct involvement at various stages of production fuelled this perception, rendering her more accountable in the

⁸² Corelli offered to return the money to Grosvenor Syndicate shareholders and to write a guaranteed successful play herself, starring Beerbohm Tree. However, they refused on grounds that, the shares having been issued, they were obligated to go ahead with the production (Coates and Bell 190).

eyes of the press and the public than if it had been an entirely unauthorised endeavour. Corelli's position as an independent female writer, without a male figure or a publisher to champion her, made her especially vulnerable. Since her relationship with the press had always been volatile,⁸³ despite her protestations to the contrary, they did not hesitate to hold her responsible for the failed adaptation. Unlike Braddon and Burnett, Corelli had never attempted to write for the theatre, and was thus arguably more susceptible to failed dramatic adaptations, since there were no superior adaptations authored by her to override those authorised by her. Her reputation and career were further harmed when this catastrophic failure reportedly made other theatre managers wary of staging adaptations of her fiction (Waller 787), causing further damage to her reputation and her work.⁸⁴

e. Legally Safeguarding Adaptation

The press was also alienated by authorial efforts to secure dramatic copyright. In the latter half of the century, staging theatrical performances in order to copyright them prior to their print publication became a popular and established means to circumvent the limitations of dramatic copyright law. Plays were promptly staged, often before the print publication of the plays, in order to secure legal performing rights. Often such preemptive performances were staged minimalistically and covertly in provincial theatres, producing hostility from the press, who were excluded from them in an effort to keep them secret, and who made accusations of “underhand dealings, particularly

⁸³ Ransom recounts occasions when Corelli and the popular press were opposed. Corelli, against her publishers' will, published *The Sorrows of Satan* without distributing customary free review copies to the press. Instead she inserted a notice on the first page, proclaiming: “NO COPIES OF THIS BOOK ARE SENT OUT FOR REVIEW. Members of the press will therefore obtain it (should they wish to do so) in the usual way with the rest of the public, i.e., through the Booksellers and the Libraries” (81; emphasis in original).

⁸⁴ Despite this, several other unauthorised versions of *The Sorrows of Satan* appeared on stage. Bolton catalogues 73 versions between 1896 and 1909 (*Women* 116-22).

when plays by prominent authors were being copyrighted” (Stephens, *Profession* 109). Both novelists and playwrights could stage dramatic readings for the public in order to assert authorial ownership over their writing in performance: this was also done on an international level.⁸⁵ Many authors followed Dickens’s trajectory by giving dramatic readings as copyright performances before publishing their literary work.⁸⁶ They include Corelli, who organised dramatic readings of her novels as soon as they were published, in order to register her own performance copyright of them.⁸⁷ Writing on Corelli’s life in 1903, T.F. Coates and Warren Bell, describe how this necessity would often take the form of “a ‘sham’ play performed before a ‘sham’ audience with ‘sham’ actors” (191). Louisa Ransom credits this way of assuring ownership of her work on the stage to Corelli’s prior negative experience with adaptation of her work by others in 1896-7 (87-8).

The staging of authorial copyright performances was an established tactic by the late 1880s, which, according to Derek Miller, earned “regular notice in the theatrical press,” became “a selling point for theatre owners” and acquired a “unique term of art,” as well as revealing “the complex interaction between economics and aesthetics in the late nineteenth century” (167-76). Miller, however, describes many “copyright performances” as “failed” theatrics, as he highlights the paradox, in which writers “successfully performed legal work without working as a theatrical performance” (174).

⁸⁵ Stephens and Miller suggest that “copyright performances” were a consequence of transatlantic copyright issues and credit their emergence to Dion Boucicault, but they differ on the date of origin, with Stephens dating them back to 1861 (105) and Miller to 1876, although their first mention in print was not until 1884 (164-6).

⁸⁶ Dickens was well-known for his staged readings, nationally and internationally, although they came too late to influence their copyright status, since his works had already been published as novels and as plays. See Chapter Two for a discussion of his staged readings.

⁸⁷ Discussing *The Master-Christian* (1900) and *Temporal Power* (1902), Philip Waller observes that they were never performed commercially (787-8).

Copyright performances were so commonly used to secure the stage rights of a work for its author that, when Burnett took legal action against Seebohm's unauthorised adaptation of her work in 1888, she was criticised in the press for her failure to lawfully secure it in that way:

If Mrs Burnett thought that *Little Lord Fauntleroy* was worth preserving for the adaptor, why did she not secure it in the legal way? A copyright performance can be easily done for about £30, a mere trifle to a successful lady novelist. (*The Era*, 3 March 1888: 13)

Burnett again learned from the experience, doing so with subsequent publications. However, these were not without problems. Gretchen Gerzina's biography of Burnett recounts how Burnett's copyright performance of *Phyllis* (1889) caused tension and confusion within and between the press, when it was mistaken for an actual trial matinee (129-30), because as the *Washington Post* had observed the day before its staging in London, Burnett declined "to follow the usual custom of having the lines merely read from the stage; she prefers to pay the expenses herself of a finished performance" (1 July 1889). In so doing, she brought criticism upon herself as a dramatic author in the *World*:

She should let experienced dramatists do this sort of work for her while she writes more stories. It is quite as absurd for her to make her own plays as it would be for her to make her own dresses. They do not fit and what she saves in wages she loses in time. (qtd. in Thwaite 123)

Despite the *World* being corrected and taken to task by the *Spirit of the Times* for their error, Burnett's reputation as a writer had been compromised by the ambivalent copyright performance. Nonetheless, such copyright performances worked to blur boundaries between prose fiction and plays. Miller argues that these subtly changed

theatrical aesthetics from nineteenth-century spectacle to the more literary theatre commencing in the 1890s (175). Going further than Miller, I argue that attempts to secure authorial rights in the reaction against the failure of copyright laws to secure them contributed not only to new theatrical aesthetics, but also to new forms of hybrid writing and adaptation across media, a subject to which this thesis returns throughout.

f. The Author as Plagiariser

Prose fiction authors were not solely victims of what they perceived to be unjust copyright laws: they were also able to benefit from lax copyright laws by adapting other people's work, though the risk of reputational damage meant that they sought to hide their sources. One particularly popular method was the "borrowing" of French plays for the London stage,⁸⁸ which, according to Stephens, was actively encouraged and did not require crediting or remuneration until the Berne Convention of 1886.

Controversially, though not illegally, Braddon adapted foreign plays to her own British novels without crediting them. Carnell claims that British stage adaptations of French plays influenced Braddon, tempting her to plagiarise them for her literary fiction. Rather naively, Carnell considers this "odd," claiming that Braddon had "fathomless imagination," while conceding that the vast amount of writing that Braddon was producing at the height of her fame in the 1860s made her turn to plagiarism out of financial need and in search of ideas, an explanation that Braddon advances herself in *Hostages to Fortunes* (1875), which features a playwright who

⁸⁸ Charles Reade and Dion Boucicault were also accused of this practice. Meer discusses how both used it to test legislations and create case-laws for adaptation.

finds himself “desperate for money, bereft of ideas, and so resorts to using a French play” (220).

Braddon’s 1864 novel, *The Doctor’s Wife*, adapts Gustave Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* (1856) for English readers, changing the ending and fates of the characters.⁸⁹

However, her 1867 novel, *Circe*, written under the pseudonym Babington White,⁹⁰ is more of a direct translation of Octave Feuillet’s *Dahlia* (1857) than an adaptation.

When she was exposed as the author, she was accused by the press of plagiarism and of being a “literary thief” (Carnell 220), a clear indication that, in spite of there being no legal prohibitions to what she had done, public opinions were changing and placing pressure on existing copyright laws. Although she could not be prosecuted, her authorial reputation was thoroughly compromised by her actions. The fact that she published the work under an alias further suggests that she was aware of the moral breach that she was committing and showcasing a double standard with regard to literary ownership in the context of adaptation, protesting when her own work was adapted without credit, while doing the same to fellow authors.

Burnett, who had protested against unauthorised stage adaptations of her fiction, was similarly charged with plagiarising *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1886). Newspapers picked up on similarities between Burnett’s novel and other works, such as a story written by A.T. Winthrop in 1880, entitled “Wilfred,” a source that Burnett dismissed.⁹¹ Mark

⁸⁹ Carnell compares the source and adaptation (214-9). Emily Allen analyses both culturally, arguing that Braddon wrote “against Flaubert and against the critics” by composing an “antisensational sensation novel” (24; 135-69). Robert Lee Wolff discusses this and other claims of piracy against Braddon.

⁹⁰ Braddon used pseudonyms throughout her professional life, starting her theatrical career as “Mary Seyton,” publishing poetry and fiction under that name. Much of her work was published anonymously using other pseudonyms such as “Babington White,” explaining the title of Carnell’s bibliography, *The Literary Lives of M.E. Braddon*.

⁹¹ Miss Winthrop accused Burnett of plagiarism, which the press publicised. On 1 October 1889, the *St James’s Gazette* outlined 18 similarities between the two stories and continued to review the charge and Burnett’s reaction in later articles (Oct 11th, 14th and 19th).

Twain believed that Burnett might have appropriated his work, as he wrote in a letter to a friend: “I doubt if Mrs Burnett knows whence came to her the suggestion to write ‘Little Lord Fauntleroy,’ but I know; it came to her from reading ‘The Prince and the Pauper’ [1881],” adding that: “In all my life I have never originated an idea, and neither has she, nor anybody else” (*Letters* 2: 814). Twain here shows not only unusual generosity to a potential plagiariser of his work, he also anticipates theories of poststructuralist intertextuality and postmodern scepticism regarding Romantic theories of originality prevalent in his own day.

Originality was tied not only to ownership, but also to aesthetics: it was, and still is in many contexts, seen to be a hallmark of fine writing in any medium.⁹² When Burnett defended herself from these accusations, this was only further detrimental to her reputation, since few believed her defence.⁹³ Those who wished to decide for themselves were free to do so, since both her work and the work she was said to plagiarise were in print – a further consequence of copyright law.

As evidenced in this chapter, copyright law greatly influenced adaptation practices in the nineteenth century in ways that have been largely overlooked by prior adaptation studies. While theatrical adaptation indubitably benefited prose fiction authors, increasing the reach of their fiction and reputation to wider audiences, the lack of financial or official nominal credit resulted in a loss of control and ownership of their intellectual property and additional profits. Copyright laws produced a variety of responses from authors, ranging from authorising adaptations by others to self-adaptation and from legal actions to public and fictional outcries in print. Despite their

⁹² Chapter Two treats questions of originality in more detail.

⁹³ *The Spectator* (1890) described this as “a reply which is in very bad taste, exceedingly contemptuous and angry, and not at all the kind of answer which those who are interested for her reputation could have desired” (164-5).

protests, some authors took advantage of the law from both dramatic and literary sides, adapting the work of others as well as being adapted by others and adapting their own work. Authors' proactive engagements with copyright law resulted in changed public opinions which eventually led to substantial changes in copyright law, discussed further in Chapter Three. They also contributed to and reflected other social, economic, cultural, class, and aesthetic relations between prose and theatrical writers and writing and to adaptations between prose and play, which are addressed in Chapter Two.

CHAPTER 2
NINETEENTH-CENTURY STRATIFICATIONS OF AUTHORS AND MEDIA

*[I]t appears manifest that an Author at present is
 subjected to indefensible hardship and injustice*

– 1832 Report by the
 Select Committee on the
 Dramatic Arts (5)

While public fascination with writers was considerable throughout the nineteenth century,⁹⁴ literary authorship was not officially recognised as a profession until the 1861 Census and, even then, authors were grouped with journalists, editors, artists, actors, and musicians, the number totalling 1673 individuals. By the 1880s, the number of self-declared authors had risen to 6111 (Salmon 6).⁹⁵ The status of writers, writing, and literary arts in the nineteenth century was the product of multiple factors, including copyright law, remuneration for writing, the class of consumers, and media theories. Adaptation also greatly influenced the status of authors and writing within and across media. For most of the nineteenth century, theatres were castigated for their recourse to adaptation, which was seen to lower theatrical writers and writing for a variety of reasons discussed in this chapter. However, by the 1890's, theatres were (dis-)playing high-quality, often original, writing; adaptation practices were more tightly regulated legally; the professional accreditation of playwrights was established and esteemed,⁹⁶ resulting overall in an improved relationship between literary practitioners across media by comparison to earlier in the century. All of these

⁹⁴ Alexis Easley discusses the celebrity status of nineteenth century British writers; Loren Glass focuses on American writers and celebrity at the turn of the twentieth century.

⁹⁵ The 1841 Census groups authors under the category of "Other Educated Persons," in which only 167 out of 626 individuals declared their main occupation as writing. In 1911, the number of self-declared authors was 13786 (Salmon 6). The Census statistics apply to England and Wales.

⁹⁶ These advancements were already acknowledged in contemporary reviews: for example, by William Archer in 1882.

developments were influential in shaping the profession of authorship and theatre as a writer's medium.

Their lack of official recognition meant that earlier in the century, authors sought other ways to establish themselves professionally, including rivalries with other authors forged in debates over adaptations. As established in Chapter One, novelist Charles Dickens and playwright William Thomas Moncrieff were not viewed with the same social, aesthetic, and economic regard. Their battle over authorship in adaptation indicated how the interplay of various cultural values – economics, reputation, the class of their audiences, and the media in which they wrote – competed complexly and variably to establish the authorship and social status of each. This chapter examines more widely how adaptation and authorship inflected and were inflected by each of these values.

i. The Profession of (Dramatic) Writing

Writing within and across media created formal, social, economic, aesthetic, and theoretical stratifications of prose and dramatic writing and writers. The economic remuneration, social standing, and attributed quality of literary work by which authors and writings were assessed were inextricably linked: for example, as I detail below, lower-class audiences who paid lower prices for their fiction and plays were often charged with having lower aesthetic tastes that limited the quality of writing that their authors were able or allowed to produce; concomitantly, the lesser-paid writers who wrote for lower-class audiences were often charged with being less talented, forced to write poorly because of the volume of writing that they had to produce to survive economically. Allardyce Nicoll points out that, between 1830 and 1860, when the

theatre had a low social standing and was chiefly frequented by the lower classes, “little could be made by a practising playwright unless he were prepared to sacrifice all his literary ambitions and devote himself to hack-work” (*A History* 2: 6).

Often this “hack-work” took the form of adaptation, which was furthermore charged with having low aesthetic value because it lacked the Romantic originality deemed essential for good writing in this period. Original writing, it was claimed by middle-class authors, was *naturally* preferred by the middle classes, while the lower orders, they argued, preferred adaptations. The fact that adaptations of English prose fiction in theatres were more prominently targeted as theft than the covert pilfering of French plays, and that adapter-dramatists of English fiction were being impeached and charged with criminal behaviour by the courts, press and novelists, confirms that adaptation itself exacerbated the general low status of theatre during this time. Joining the criminalising rhetoric applied to adaptation as theft that we saw in Chapter One, a rhetoric that continues in this chapter, claims that adaptations lacked originality and were easy to write devalued adapters under a middle-class work ethic, triggering further debates about the relative moral and cultural value of prose and dramatic writers and writings.

However, when celebrated prose writers tried and failed to adapt their fiction to the stage or to write good quality original plays, this challenged assumptions about adaptations and media hierarchies based on originality and work ethics, bringing medium specificity theory to bear on discourses of adaptation. Even as adaptation was roundly attacked from the perspective of multiple cultural values, adapters found ways to defend themselves and their writings discursively.

Copyright law, as we have seen, affected the fortunes of writers across media. Chapter One documents how playwrights benefitted from the Dramatic Copyright Act of 1833, which granted them greater ownership of their writing, and from new copyright laws that allowed them to freely adapt other texts to the stage without paying royalties or crediting sources. In 1832, a Select Committee spearheaded by Edward Bulwer Lytton was appointed to inquire into the Laws affecting Dramatic Literature, summing up its findings in a report that led to the 1833 Act but, more importantly for this thesis, illuminating a number of these issues. As Nicoll states, the status of dramatic writing was far from lucrative for most of the nineteenth century. In 1832, “A considerable decline, both in the Literature of the Stage, and the taste of the Public for Theatrical Performances” was “generally conceded” by the Select Committee (3). The report faulted “the uncertain administration of the Laws” and “the slender encouragement afforded to Literary Talent to devote its labours towards the Stage” (3), which the Committee argued had produced hardship and inequities for dramatic writers by comparison to other writing professions – hardship that lowered the quality of dramatic writing:

In regard to Dramatic Literature, it appears manifest that an Author at present is subjected to indefensible hardship and injustice [cited in the epigraph]; and the disparity of protection afforded to the labours of the Dramatic Writer, when compared even with that granted to Authors in any other branch of Letters, seems alone sufficient to divert the ambition of eminent and successful Writers from that department of intellectual exertion. (5)

The Committee hoped that changing copyright laws would improve these conditions:

Your Committee, therefore, earnestly recommend that the Author of a Play should possess the same legal rights, and enjoy the same legal protection, as the Author of any other literary production; and that his Performance should not be legally exhibited at any Theatre, Metropolitan or Provincial, without his express and formal consent. (5)

The Committee argued further that better pay would produce better writing:

In regard to Authors, it is probable that a greater variety of Theatres at which to present, or for which to adapt, their Plays, and a greater security in the profits derived from their success, will give new encouragement to their ambition, and, perhaps (if a play is never acted without producing some emolument to its Writer) may direct their attention to the more durable, as being also the more lucrative, classes of Dramatic Literature. (5-6)⁹⁷

Seven years before his dispute with Dickens over adapting *Nicholas Nickleby* (see Chapter One), Moncrieff testified before the Select Committee regarding the reputational and financial injustices suffered by dramatists in the 1830s:

As the drama is at present constituted, it is impossible for any man, whose misfortune may oblige him to resort to that species of writing, to obtain a fair remuneration for his labour and talent; the laxity that has crept into the different theatres in London renders it impossible, except by mere accident. A man may write a good piece and get well paid for it, but he must wait a long time. (176)

⁹⁷ In his testimony to the Committee, Moncrieff recommends that “if the minor theatres were classed, it would have a most beneficial effect,” as they could “become nurseries for dramatic talent” (5). For further information on the variety of theatres in this period, see Michael R. Booth; Allardyce Nicoll (*A History 2*); Russell Jackson; Anthony Jenkins and John Russell Stephens (*Censorship*). Jane Moody gives a historical account of illegitimate theatres in London 1770-1840.

Moncrieff suggested that if the French law of remuneration for theatrical writing were to be adopted,⁹⁸ “instead of being one of the poorest men,” he “should be one of the richest,” concurring with the Committee that, if the profession itself was more lucrative, more dramatic talent would emerge. Additionally, they agreed that the demand for adaptation, made lucrative through a lack of copyright protection for what was adapted, prevented originality and talent from emerging in dramatic writing.

a. Social, Cultural, and Economic Stratifications of Writers and Writing

The findings of the Select Committee paved the way for the Dramatic Copyright Act of 1833. Although the rights given to dramatic authors placed them on an equal legal footing with any literary author (Nicoll, *A History* 2: 70), this did not, on its own, ensure a rise in status or remuneration for the playwright. There were other economic and social factors influencing the low standing of theatre in general, and of adaptation in particular.

In 1839, seven years after his deposition, locked in a battle of words with Dickens, Moncrieff acknowledged that he was at a disadvantage because of the differing cultural valuations of prose fiction and theatrical writing at the time. In his open letter addressed “To The Public” in June 1839,⁹⁹ Moncrieff reminded the public that he and Dickens were equal in terms of class – both were gentleman who wrote for a living:

⁹⁸ According to the French law, dramatists were generally very well protected. Not only did they receive high remuneration for their work, but plays performed without the consent of the author at any theatre also risked the penalty of forfeiting the whole profits. In “Dramatic Grub Street” (1858), discussed further below, Wilkie Collins would also compare the English Theatre unfavourably to the French: “In France, the most eminent literary men of the period write, as a matter of course, for the stage, as well as for the literary table” (267). French plays, greatly admired by writers, were as rampantly and eagerly adapted as British prose fiction in this period.

⁹⁹ The letter is discussed in Chapter One and cited in full in Fitz-Gerald (121-6).

I confess I write for my living, and it is no discredit to Mr. Dickens to say that those who know him best are aware he is as much indebted to his pen for the dinner of the day, as I can possibly be. (125)

At the same time, he highlighted the marked class and economic differences between celebrated novelists and adapter-playwrights, hoping that Dickens would “indulge in a little more generosity of feeling towards his humbler brethren of the quill” in future (126). Yet his faux humility underscored the way in which one kind of writer sought to elevate himself by putting down another – in this case, by deprecating in his turn Dickens’s discursive depreciation of him on moral grounds:

I would beg to hint to Mr. Dickens that depreciating the talents of another is but a shallow and envious way of attempting to raise one’s own – that the calling the offending party a thief, sneering at his pecuniary circumstances, and indulging in empty boasts of tavern treats, are weapons of offence usually resorted to only by the very lowest order. (125)

If Dickens had criminalised Moncrieff’s writing as theft, Moncrieff retaliated by charging the very writing that criminalised him as immoral and low-class, implying that through his adversarial writing Dickens had devalued himself not only as a writer, but also as a gentleman. This debate, and many others, indicates for adaptation critics today the central role that adaptation played in the establishment and contestation of media and writer hierarchies in the nineteenth century.

The comparative lack of social and cultural esteem given to playwrights as opposed to novelists was closely linked to hierarchical ranking of the two media themselves.

While it would be overly simplistic and inaccurate to argue that all fiction writers were ranked more highly than all playwrights, it was not until later in the century, as

copyright laws offered more protection to writers, as the social status of theatregoers rose, and as the original writing deemed the hallmark of good art (by contrast to adaptation) was established in force in the theatre, that any playwright had any chance at being as highly regarded as a prose fiction author so famous and celebrated as Dickens.

One primary area in which media differences devalued the theatre lay in the fleeting nature of performed plays by comparison to printed prose fiction; concomitantly, public recognition of the stage adapter was brief in contrast to the prose writer whose work persisted and was often reissued in print. Moncrieff was keenly aware of this difference: “I can assure him I have never anticipated that any credit I might derive from dramatising ‘Nicholas Nickleby’ would more than endure beyond as many days” (125). Often, adapters were not credited at all: in 1837, Moncrieff was identified merely as “the author of ‘Tom & Jerry’” on a playbill for his dramatisation of *The Pickwick Papers* by Dickens. Despite “Tom & Jerry” also not being original work, but an adaptation of Pierce Egan’s journal *Life in London, or Days and Nights of Jerry Hawthorne and His Elegant Friend Corinthian Tom* (1821), Moncrieff, though unnamed, is nevertheless acknowledged as the “author.”¹⁰⁰ Yet in identifying him by the title of his former work, rather than by his own nominal title, the credit works more to favour the theatre than the author, informing audiences that, if they liked “Tom & Jerry,” they are likely to like this play.

The playbill for “Sam Weller! Or the Pickwickians,” performed at the Strand Theatre from July 1837, is an intriguing document informing relations between the prose writer and dramatic adapter, particularly in terms of the subsequent dispute between

¹⁰⁰ This has caused confusion, as the British Library entry for the Playbill credits Pierce Egan as the adapter.

Dickens and Moncrieff. By all appearances, Moncrieff himself wrote a paragraph for the advertisement, explaining the circumstances of the adaptation and his situation as adapter, as well as his ability as a literary critic, his views of the hybridity of Dickens's visual writing, and how medium specificity brought challenges to his own writing in adaptation:

The most graphic writer of any age or country, "Boz" presents to the dramatist both peculiar advantages & peculiar difficulties; – he is a painter in print, with all the finish, minuteness, and truth to nature, of the Dutch School; – in a sort of pen and ink actor, placin[g] vividly before us "in their form and habit, as they live" every character in life, from the highest to the lowest; – in short, for whim, and humour, and the power of delineating a character by a touch, he may truly be regarded as the verbal Cruikshank of the day.¹⁰¹ To meddle with so extraordinary a writer, therefore, is as dangerous as it is enticing [...] and with these observations all parties concerned, throw themselves on the kindness of their best *Patrons* the *Public!* and if only in honor of their original, the popular favorite "Boz," confidently anticipate a patient hearing and an impartial judgement. ("Playbill: Sam Weller"; emphasis in original)

The unnamed adapter here pays homage to the pseudonymous Dickens, highlighting the peculiar appeal that he holds as a pictorial, visual writer not only for the public, but also for dramatists. He underscores not only the difficulty but also the danger of

¹⁰¹ Dickens was frequently likened by periodical writers and reviewers to George Cruikshank, who illustrated many of Dickens's works and was widely celebrated for his caricatures. He had also illustrated Egan's *Life in London*. However, Cruikshank's collaborations with Dickens ended on bad terms, and after Dickens's death he also claimed to have contributed more substantially to the works themselves. See Robert L. Patten and J. Hillis Miller and David Borowitz.

adapting such writing to the stage and, as much as he credits the original writer and appeals through him to the audience, Moncrieff ultimately declares a degree of independence from the author in rewriting his work for adaptation and defers to the public's judgement, irrespective of Dickens's opinion of his work. The critical acclaim of an adapted play was also less important than its appeal to the audience, whose presence was more directly instrumental to its economic success and the fortunes of the playwright than any kind of published criticism.

However, the class of consumers determined the price of tickets and the profits that could be reaped by a play, which indirectly determined the class of writer and the critical value accorded the writing produced, regardless of which class he was born into and how much money he made. Katherine Newey argues that, "for all its reformist zeal, the 1832 Select Committee made recommendations that were based on a set of class assumptions [... emerging] from a largely middle-class point of view, which valued literariness [...] and sought an improving and educational purpose for the theatre" (123).

Twenty-six years after the Select Committee Report, in "Dramatic Grub Street," an essay published in *Household Words* on 6 March 1858,¹⁰² Wilkie Collins called for improvements in the class of theatre audiences to be brought about in part by the kinds of plays written for the theatre (xvii: 265-70). Aesthetic improvements were inseparable from economics; concomitantly, changes in the class of audiences were figured as inseparable from aesthetics. Collins addressed the situation of dramatic writers and the state of English theatre through a fictional letter exchange between

¹⁰² At Collins's request, Dickens wrote a formal letter in 1870 establishing that Collins's contributions to *Household Words* and *All Year Round* were copyrighted to Collins (*Letters 2*: 337), demonstrating that even the ownership concerning non-fiction articles was not clearly legislated.

“Mr. Reader” and “Mr. Author,” in which he blamed the decline of English theatre on the poor pay of theatrical writers and that poor pay on the low incomes of theatre audiences, observing that, “while the remuneration for every other species of literature has enormously increased in the last hundred years, the remuneration for dramatic writing has steadily decreased” (267). Ultimately, Collins as “Reader” argued that a radical change of theatre practices was necessary to elevate the medium and make it appeal to a more elevated audience: that is, an audience that could pay more for tickets.

The poor financial remuneration of dramatists in the early and mid-nineteenth century was inextricably tied to the class of patrons and the price of tickets, whereas lucrative payment for literary fiction did not depend on higher prices but could be profitable by simply reaching far greater numbers than theatres through print circulation. So, “even the highest earnings of Victorian dramatists” paled against the financial incentives given to novelists, whose material conditions of writing and working were generally preferred to those of the dramatic writer, where “quantity rather than quality was necessary to maintain any sort of income level” (Booth 143). Collins even argued that, at “the present low rate of remuneration, a man of ability wastes his powers if he writes for the stage. There are men still in existence, who occasionally write for it, for the love and honour of their Art” (269). The crux of the matter, he asserted, was the need for “great dramatists” (266), who would not write great theatre without great economic rewards. Just as Moncrieff in the 1830s deferred to the judgement of the audience, so too Collins contended that change within theatre was highly reliant on the audience and that the public alone could bring about the needful reform (267).¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Booth and Jackson (9-78) discuss the relationship between nineteenth-century theatre and its class of audiences.

Writers themselves therefore actively promoted the idea that the opinion and judgement of the audience were paramount, not only regarding the reception of a play and its author, but also to what was written and how it was represented. Censors were also keenly concerned with the audience: here too, plays fared worse than novels, as the Lord Chamberlain's Office granted greater freedom to novels than plays: "what is seen and heard on a public stage before a mixed audience must remain less explicit than what is read individually and in private" (Stephens, *Censorship* 78).

The view that theatre audiences were comprised mainly of the lower classes has been widely questioned in later studies of the era: "the range of Victorian theatre was as wide as that of Victorian society, for it was the principal medium of entertainment available to literate and illiterate alike" (Jackson 9). Nevertheless, Collins's view did express the opinion of his day, and he was part of a mid-century "drive towards respectability and status" designed to attract the "moneyed and educated classes" to the theatre (Booth, *Revel* 14). Richard Pearson proposes that Queen Victoria's support of the theatricals not only created new enthusiasm for the theatre across the class divide, but that her patronage also marked a rise "in the status of the author, and the interest in writing for the theatre by authors such as Wilkie Collins, Thackeray, Trollope[,] and George Eliot" (13). Nicoll also credits technological changes with attracting a better class of audience, as well as a larger number of theatre-goers. Physical changes such as design and technical evolutions in lighting and staging heavily affected the appeal of theatre to audiences. Matinees and other changes to performance times added more theatre-goers. Developments in transport furthermore enabled audiences to travel more easily to city theatres (*A History* 2: 10).¹⁰⁴ In

¹⁰⁴ The 1832 Select Committee suggested that, among other factors, the causes of theatrical decline were "the prevailing fashion of late dinner hours, the absence of Royal encouragement [prior to

December 1888, *The Saturday Review*, stated: “the theatres today fill a more important place in the national life, at any rate in London, than ever [...] There is no denying the fact that the stage has become more fashionable and more popular” (lxvi: 76).

From the 1880s, the establishment of longer runs for plays brought better financial remuneration to dramatists, as did the increasing substitution of royalties for outright purchases. All of these changes “came to guarantee to the author of a successful play an income which compared favourably with the remuneration received by a popular novelist or essayist” (Nicoll, *A History* 2: 69; 7). Rising income brought with it greater esteem for theatrical writers generally.

By the end of the century, the theatre was a thriving medium, attracting the best writers:

in every way now men of literary genius could be attracted to the theatre; they were tempted by the possibility of great material rewards and they knew that their work, if worthy, would no longer be forced to remain in guarded manuscript or, at best, be issued in cheap series of stage texts, but were likely to appear in dignified form apt to appeal to the ordinary reading public. (Nicoll, *A History* 2: 72)

b. Adaptations and the Problem of Originality

More central to my thesis than these general points about novels, theatre, class, and economics is the role that adaptations played in these debates. In his testimony before the Select Committee, Moncrieff had blamed the prevalence of theatrical adaptations

Victoria’s coronation in 1837], and the supposed indisposition of some Religious Sects to countenance Theatrical Exhibitions,” although these were all “out of the province of the Legislature to control” (3).

on economics: “such is the spirit of parsimony among the managers, that sooner than pay an author for a piece, they will set Hamlet, and call it by some other name” (5).¹⁰⁵ Adaptation, in spite of the labour and different kind of writing required to produce it, was perceived as unoriginal, and therefore aesthetically lacking under prevailing Romantic aesthetic theories.

Richard Salmon discusses how the relationship between the “Romantic figure of creative genius” and that of “the worldly Victorian professional” posed difficulties for the writer, as the terms “genius” and “professional” were both antonym and synonym to one another (10). Theories of art that had persisted from the Romantic period were opposed to widespread nineteenth-century practices of adaptation, even as adaptations across multiple media platforms in all directions and combinations were in great popular demand – hence, dictated and determined by audiences (see Meisel, *Realizations*).

Collins also attacked adaptations in 1858. Denouncing the current rage for them, he lamented that original dramatic writing was not valued financially by theatre audiences or managers, and that it was therefore all but absent from the English stage. Collins offered a clear economic and class basis for his own and the larger cultural estimation of the insignificance of the dramatic writer in the theatre of this time: “[A] man of ability” is better rewarded with rattling off “Original Adaptation,” supplied by

¹⁰⁵ Moncrieff’s report shows that an original playwright was as vulnerable to plagiarism as a novelist under earlier copyright laws. He related to the Committee how one of his own pieces was taken without his consent from a minor theatre and played at Drury Lane, despite his objection against its suitability for the “legitimate boards” (175). Moncrieff, assured that the law was on his side, was told to apply for an injunction against the performance; yet, as he could not afford the £80 fee to hire a lawyer, he was unable to prevent the play being staged. He complained that he did not receive any remuneration for the play, despite it making “a great deal of money.” Nevertheless, Moncrieff was subsequently employed and well paid to produce other works by Drury Lane for three years, before a disagreement ended his engagement. Despite the injustice of having his work performed without his consent, Moncrieff still worked for those who had wronged him, illustrating how dependent dramatists were on those who mistreated them for employment.

the “well-paid Frenchman,” than wasting “his powers if he writes for the stage” and “throwing away [his] talents if [he takes] the trouble to invent,” as the manager will “cast what garbage he pleases before” the audience, whose “unquestioning mouths” are “open, and snap at it” (269). Collins controversially suggested that “the theatre [in England] is the luxury of the illiterate classes – the house of call where the ignorance of the country assembles in high force, where the intelligence of the country is miserably represented by a minority that is not worth counting” (266). Consequently, he blamed the lower class, lower taste, and lower income of those frequenting the theatres in the middle of the century with the dearth of theatrical originality and quality, which he affirmed would appeal “naturally” to the educated middle classes, represented by “Mr. Reader.” Adaptation, then, kept the middle classes away from the theatre in Collins’s estimation.

By the 1880s, along with the rising fortunes of drama generally, adaptation was also viewed less disparagingly than it had been previously in the nineteenth century.

Through new laws established by the Berne Convention in 1886, writers in most instances were being contracted to adapt legitimately, removing charges of criminality against them. Rather than adapting a piece of foreign work without intermediary assistance or acknowledgement, as had been the practice, writers were now hired directly and officially by theatres. A “certain amount of honesty” had now been forced into adaptation practices on an international level, as theatre managers and authors had to acquire the legal rights to adapt a work and did so as soon as a new work emerged on the international market. This resulted in pay becoming more stable for writers, as adaptations were now “commonly paid for by a fixed sum” (Dramatist 79). The consequences of this were not only more regulated and respectable practices of adaptation, but also greater diversity in the plays being produced.

However, even with theatre's rising fortunes, the high value placed on originality remained problematic for theatrical adapters. A playwriting manual published in 1888, *Playwriting: A Handbook for Would-Be Dramatic Authors*, written by "A. Dramatist," offers insights into the practical aspects of nineteenth century dramatic writing.¹⁰⁶ A. Dramatist observed that, in the theatre world, there was prejudice against a new writer, simply for being "new," whereas "a popular author is fought after like a pretty girl at a picnic, and can dictate his own terms" (67).¹⁰⁷ In contrast, the attention given to new dramatists was negligible, leading to a connected devaluation of new and original writing for the stage. The conundrum for the emerging dramatist was the fact that his/her professional value as a writer was reduced by writing adaptations or formulaically repeating his/her own successful original plays with variations (a form of self-adaptation) and yet it was just this kind of adapted writing that was essential to gaining access to theatre managers and audiences.

Playwrights were also reluctant to present original work to managers in case their ideas were stolen and given to the stable of playwrights to write under their own name. An article written by William Allingham for *The Athenaeum*, published on 6 March 1886, reads:

The question, of some importance to the English Drama, is this, How shall a writer outside theatrical circles bring a play under the eyes of managers without the risk that, should it contain anything of value for

¹⁰⁶ The guide, a precursor for early screenwriting manuals, offers the reader access to the world of playwriting, addressing the task of writing, rehearsals, productions, and monetary considerations of the profession.

¹⁰⁷ As with many film companies in the twentieth-century, commercial managers preferred plays "written by a limited number of already tried and recognised authors" (Nicoll, *A History* 2: 58).

stage purposes, this will be appropriated without the smallest acknowledgement. (qtd. in Nicoll, *A History 2*: 59)

Clearly, original work by dramatists was not rewarded and the lack of legal protection from uncredited adaptation of their own original work by others made original writing even less rewarding, as A. Dramatist confirmed:

[I]f you devote your time to writing a play or a book, the law washes its hands of you, and leaves you to the mercy of a bunch of ill-worded, involved, and not-to-be understood statutes, under which you can be robbed and swindled with impunity by every dirty blackguard who may be hanging on to the fringe of the theatrical profession. (85)¹⁰⁸

Paradoxically, it was the lack of protection from unremunerated, uncredited adaptation or plagiarism by others that led so many not to risk new writing, but to adapt the writing of others instead.

While Nicoll, writing from an early twentieth-century perspective, faulted the materialism of the Victorian age for restricting the “scope of the playwright” (*A History 2*: vii), and for the consequent lack of high art in theatre, this is more a reflection of the modernist values that directed his thinking than of historical record: copyright law was more centrally to blame, as it favoured adaptation and adapting writers over original writers and writing economically. As a result, A. Dramatist warns his readers:

[Y]ou will come down to adapting very soon. You will start with the high resolve to uphold the dignity of your profession and your country, and scorn the idea of being the mere purveyor of other men’s thought.

¹⁰⁸ A distinction is also being made here between writers within the “theatrical profession.”

After a few years you will take kindly to Bowdlerising French indecencies, and cooking up German horse play, and terming the result *your* “new and original play.” (79; emphasis in original)

However, even as playwrights acknowledged the pragmatic necessity of adaptation, they continued to lay claim to the ideal of original writing, disguising adapted works as original writing to uphold the value of their writing and themselves as writers.

Nevertheless, some dramatists managed to establish themselves as celebrated, original literary writers by the end of the century, including Oscar Wilde, G.B. Shaw, Arthur Wing Pinero, Henry Arthur Jones, John Galsworthy, and J.M. Barrie, who raised the reputation of the drama, and with it, that of the dramatist.¹⁰⁹

c. Classifying the Adapter

Yet the notion that adaptation writing and writers were inevitably and always inferior to original writing and writers has been called into question. Andrew Maunder laments that the “picture of hack dramatists running amok has coloured perceptions of Victorian stage adaptations” (*Sensation Fiction* 57), giving insufficient credit to their creativity in adaptation and to the ingenuity of the interconnections and exchanges that their writing forged between adapted and adapting works. For example, we saw in Chapter One that Moncrieff penned an original ending to *Nicholas Nickleby*, one that correctly guessed elements of Dickens’s intended ending, forcing him to change it – to adapt his original writing to an adaptation of it – and constructing Moncrieff as a semi-original writer. Beyond such piecemeal originality, Philip Cox has argued that “on the one hand the playwright is seen as having a secondary status to the original

¹⁰⁹ The nominal absence of female playwrights in critical academic studies of playwriting in the nineteenth century is discussed, for example, by Kerry Powell and in a collection edited by Tracy Davis and Ellen Donkin.

novelist, on the other he is capable of surpassing the narrative's originator and achieving a significant work in his own right" (134). These notions are not new to the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries. An anonymous periodical author, writing on "Originality" in 1869, citing Shakespeare as the epitome of a theatrical adapter, opines that "adapted plays may individually show originality now as truly (though no doubt in a different manner and degree) as the similar process showed it in Shakespeare's time" (*Every Saturday* 365).

Additionally, reflecting on how literary criticism is tied to cultural status, Janice Norwood points out that "antipathy to 'hack' dramatists was stoked" by authors who were protecting their own interests ("Adaptation" 4). That Dickens, his contemporaries, biographers, and critics have influenced contemporary perception of Moncrieff's status as a "hack" adapter is indisputable. Chapter One of this thesis documents the violent verbal condemnation of adapters in public discourses, especially by those whose work they adapted (as in Dickens's castigation of them as "thieves," "pirates," and "vermin"), a rhetoric continued by literati and champions of Dickens. By contrast, Jacky Bratton's appeal for a more "sympathetic" and "admiring evaluation" of Moncrieff's adaptations, after having been "fatefully tarnished" by Dickens's abuse (9), presents another perspective. This is a step toward a more balanced assessment of the adapter in nineteenth-century theatrical adaptation studies, where the figure is often overlooked or too quickly dismissed in favour of the adapted, and often canonical, author. Norwood argues that "it is a mistake to undervalue the work of adapters and fail to recognise the significance of their contribution to theatrical practice," as "much of the vitality of nineteenth-century drama can be attributed to the continual inventive re-imagining of plots, characters and motifs from fiction, poetry, the visual arts and music" (5).

Chapter One also demonstrated that the derided adapter himself sometimes wrote back to a derisive author, not only to defend himself, but also to challenge assumptions about hierarchies of writing, as Moncrieff did to Dickens. Besides castigating Dickens's ethics in abusing a fellow gentleman and writer in less advantageous economic and professional circumstances, Moncrieff suggests that Dickens's mistreatment of him as a writer derives from Dickens's envy of Moncrieff's authorial success in the theatre, in contrast to Dickens's failed attempts at dramatic writing: "having himself *unsuccessfully* tried the drama, there is some excuse for Mr. Dickens' petulance towards its professors" (125; emphasis in original). Moncrieff thereby proposed that the profession of dramatic writing required an artistic talent that Dickens, the most celebrated prose writer of the day, did not possess. Moncrieff also stressed his medium-specific, original writing in the playbill to his 1837 adaptation of Dickens's *The Pickwick Papers*:

[T]he absence of that continuity of plot so essential in a dramatic piece, has also been the subject of much embarrassment and had led the adapter to draw on his own resources very frequently, when he would more gladly have availed himself of the superior material of his master, but he had no alternative; his aim has been, by a necessary compression and condensation, to embrace all the leading and dramatic points of his prototype. ("Playbill" Strand Theatre)

Thus, while Moncrieff conceded his lower economic and cultural status, he laid claim to possessing writing ability that Dickens lacked, a subject that I pursue further in the second half of this chapter on discourses of medium-specific writing.

The hierarchies of writing in adaptation became blurred when the original writer and adapter were both prominent literary writers. In 1872, Charles Reade adapted

Anthony Trollope's novel, *Ralph the Heir* (1871), to the stage without authorisation, giving it the title *Shilly-Shally*. Although Reade intended to credit Trollope, he had not obtained his permission prior to adapting the work, claiming that Trollope's absence from the country prevented him from doing so; he would not otherwise have "taken the liberty," despite his actions being legally permissible (Lauriat 1-2).

Trollope was nevertheless displeased. Unlike Moncrieff, however, Reade was not considered a "hack" writer and was an eminent literary figure as well as an authority on copyright law. Also unlike Moncrieff, Reade was also an accomplished novelist, and wrote easily across the two media.

What is particularly important for my argument about modes of elevating adaptation is that the ensuing, widely publicised dispute between Reade and Trollope introduced other means of elevating adaptation. Reade justified his actions by stating that he had seen the novel's nationalist potential and had decided to adapt it before anyone else did: there were "gems in [it] that ought not to be lost to the British Stage, so barren of English life, English characters, and English idioms" (*Trade Malice* 26). Recalling Collins's entreaty that the English stage needed to be revitalised, Reade championed the notion that he was preserving and presenting national culture to a new audience through his actions as adapter.

II. Dramatic Writing and Adapting across Media

Any assessment of adaptation in the nineteenth century needs to take into account that some writers, including Reade, were both original authors and adapters, and that some adapters were doubly respected because they were the successful adapters of their

own work across media, holding twofold value as original authors and acclaimed adapters.

Like the fiction of Dickens and many others, Collins's fiction had been adapted to the stage without authorisation by others numerous times; his attempts to diminish unauthorised adaptations of his work often, but not always, took the form of adapting his fiction himself, before anyone else had the opportunity. In her biography of Collins, Catherine Peters suggests that he "found the drama more exciting and more rewarding than novel-writing" (345). Andrew Maunder and Graham Law argue that, although the cynic's view would be that Collins was simply money-spinning in producing adaptations of his novels, "allowing him to regurgitate old material for extra profit, while the complexities of the novels [we]re distorted by being squeezed into the straightjacket of melodrama," they counter that Collins "was very conscious that he could not simply transfer dialogue from page to stage verbatim." Therefore, rather than "destroy the texts," he "re-fitted" and "re-visualized" them for the stage (120-1). While some novelists hastened to realise their work dramatically solely in order to safeguard it from adaptation by others, Collins engaged thoughtfully with his work, not only adapting his prose into dramatic form, but sometimes also re-writing the narrative, thereby demonstrating his awareness of the need to write differently for different media and audiences, by contrast to the "cut and paste" approach that was conventional among adapting dramatists (see Chapter One).

In the case of his most popular novel, *The Woman in White* (1859), Collins realised that an adaptation to the stage of such a widely-read novel also required changes to the plot in order to (re)create the sensational surprises of the original work. After serial publication of the prose fiction version finished in August 1860, the work was

published as a three-volume novel in the same month, followed in November 1860 by the first of many unauthorised adaptations. Intriguingly, Collins did not attempt to adapt the novel himself until nearly eleven years after its publication, his version opening on 9 October 1871 at the Olympic. At this point, Collins was aware that theatre audiences were so familiar with the plot and its mysteries, both in the novel and on stage, that he entirely rewrote the narrative, receiving positive reviews for doing so. The *Daily Telegraph* hailed his success as an adapter, claiming that “a more masterly instance of adaptation for the stage from a story has seldom been seen” (11 October 187: 2). More recently, Norwood has documented that Collins “deliberately avoided the obvious sensation scenes”; instead, as a dramatist, he surprised his audience by changing details and toying with their expectations, thus creating “intellectual titillation rather than [merely] stimulating physical excitement and suspense” (“Sensation” 226). A *Times* reviewer went further to observe that the changes to the 1871 adaptation were made wisely *to suit the conventions of the stage*: “[Collins] has firmly grasped the rarely appreciated truth, that situations which appear dramatic to a reader, are not necessarily dramatic when brought to the ordeal of the footlights” (12 October 1871: 4). In the playbill for *The Woman in White*, Collins himself stated that he “had endeavoured to produce a work which shall appeal to the audience purely on its own merits as a play” and had not “hesitated, while preserving the original story in substance, materially to alter it in form” (qtd. in Norwood 227). Collins’s appreciation for and understanding of medium specificity conventions were evident throughout his career, and he proved more versatile than Dickens in writing across media, writing critically acclaimed and best-selling plays and prose fiction, though he never achieved the fame or reputation of Dickens as a writer overall (and neither did anyone else).

Even so, Collins's successful stage adaptation of *The Woman in White*, meant that he was able to set and control the terms for future dramatisations of his other work. This can be seen in the contractual demands that he placed upon Ava Cavendish, who starred in and produced his play, *The New Magdalen*,¹¹⁰ at the Olympic in 1873:

No alterations of any sort are to be made in the dialogue without my permission. The play is to be produced under my directions. The cast of characters, the scenery, and the dresses are to satisfy me – or failing that I am to have the right of withdrawing the play. If the continuous run of the play is interrupted it is to be left to my discretion to resume the performance of it at the Olympic theatre or not. Proofs of the posters play bills and of all other advertisements are to be submitted to me – and I am to have the right of altering adding to or cutting out any words or expressions to which I may object. (qtd. in Peters 343; punctuation in original)

The agreement placed Collins in complete artistic and executive control over the adaptation; any changes, whether internal or external, had to be approved by himself and he had the right to cancel the production altogether if his wishes were not followed.¹¹¹ As both the original and adapting writer, Collins was thus like the “pretty girl at the picnic,” able to use his literary status to gain more authority over the production.

Successful adaptation was also profitable. Collins's adaptation of *The Woman in White* signalled the most successful stage of his career as a dramatist, according to

¹¹⁰ An example of the relaxing censorship accompanying the rising classes, fortunes, and respectability of theatre in the 1870s, *The New Magdalen* was the first play to introduce a clergyman with anything other than a peripheral role into a drama (Stephens, *Censorship* 109).

¹¹¹ Peters points out, that the stringent written contract contrasts with contemporary accounts made of Collins's amiable behaviour during productions and rehearsals (344).

Peters, who notes “that his lifelong obsession with theatre was finally paying off,” as he was making “real money” through a percentage of the profits rather than the usual flat fee, thus making £47.10s in the first week and £59 in the second (333-4).

Norwood argues that, since Collins was not able to gain dramatic copyright for the adaptation at this point, money would have been a major motivation for him to adapt his earlier work at this time.

Although Collins did not create all of his fiction with a view to adapting it to the stage, some of it was nonetheless written with dramatisation in mind. According to Peters, this strategy is evident in the 1871 novella *Miss or Mrs?*, although it was never adapted by Collins, and in the 1872 short novel, *The New Magdalen*, which he did dramatise and which ended up being one of his most successful plays. However, Peters argues that both prose works suffer from “literary economy” and that these two stories in particular seem “stagy, rather than dramatic” (337).¹¹² The success of Collins’s works, both prose and drama, including his own adaptations, nevertheless demonstrate that he was adept at writing across media, adhering to the expectations of his time regarding different media, even if these do not reflect twenty-first-century views formed by modernist medium specificity theories, such as Peters’s.

However, Collins’s ability to write and adapt across media was not unilateral; in fact, writing across media made him particularly aware what fiction was suited to adaptation and what was not. This was not only a matter of form, as modernist medium specificity would have it, but also of content and cultural contexts, as seen

¹¹² Similarly to other biographies, Peters’s assessment of Collins is more focused on his persona than on the social and cultural changes or media relationships in this period. This can also be seen in her view that Collins “increasingly began to neglect” the distinction between the arts, despite his clear awareness of it, which she does not fully address or explain, merely pointing out that Collins suffered from illness, pain and exhaustion from writing, as well as increased opium usage (136-7).

with the adaptation of *The Woman in White*, where audience familiarity and expectations were as important as formal considerations. A letter to John Hollingshead, dated February 1873, about an unauthorised dramatisation of his novel *Poor Miss Finch* (1872) indicates what fiction he considered to be ill suited to adaptation:

My “Poor Miss Finch” has been dramatized (without asking my permission) by some obscure idiot in the country.

I have been asked to dramatise it, and I have refused, because my experience in the matter tells me that the book is eminently *unfit* for stage performances. What I dare not to do with my own work, another man (unknown in literature) is perfectly free to do, against my will, and (if he can get his rubbish played) to the prejudice of my novel and my reputation. (*Letters* 2: 362; emphasis in original)

His reluctance to adapt all of his novels suggests that, rather than leaping on the nineteenth-century bandwagon, in which everything was fair game for adaptation, he entertained notions of medium specificity prominent in the late eighteenth century. Rather than imitate other art forms, each art should work within its own formal limitations and connected phenomenologies (as suggested by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing’s *Laocoön* in 1766); this rationale would resurface in the early twentieth-century, where critics, such as Irving Babbitt in 1910, Béla Balázs in 1924 and 1930, and Rudolf Arnheim in 1932, among others, would develop Lessing’s work further in discussions of the arts, including film.¹¹³

¹¹³ Chapters Four and Five address medium specificity theory in relation to film.

Yet in the mid-nineteenth century, sister art theories were often preferred to metaphors of the arts as separate species.¹¹⁴ Therefore, in spite of his sensitivity to medium specificity in adaptation, Collins affirmed his faith in the sister arts in the dedication to his 1852 novel *Basil*:¹¹⁵

Believing that the Novel and the Play are twin-sisters in the family of Fiction; that the one is a drama narrated, as the other is a drama acted; and that all the strong and deep emotions which the Play-writer is privileged to excite, the Novel-writer is privileged to excite also. (4)

Yet in spite of their sibling resemblances as drama, they take different forms: the novel is narrated whereas the play is acted. The key to adaptation from one to the other lay in the *writing*. Norwood argues that Collins's rhetoric acknowledges the two art forms as equal; yet, writing in the twenty-first century, she cannot resist pulling away anachronistically from the very sister arts theory that Collins embraced to argue, somewhat condescendingly, that the play should not be likened to the novel, as twins are, but that, "it is more instructive to view it in its theatrical context, taking into account the circumstances of its performance. It should thus be recognised as a valid drama in its own right" (233). Like the hordes of future literary film adaptation scholars, who would insist that film adaptations be viewed as films "in their own right" (see, for example, Wagner). Norwood misses an opportunity to understand how

¹¹⁴ Sister art theories were also used also to describe the relationships between other arts forms such as poetry, painting, and film (Kamilla Elliott 1-10).

¹¹⁵ The edition published in 1862 was a revised version of his work, originally published in 1852. His dedication reads: "While the incidents of the story remain exactly what they were, the language in which they are told has been, I hope, in many cases greatly altered for the better" (6). As we saw in Chapter One with Shelley and Burnett, Collins's actions suggest that his earliest work did not reflect his acquired literary skill, so he set out to revise it. This furthers the argument that, while the original author is still alive, the work is not yet fixed and it is within the right of the author to rework it as he/she pleases. This will be picked up further throughout this thesis.

adaptations were theorised in the nineteenth century by those who wrote them and the role that writing played in adaptation from narration to performance.

a. Hybridity on Page and Stage

If Collins occasionally wrote with a possible eye to stage adaptations, as Peters suggests, making some of his prose fiction more “stagy” than narrated, some authors did so often, hoping to have their work adapted or intending to adapt their work themselves. In discussions of literary film adaptation, it is common to read that novelists write with an eye to the film rights. The same was true for nineteenth-century novelists with regards to adaptations for the stage. Mary Elizabeth Braddon was one author perceived by contemporary reviewers to write with the stage in mind. Jennifer Carnell cites the *Athenaeum* review of *Eleanor’s Victory* (1863) as one of many assessing that Braddon’s novels appeared to have been written with adaptation in mind, in ways that made them “suitable for transfer”; however, this reviewer considered that such writing degraded her work:

Miss Braddon is throughout beset by the consciousness that her story *must* be adapted for theatrical purposes, and to her conviction of this necessity she has sacrificed all the higher qualities of a work of fiction.
(qtd. in Carnell 195; emphasis in original)

This statement positions theatre unilaterally as a lower art form. The review charges that, by writing with an eye to adaptation, Braddon not only lowered the standard of her novel, but also herself as a writer of fiction. The critique here seems to be less about the superiority of medium specific writing, as it had been in the late eighteenth century and would be again in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as about the class status of theatre mid-century.

Even so, in *Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial, and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth-Century England*, Martin Meisel attests that the Victorians were keenly interested in mixed media and adaptation across media. Despite hierarchical boundaries between the arts, picture and drama affected both style and structure of the novel in the nineteenth century, with fiction increasingly turning to drama for both “manner and matter” (52; 64).¹¹⁶ Building on Meisel’s study, we can argue that prose fiction and the profession of writing also adapted *themselves* to a more visually descriptive model of representation in nineteenth-century culture.¹¹⁷

Braddon was prominently perceived to be an author who moved between media and integrated other media forms within a single medium: a former stage actress before becoming popular as a novelist, her prose fiction was not only adapted to the stage by others, but she herself also wrote original plays and, as we have seen, adapted novels and plays by others without authorisations or acknowledgement. Her experience and background with the stage had an influence on her prose writing and provided her with material for her novels, including *Aurora Floyd* (Carnell 284; Holder, “Misalliance” 165).

Similarly, critics often claim that Dickens was “indebted” to the stage for his work.¹¹⁸ For Dickens, writing and acting were intertwined in the composition of a novel as well as its adaptation to the stage. His preface to *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) attests:

¹¹⁶ Meisel, using examples from Dickens and William Makepeace Thackeray, discusses “the disposition of novelists in the nineteenth century to accept contemporary and pictorial models for their narrative art” and the novel to absorb these elements (68).

¹¹⁷ There have been prominent discussions about the visual imagination of nineteenth-century authors anticipating the medium of film, such claims that Dickens’s writing was proto-filmic, influencing early filmmakers such as D.W. Griffith and Sergei Eisenstein (Graham Smith; Chapter Four). Other critics counter that Dickens was adapting the visual media of his own day, such as magic lantern shows, which also fed into film (Joss Marsh).

¹¹⁸ Moncrieff sees this indebtedness in some of Dickens’s “best characters,” such as Sam Weller (Fitz-Gerald 126). Other critics agree: Emily Allen, for example, argues that theatre acts as a prominent figure in Dickens’s prose.

I first conceived the main idea for this story. A strong desire was upon me then, to embody it in my own person; and I traced out in my fancy, the state of mind of which it would necessitate the presentation to an observant spectator, with particular care and interest.

As the idea became familiar to me, it gradually shaped itself into its present form. Throughout its execution, it has had complete possession of me; I have so far verified what is done and suffered in these pages, as that I have certainly done and suffered it all myself. (397)

The passage makes clear that he envisioned his characters in performance before spectators and that he embodied them in performance before he wrote them down as prose narrative, allowing them to possess him, as much as he possessed them. This is an extreme claim not only to authorial ownership of his prose characters, but also to a pre-existent ownership of their embodied performance, which his own body has “verified” and authorised, *before* he wrote them in prose. Performance here comes first, and prose second. In this formulation, he sets himself not only before the adapters who rewrote his work for the stage, but also the stage actors who performed his characters.

Dickens’s hybrid writing and performance persisted after he published his novels, as he rewrote and performed his fiction on a stage before an audience, thereby turning himself into a profitable adapter-performer of his fiction.¹¹⁹ As Chapter One attests, when authorised and unauthorised adaptations threatened authorial reputations, authors resorted to other modes of adaptation to reinforce their authorial ownership publicly, as well as to benefit financially. When authors could not or were not allowed

¹¹⁹ These readings were not “copyright performances,” as other works copyrighting his fiction for performance had already been published.

to write plays of their own works, they sometimes turned to giving staged public readings of them to assert authorial control over their performance. According to Amanda Adams, these performances were used as “tools of resistance,” where both the role of the “protected author” and “protected text” were intimately embodied in the performance (*Ownership* 224). No one did so to greater effect than Dickens.

Adaptation produced hybrid writing that was perceived to be new: Dickens’s first readings prompted reviewers to credit him with inventing “a new medium for amusing an English audience,” such as the *Illustrated London News*, from 31 July 1858 (100). Like contemporary reviewers, Adams suggests that Dickens invented a new genre of performance, in which performances struck “a delicate balance” between “theatre and authorial reading.”¹²⁰ Philip Collins, however, observes that Dickens was not the first “author-recitalist,” but concedes that his success with the readings, which uniquely combined “literary eminence” with “an accomplished stage presence” was unrivalled (xlvi-liii).¹²¹

Authors not only adapted their writings to public readings, but also their authorial personae. Discussing *A Christmas Carol*, Adams argues that his performance

tapped into the cultural approach to intellectual property that imagined the work as expressive of the inner life of the author, rather than as

¹²⁰ Adams focuses on Dickens performing authorship in transatlantic lecture tours. In her book, she discusses the reverse process, where American author Mark Twain toured Britain in order to secure ownership of his works (57-84).

¹²¹ Starting with private readings and moving to charity readings, Dickens turned his readings professional in 1858. The estimated number of his professional readings is 472. The usual format of these included a longer piece, lasting 70-80 minutes, and a short piece, lasting 30-40 minutes, with various other pieces of his repertoire. Readings from *Pickwick* (164) and *A Christmas Carol* (127) were by far the most performed (P. Collins xxvii). Collins provides the most in-depth account of the history of Dickens’s performances, including material and accounts of each of his performed works. Malcolm Andrews discusses these performances in relation to Dickens’s persona as a novelist and the impact the reading tours had on him and his listeners. Schlicke argues that Dickens’s public readings were the culmination of his lifetime dedication to the cause of popular entertainment (226-48).

merely the product of the author's labor. And yet while his method of dramatic reading performed a connection to [the] text, it also reminded audiences that the performer was an author and not an actor.

(*Authorship* 72-3)

The hybrid enabled Dickens to foreground his authorial identity so that it never disappeared into his characters or stories, but remained visible. It also enabled him to take the lion's share of the profits. In "Grub Street," Wilkie Collins suggests that the poor remuneration of dramatists was not due to a general lack of money in the theatres, but because they chose to distribute most of it to celebrated actors and actresses (263), a practice that persisted in early film and continues to the present day.¹²² Dickens circumvented this, starring as the author reading his own work.

The same performing body that represented the author was extended into a body performing many literary characters, thus creating a unique hybridity of author, text, and character, as well as of prose and theatre. Witnesses of his readings agreed that Dickens effectively embodied a variety of his characters: "the facility with which Mr. Dickens suited his voice to the various characters comprised in his selection was most striking. [The characters] were each admirably rendered, and gave increased effect to the wonderful descriptive power of the author" (*Cheltenham Examiner*, January 1862). Kate Field, in her eye-witness account of one *Nickleby* reading, was more critical of certain character portrayals, but stated nevertheless that the character of "Nicholas *Nickleby* might be done better on stage, but never *is*" (61-2; emphasis in original).¹²³

¹²² The acting profession was gaining in popularity and respectability in the nineteenth century, and the names of the performers were beginning to outshine those of writers within advertisements, as well as pay rates.

¹²³ Field published her reviews of Dickens's readings in 1871. Another contemporary account of the reading tours was provided by George Dolby (1885), who accompanied Dickens as a manager in Britain and America from 1866-70.

Dickens's performative command over his characters thus worked to assert authorial ownership over his characters, authorised in performance by his "own person," in a performative literalisation of his preface to *A Tale of Two Cities*.

Dickens's claim to adaptive as well as originating ownership of his work was reinforced by the material that he selected to perform, as the case of his *Nicholas Nickleby* readings demonstrates.¹²⁴ Having battled with Moncrieff over the adaptation of this novel to the stage, he used the readings to reassert his ownership of the work in performance. The *Nickleby* readings started in October 1861 and, unlike stage adaptations, which tended to repeat night after night, it appears that Dickens adapted each of the following 53 readings differently, either textually or performatively. Both short and long versions of *Nickleby* were used, depending on what other readings accompanied it.¹²⁵ Adams suggests that the many versions gave authorial exclusivity to the readings: since there was no single printed authoritative version of his readings and, as Dickens changed them from reading to reading, there never could be an authoritative version: "Only the author could decide, night by night, what the latest authentic version was to be" (*Authorship* 67-8). These readings therefore allowed Dickens to reclaim and reassert ownership over his printed work through adaptation continuously, as he freely adapted his writing textually and performatively. However, the additional point to be made in the context of his authorial battles with Moncrieff is that Dickens was flaunting his versatility and inexhaustible facility in adaptation.

¹²⁴ Other texts discussed by Collins prove a similar point.

¹²⁵ Only certain narrative strands were related to the reader. The *Nickleby* readings were advertised as "Nicholas Nickleby at Mr Squeers's School." Dickens had privately printed prompt copies of all of his readings, but altered these continuously by cutting out, pasting in, or annotating the texts, as well as not following the texts when he performed. Collins discusses successful and unsuccessful attempts to publish the reading copies especially in America, listing currently available texts and their whereabouts (Collins xlii ff.).

b. Visibility of Authorship

Adapting his own writings to and in performance by himself indubitably also enhanced Dickens's literary reputation, as he displayed himself favourably before public audiences as an author and performer of his writings, whilst simultaneously visualising himself as an authorial persona above and beyond his textual identity and written words. Salmon discusses how the cultural visibility of authors within the public sphere during the nineteenth-century was being increasingly coded in visual and verbal media, which intensified authors' "apprehension of exposure to market conditions" (17).¹²⁶ The increasing visibility of authors can also be traced back to their unprecedented exposure within the nineteenth-century press, which solidified further their professional status and cultural authority.

However, despite his success in writing fiction and with the dramatic readings of his work, as well as his keen interest in theatre generally, Dickens's own playwriting endeavours – both in terms of adaptation and original work – were deemed less proficient, not only by Moncrieff, other playwrights, and theatre producers, but also by critics. By contrast, his friend, Wilkie Collins, experienced increasing success in his dramatic ventures and was praised as "a dramatist of unusual ability whose dialogue was pointed and skilful," according to Peters, who documents further many critics preferred at least one of Collins's dramatic adaptations over its source novel (341).¹²⁷ Collins himself believed that his own faculty lay in the dramatic arts more than in novel writing and, had the economic circumstances of the theatre been more

¹²⁶ Salmon discusses this in view of authorship and portraiture (16-30).

¹²⁷ Peters refers here to an 1873 adaptation of *Man and Wife* (1870), suggesting that "ideas that many critics had found repellent in the novel pleased them on the stage, where the action seemed complete and coherent" (341).

favourable, his stories would have appeared in dramatic form (*Letters*, i. 208).¹²⁸ Lyn Pykett considers that Collins was at his most successful as a dramatist when adapting his own work (95). This view poses an intriguing notion regarding the role of the original prose work as preparatory, requiring adaptation in order to develop the optimal art of dramatic writing; stated more simply, it posits adaptation as enabling a writer to produce optimal work – by contrast to views that originals were optimal work.

There were other modes of hybrid writing besides authors mixing media and writing across media: collaborations between writers also produced hybrids that were partly written by one author and partly written by another. Prior to his independent success in the 1870s after Dickens's death, Collins had been writing collaboratively with Dickens, a practice that was not unusual in the century. Although Dickens was initially the guiding mentor in their writing collaboration, the question of who benefitted most from their relationship has been an ongoing topic in critical discussions,¹²⁹ and only in more recent critical studies has the focus shifted to highlight Collins's dramatic abilities as significant contributions to their collaborations. Artistically, Sue Lonoff argues that Dickens was the beneficiary of Collins's talents in terms of the plotting and density of their stories (51), which

¹²⁸ Like Moncrieff's earlier claim, Collins conjectured that the French law of remuneration would have benefitted him: "If I had been a Frenchman – with such a public to write for, such rewards to win, and such actors to interpret me, as the French Stage presents – all the stories I have written from 'Antonia' to 'The Woman in White' would have been told in dramatic form. Whether their success as plays would have been equal to their success as novels, it is not for me to decide; But if I know anything of my own faculty, it is a dramatic one" (*Letters* 1: 208).

¹²⁹ As his editor in *Household Words*, Dickens was already Collins's superior. John Forster's extensive biography of Dickens, published between 1872-4, has been widely charged with marginalising Collins's role in Dickens's career, while other biographies of both Dickens (Slater) and Collins (Peters and Pykett) have foregrounded their personal rather than professional relationship. Other critics across the twentieth century, including J.W.T. Ley in 1924, T.S. Eliot in 1927, K.J. Fielding in 1953, Lonoff in 1982, and, more recently, Anthea Trodd, and Jerome Meckier, have focused instead on their mutual influence as writers.

continues critical perceptions in their own day that Collins was a better dramatic writer than Dickens.¹³⁰

This form of collaborative adaptation was beneficial to prose authors with limited knowledge of dramatic conventions. Frances Hodgson Burnett, for instance, collaborated on all of her dramatisations with more experienced playwrights.¹³¹ It was not only fellow writers who collaborated on and influenced the final production, but also other figures within the theatre. Madge Kendal, an actress who managed and produced the production of *The Real Little Lord Fauntleroy* in 1888, recounted her experience with Burnett in 1890:

When the play was produced, Mrs Burnett said to me, “You have cut it about rather severely.” I ventured to remark that had I cut any flowers out of the play, I would humbly beg her pardon; but that I thought I had only knitted my cloth a bit finer, and by that means brought out its brighter gloss. That is, of course, only what habit gives you the power of doing, – that, and the instinctive feeling of what will be more or less dramatic.

Kendal continued: it “is no easy task to ‘cut’ well, as we call it; that is, to be able to make judicious omissions, – to leave all the beauty, and only take out the weeds”

¹³⁰ Other, more recent, critics supporting Collins’s independent literary skills include Lillian Nayder and Pearson. Two of Dickens’s and Collins’s collaborative adaptation projects highlight their different approaches to writing: *The Frozen Deep* (1857) and *No Thoroughfare* (1867). Pearson describes *No Thoroughfare*, both as fictional story and as play, as an “experiment in symbiosis,” which “challenges the notion that the play is always the adaptation of an original fiction by creating two versions of the same narrative in two different forms” (124-46).

¹³¹ As discussed in Chapter One, Burnett enthusiastically involved herself in adaptations of her plays. Her collaborators included Stephen Townsend (whom she later married), Constance Fletcher (writing as George Fleming), Julian Magnus and William Gillette, and she experienced varying success both in terms of the adaptations’ reception and her collaborative working relationships.

(106-7).¹³² Her experience within the dramatic environment certainly qualified her to judge staging productions, although her extensive cutting of the author's words appears to undermine Burnett's authority here, whose objection seems to be marginalised.

Yet Kendal herself felt equally that the profession of dramatists was universally disregarded and criticised. At the beginning of her *Dramatic Opinions*, she complained that:

the playwright of today is hardly appreciated as he should be. His work is subject to keen and universal criticism; for it is a curious fact, that whereas few would venture to criticize books, poems, or paintings without some little special knowledge, every one thinks he has a right to pronounce judgement on a stage-play, and is convinced that that judgement is infallible. And again, the dramatist runs the risk of being misinterpreted, and consequently misunderstood. (7-8)

For the prose author to write for stage, a knowledge of dramatic conventions and agencies was necessary, but Nicoll has suggested that prose authors often failed to make the required adjustments due to a "sense of superiority" to the theatre:

attempts were doomed because they originated not from within the theatre but from without. Instead of coming to the level of the stage and seeking gradually to raise the standards of performance, literary men persisted in standing aloof, self-consciously lowering their precious tragedies and dismally monotonous comedies as though these were divinities, machine-borne, by which alone the evil course of events

¹³² Kendal offers a historical account from a practitioner's perspective, which originated in a paper she presented at the Congress of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science in Birmingham in September 1884.

might be altered. This sense of superiority, allied to a sad ignorance of theatrical conditions, marred practically every effort. (*British Drama* 163)

Collaborations, unsurprisingly, often resulted in disputes. Like Collins, Reade believed that “his natural gift was for the drama: my greatest love” (“The Rights and the Wrongs” 166) and his collaborations with other authors were manifold.¹³³ His first joint venture of writing was the original play, *Masks and Faces* (1852), co-authored with Tom Taylor.¹³⁴ This generated various disagreements, causing Reade to subsequently adapt the play to his debut novel, *Peg Woffington*, published only a month later, much to the annoyance of Taylor,¹³⁵ although Taylor and Reade continued to collaborate on future projects.

This was likely because, as Pearson points out, there were legal as well as aesthetic advantages in writer collaborations across media:

By setting out to co-author a play, the authors could assert their rights through the authority of the team. This was particularly attractive to writers seeking to connect together their fictional productions with dramatic ones. Rather than seeing the two forms as occupying antagonistic spheres, writers could see the combination of the two as a powerful media capture. (124-5)

¹³³ Dickens consulted Reade regarding an unauthorised adaptation of his and Collins’s collaborative short story from 1860, “A Message from the Sea,” for which they had already registered a dramatic version. Dickens sought legal advice from Reade, who was by that time regarded as an expert in copyright law, and on his advice, resolved the matter, see Lauriat (19).

¹³⁴ Taylor was a prominent dramatist, who also championed authors’ rights. For example, as first Chairman of the Association to Protect the Rights of Authors in 1875.

¹³⁵ Wayne Burns discusses both the book and the play, looking at Reade’s public declarations regarding his defence, as well as his private writings on the matter (114-9).

Although the “team authority” could be beneficial in some cases, it also produced social and legal ambiguity surrounding authorial ownership, authority and autonomy, as the level of contribution made by each participant remained indiscernible and the romantic notion of the solitary genius was destabilised. Pearson argues that the nineteenth century “foregrounded the notion of drama as collaborative performance” and that, as a result, the play-title rather than the author “pervaded the Public Sphere and the invisibility of authorship prevented any identification between writer and text.” Pearson credits the Dramatic Copyright Act with saving the “authorial disintegration in relation to the drama” (151). Yet the case of dramatic adaptations is more complex, since here, the recognition of the title, as well as its original author, was marketed, thus heightening the invisibility of the adapter/dramatist, while making the prose author more visible.¹³⁶

That said, the Dramatic Copyright Law of 1833 did contribute to the rising visibility of the original dramatic male author, gradually establishing his professional esteem. For women, it was more difficult. Kerry Powell argues that “even the most prominent women novelists – could not readily obtain a hearing as playwrights and remained uniquely vulnerable to textual invasion from dramatists” (114).¹³⁷ Even so, writing across media was common for women such as Braddon, who also wrote poetry and original drama. Carnell describes Braddon as a “failed” playwright, who “longed for success” and, discussing the poor reception of Braddon’s plays, speculates that “[p]art of Braddon’s anger at the unauthorised versions of her most popular novels must have stemmed from the fact that they were enormously popular, while her own plays were

¹³⁶ This is also the case regarding film adaptations and screenwriters, discussed in subsequent chapters.

¹³⁷ Powell suggests this was the case until “at least 1888,” the year in which Burnett triumphed in her court case and with her own adaptation, as well as the year when the Berne Convention became more widely observed.

not” (398). Like Dickens, Braddon had a keen interest and background in theatre, yet failed to realise her ambitions as a dramatic author.¹³⁸ Pondering negative contemporary reviews, Carnell canvases reasons why Braddon’s “talents were limited as a playwright,” proposing that her plays were at times old-fashioned, in contrast to the controversial contemporary plots within her novels, and that her dialogue was unrealistic and therefore not well received in live performance (398). Heidi Holder argues that Braddon’s plays “are as good as if not better than many pieces produced on West End stages in the latter half of the nineteenth century” (166), and blames Braddon’s personal life and the fact that the drama was at a “perennial low point” for her perceived failure as a dramatist (170).¹³⁹

Holder suggests that Braddon’s plays “reveal a decidedly combative attitude toward the theatrical conventions of their time, particularly as regards gender roles,” with “the unjustly persecuted female – particularly the wife” being her “favored theme” (166-7). These arguments, in addition to demonstrating differing opinions at different periods, show that literary merit, status, and form were inextricably linked with gender as well as class hierarchies in critical reviews, and that it was difficult for female literary writers to break into dramatic writing and be successful, just as it would be a few decades later for them to succeed in writing for film.

¹³⁸ The reviews of her works perceived her to be more successful as a novelist than as a dramatist. For example, a review of her play, *Genevieve; or, The Missing Witness*, performed at the Royal Alexandra Theatre in Liverpool, reports that: “Miss Braddon’s enthusiastic reception, on Monday evening, was a tribute paid rather to her popularity as novel-writer than her success as a dramatist” (*Porcupine* review 11 April 1874 28).

¹³⁹ Holder argues that “Braddon’s status was a very live issue, and part of a distracting ‘drama’ in itself,” as “[t]heatrical managers of the time exhibited great concern about the ‘respectability’ of their theatres, and were defensive about charges of immorality.” She suggests that the scandal about her “living arrangements” with John Maxwell will have been more harmful to her career as a playwright than as a novelist (176-7).

Despite the citation in the epigraph to this chapter referring to writers of “Dramatic Literature,” the notion that all authors were suffering from “indefensible hardship and injustice” in some form or another during this period is palpable. The implied stratifications regarding media, writers, and their writings were clearly informed by wider social and cultural hierarchies of the nineteenth century, working together to construct the fluctuating status of literary writers, as well as perceptions regarding the quality and status of the media in which they wrote. Although the worrying decline of theatre was halted by changes late in the century, leading to a thriving profession for many dramatists at the end of the century, the arrival of the new medium of film and its adaptation practices would soon change the dynamic among different kinds of writers again, dynamics that were heightened in writing across media. The struggles and rising and falling fortunes faced by nineteenth-century prose and dramatic writers, especially those writing between media and industries were extended and varied with the advent of film and industry film writers, and their relationships with both novelists and playwrights is the subject of the next three chapters.

CHAPTER 3
ADAPTATION, OWNERSHIP AND THE BIRTH OF FILM

[O]ur rights are an asset which is rising in value, no one knows quite how much. English cinema films are in their infancy, but promise well, and it is there that our hopes lie. – Arthur Conan Doyle (September 1913, qtd. in Lycett 341)

Focusing on experiences of literary writers during the early years of film, from its public birth in 1895 to its wider recognition as a mass narrative form in the late 1910s, this chapter works to bridge nineteenth-century stage and early twentieth-century film adaptation practices, considering formal medium changes, as well as social, cultural, and legal issues. It argues that many of the social, legal, practitioner, and cultural experiences and discourses of prose fiction writers and stage adapters in the nineteenth century carried into twentieth-century experiences and discourses of literary authors and early film adapters. Although some issues surrounding ownership of original and adapted work had been legally resolved, many continued, and were sometimes exacerbated by the new medium. For example, the role of the literary writer in adaptation was destabilised further with the advent of the, as yet, undefined figure of the industry screenwriter and film's delayed incorporation into copyright law prior to 1911. Additionally, uncertainty regarding film's identity as a new medium was pronounced in early film adaptation discourses and practices, many of which were highly experimental, and all of which highlighted conflicts, continuities, and interchanges between film, literature, and drama in the period. Moreover, attempts to raise the status of film through its association with literature (both celebrated plays and prose fiction) mirrored theatre's prior efforts to elevate itself via the novel.

In order to construct a bridge between literary authors involved in stage and film adaptation in this chapter, writers discussed within the previous two chapters, including Frances Hodgson Burnett and Marie Corelli, return, and are joined by H.G.

Wells, Arthur Conan Doyle, Thomas Hardy, P.G. Wodehouse, and George Bernard Shaw.

Although the focus of this chapter remains predominantly on British writers, some American practitioners are also represented here for the reasons outlined in my introduction and also because the turn of the century saw greater international cooperation between authors following the Berne Convention. Moreover, the rise to dominance of the American screen industry in the 1910s, as Britain's pioneering and thriving film industry languished in the wake of the First World War, along with other European film industries, resulted in greater international exchange between British literary authors and the American film industry. The Americans took the lead in mass produced feature films, and soon became eponymous with its centre in Hollywood, California (Knight 51).¹⁴⁰

This chapter also considers celebrated British literary authors in relation to emerging ordinary "picture-playwrights" as film struggled to establish itself as a viable art form, following trajectories similar to those of literary and dramatic professions in previous centuries. From its early days, questions of aesthetic value amid rapid technological and social change placed film in ambiguous relations to other art and media forms. If popular theatre was considered low art until the latter part of the nineteenth century,

¹⁴⁰ Despite the British film industry correctly predicting a growth of film audiences during the war years, it failed to realise the impact that the war would have and the monopoly that the American industry would create, a failure that was evident through Britain's increased blind and block bookings of American films. Bill Baillieu and John Goodchild chart the economic and commercial history of the British film industry in the context of American involvement and competition, considering production and regulation and exhibition practices. Their first two chapters focus on 1895-"Talkies" (1-26). Ernest Betts points out that the American industry actively pursued a conquest of the British industry and considers that American films were "in every way superior" to British ones, partly due to Britain's comparative lack of industry organisation (81-2). Robert Murphy documents that in 1926, 37 British films were competing with over 500 American imports as well as the widespread opinion that America had "exploited wartime disruptions to establish an unfair advantage" (47). Tom Ryall argues that British cinema also influenced the American industry, for example through adaptations of British literature (107-24).

the new medium of film was initially not even acknowledged as an art form, but viewed as an upstart, populist adapter, simultaneously advancing the interests and threatening the reputations and popularity of both the theatre and prose fiction. As previously, adaptation was not universally welcomed, either by writers across media or those who sought to establish film as an art, since being classified as an art required demonstrating unique qualities apart from literature and other arts under the aesthetic theories of the time. Such qualities were canvassed variably by the writers discussed in this chapter, and subsequently by film theorists such as Béla Balázs, Sergei Eisenstein, and Rudolf Arnheim, discussed in my final two chapters. All of them sought to establish film's status as an art form by advancing its unique aesthetic forms (which they identified as cinematography and montage) against its similarities to other art forms, including adaptations of the written word. Thus, in spite of film's actual indebtedness to writing, the aesthetic theories to which it was made to conform in order to qualify as "art" were influential in devaluing the recognition of the writer and the written word, a devaluation which extended from theory into the film industry itself.

i. Introducing the New: Discovering Film and Adaptation

Original writing in both drama and prose fiction was thriving in the 1890s. As the likes of Shaw, Oscar Wilde, Arthur Wing Pinero, and J.M. Barrie were changing the theatrical landscape, prose writers such as Herbert George Wells (1866-1946) were developing original writing based around scientific themes.¹⁴¹ Scientific and other technologies developed during the nineteenth century were being utilised as

¹⁴¹ His novels *The Time Machine* (1895), *The War of the Worlds* (1898), and *The First Men in the Moon* (1901) are regarded as pioneering works of science fiction.

entertainment and technical marvels permeated fairground attractions and theatrical ventures.¹⁴² Film was one of these technologies, and Arthur Knight points out that, unlike any other art, film was made possible through the joint ventures of artists, businessmen, and scientists (3).¹⁴³

Writers were also crucial to early film. The influence of literature and storytelling on film can be witnessed in the earliest films of such pioneers as George Méliès, who not only based many of his short films on fairy tales such as *Cinderella* (1901) and *Red Riding Hood* (1902), but also took inspiration from the works of contemporary authors such as Wells and Jules Verne, as in the 1902 film *A Trip to the Moon* (orig.: *Le Voyage Dans La Lune*).¹⁴⁴ While I continue to trace the influences of literature on film writing and adaptation, since prior scholars have already made the case for literature's wider influence on film's early narratives and forms, this chapter's more original contribution to scholarship is to show that the influences run both ways, and are more reciprocal than has been generally acknowledged by either literary or film scholars.

Already on 24 October 1895, before the first public, commercial film screening of Auguste and Louis Lumière's cinematograph on 28 December in Paris,¹⁴⁵ the British

¹⁴² Hermann Hecht charts technological developments from the sixteenth-century to 1896, including those feeding into early film. Stephen Herbert's collection of nineteenth-century articles illustrates the popularity and variety of "'time-based' visual media" in the period's entertainment industry, advocating for these to be viewed as "self-contained media," rather than merely as "a step toward cinema." Simon Popple and Vanessa Toulmin's edited essay collection provides a historical and theoretical framework for the intermedial culture of visual imagery from the nineteenth century to the turn of the twentieth.

¹⁴³ Further critics treating the early years of film are: A. Nicholas Vardac traces the theatrical origins of early film; Thomas Elsaesser *et al.* provide a historical and theoretical trajectory; Rachael Low focuses on British film history from 1896-1918 (Volume 1-3); Charles Musser treats the early origin of film in America to 1907 (*Emergence*), which Eileen Bowser continues until 1915.

¹⁴⁴ Méliès, a former magician and caricaturist, is often credited with bringing aesthetics to film by exploiting the "magical" properties of the camera through his "pictorial fantasy" (Vardac 174-9).

¹⁴⁵ Shown in London on 20 February 1896, which Baillieu and Goodchild date as the "birth of the commercial cinema in Britain" (1).

film pioneer R.W. Paul, in consultation with Wells, had filed a patent for a “Theatroscope” to produce a moving picture inspired by *The Time Machine*, published in the same year, in which the audience was promised the sensation of being carried through time and space (Williams, *Wells* 28).¹⁴⁶ David Jones points out that “cinema itself was, of course, the real time machine, a device that could capture, store and reprise the past, setting the actors in the filmed scenes free to repeat their actions again and again, like eerily eternal revenants” (178). Although Jones’s comment reinforces the view, common in the 1890s-1910s, of film as a mere recording device, it equally underscores that this was a time of representational change in both technology and art.

Experimentation was being made in both technology and art, and reciprocal influences can be traced between them. Jones, for instance, notes the influence of X-ray technologies on Wells’s novel, *The Invisible Man*, published in 1897 (179). This point is not original to Jones: Vachel Lindsay observed it in 1915, when he said of Wells that “the X-Ray has moved that Englishman’s mind more dangerously than moonlight touches the brain of the chanting witch” (182).

More pertinent to my research is the development of writers alongside the early development of film, which has already been the subject of several studies. Wells is particularly popular, as his themes and motifs were used by filmmakers directly and indirectly, authorised and unauthorised, from film’s earliest days (for example, Keith Williams (*Wells*) and Don Smith). Sylvia Hardy argues further that his “position as a writer had affinities with the burgeoning British film industry,” adding that “his writings both reflect and have contributed to the changes which have taken place over

¹⁴⁶ The film was not made. Laura Marcus discusses this and the connection between Paul and Wells further (48-52).

the decades in the way film makes use of and sees itself as relating to prose fiction” (242-3). Yet these studies are rather one-way in their focus. It was not just literary writings and authors that shaped films, but also films and film technology that shaped writing and the writer, as this and subsequent chapters argue.

As films developed by film pioneers such as Méliès and Edwin S. Porter transitioned from short “actualités” to lengthier films with fuller narratives, the medium took inspiration from textual sources, ranging from plays and novels to newspaper reports. Steven Price states that not only were there no intermediary stages of textual adaptation in film’s earliest days, but also that, more generally, “Writing had no value in a medium that at this stage (often termed ‘primitive’ by film historians) could not begin to approximate the intellectual and artistic revolutions taking place in modernist literature” (*Authorship* 2-3).

While the written word was thriving in the elite circles of modernist literature, film continued the emphasis on the visual that had characterised popular media culture in the second half of the nineteenth century (see Meisel, *Realizations*). Yet, paradoxically, in spite of film’s devaluation of writing, it was the formation of narrative films around the turn of the century that established the medium’s cultural popularity, as narratives rapidly transformed by technological developments began to challenge media hierarchies. As early as 1908-9, according to Charles Musser, film had become a “form of mass communication/mass entertainment and finally involved a kind of mass production” (“Pre-Classical” 98). Shaw, in the *New Statesman* (27 June 1914), described its appeal in terms of its ability to tell stories without words: “The cinema tells its story to the illiterate as well as to the literate.” Just as Wilkie Collins associated the low aesthetic status of theatre with its predominantly lower-

class audiences in 1858, so too, film at the beginning of the twentieth century was accorded a low aesthetic status due to its mass appeal based on “its cheapness and accessibility” within the music and vaudeville halls (Low 2: 25), with its primary classification as a technology and craft further adding to its low aesthetic status. Yet, despite this identification, this popularity was also what fostered its rivalry with other arts. Shaw continued in his 1914 article: “And that is why the cinema is going to produce effects that all the cheap books in the world could never produce.”

Expectations regarding the potential of the medium were high, and many predictions as to its future were made, both alongside and apart from literature. My focus in this study is on literary authors, and therefore attends especially to their perceptions of the impact of film upon literary writing. Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910) wrote on his 80th birthday in 1908:

You will see that the little clicking contraption with the revolving handle will make a revolution in our life – in the life of writers. It is a direct attack on the old methods of literary art. We shall have to adapt ourselves to the shadowy screen and to the cold machine. A new form of writing will be necessary. I have thought of that and I can feel what is coming. (qtd. in Starr 32)

Despite acknowledging film’s impact and threat to literature, Tolstoy was nonplussed, continuing: “But I rather like it. The swift change of scene, this blending of emotion and experience – it is much better than the heavy, long-drawn-out kind of writing to which we are accustomed. It is closer to life” (32). Tolstoy’s view was emblematic of the challenges that literature and film would face in terms writing across media in the context of medium specificity theory.

Tolstoy was not an exception. Indeed, rather than scorning film as a medium of lower rank and rejecting it because of its potential to undermine literature, many literary authors of the period championed it. Shaw took a more positive and politically radical view than most. Seeing film's potential to shape national ideology, he called for it to be liberally funded:

The cinema is going to form the mind of England. The national conscience, the national ideals and tests of conduct, will be those of the film. [...] the State should endow the cinema, as it should endow all forms of art to the extent necessary to place its highest forms above the need for competition. (*New Statesman*, 27 June 1914)

Not only did Shaw recognise film as an art form alongside others, needing and deserving to be nurtured alongside them, but, as a Fabian Socialist, he also called on the government to secure film against the forces of capitalism.

In its unprecedented reach, the medium crossed linguistic and social boundaries, and its rapid progression as a form, both technically and artistically, was visible to millions.¹⁴⁷ Writers were part of film audiences, and as such they encountered the screen along with the masses. Shaw had declared himself a film viewing enthusiast in 1912, when he stated: “I, who go to an ordinary theatre with effort and reluctance, cannot keep away from the cinema” (qtd. in Dukore, *On Cinema* 5). Frances Hodgson Burnett too expressed delight over her first encounter with moving pictures in October 1913, defining it in a letter as “one of the wonders of the world as aviation is” and praising its extraordinary historical and geographical range and popular scope.¹⁴⁸ Like

¹⁴⁷ Low charts the rise of the industry around 1910, attempting to verify the numbers of film theatres, production companies, film releases, financial costs, and audience numbers (2: 13-57).

¹⁴⁸ She wrote: “We have seen battles with thousands of soldiers in them & processions & functions of great cities with apparently hundreds of thousands of people – we have seen heroines of lays galloping over miles & miles of veldt in South Africa, & lions prowling about in jungles – and the arena filled

Shaw, she contrasted her experience favourably to theatre-going: “We never wanted to go away [...] If we had seen the same thing in a play we should have been bored to death. We have given much time & argument to trying to explain what exactly the fascination is” (qtd. in Gerzina 173). Yet at this point, neither Burnett nor Shaw could fully explain exactly why they preferred film to theatre.

Indeed, early film was regularly seen as kin to theatre in many ways by numerous filmmakers, reviewers, and scholars; its very terminology established their connection, as it was variously nominated the upright stage (*Moving Picture World* 30.5, 4 Nov. 1916, 685), the photodrama (DeMille), and the photoplay (Münsterberg), terms that also served as titles to popular film magazines, such as *Photoplay*, established in 1911.¹⁴⁹ In its earliest forms, film was regarded as an extension of the theatre rather than a threat to it,¹⁵⁰ but, as it evolved, some critics thought that their similarities might render the theatre obsolete, a fear that intensified with the coming of synchronised sound (discussed in Chapter Four). However, not everyone agreed, with a January 1914 article in the *New Statesman* arguing that “literature and drama will survive even the most ingenious cinematograph. It is the rival of the painter rather than of the poet and novelist” (2: 426): the fact that film was commonly referred to as “moving pictures” supported this view. However, to nominate film a moving picture also pressed its affinities with theatre. Martin Meisel attests that nineteenth-century

with thousands & thousands of maddened leaping struggling Pompeiians on the day of the eruption which destroyed them” (qtd. in Gerzina 173; punctuation in original).

¹⁴⁹ Many of these specialised film magazines can be read in the Media History Project’s digital library.

¹⁵⁰ European theorists began to hail film as an art in the early 1910s: see, for example, Ricciotto Canudo (1911). Yet even so, they initially saw film as an extension of theatre. As film developed, it was increasingly recognised as a separate form, championed further by European theorists and filmmakers (Chapter Four). Ian Aitken discusses early European film theories and movements from 1900.

reviews nominated tableaux and theatricals “moving picture[s]” and “picture play[s]” (*Realizations* 51).

Dramatists also mitigated the film-theatre rivalry, using film to do so: the 1917 film adaptation of Tom Taylor and Charles Reade’s collaboratively authored nineteenth-century play, *Masks and Faces* (1852), features an introduction by luminaries of the stage, including dramatists Shaw, Barrie, and Pinero.¹⁵¹ The adaptation, as the prologue recounts, was made to raise funds for the Academy of the Dramatic Arts; yet it also promoted film as the sister of theatre, with John Hare, a stage actor and theatre manager, professing that “there should be no caste-prejudice. The film is the Sister of the Stage.” Hare’s comment is set up by Pinero, who on hearing Barrie’s idea of the “All-Star film” of *Masks and Faces* to clear off the building debt, agrees with “the excellent suggestion,” before reasoning that “the ‘Pictures’ owe much to the stage [and] it shall repay.” The idea of indebtedness to the other art was commonly expressed, and Hare’s pragmatic response, reminiscent of nineteenth-century charges that the stage owed the novel a great deal, signals a disdain for the hierarchisation of the arts. Finally, Shaw, roused by the cheers of his fellow stage practitioners, responds in favour of the proposed film due to its pecuniary remuneration to the theatre, concluding the prologue with the words: “after all, what monument more enduring than brass?”¹⁵² Although film scholars would disagree with the implication that film’s only enduring value lies in the money it makes, the message accurately underscores

¹⁵¹ The assembly also included Squire Bancroft, George Alexander, John Hare, Johnston Forbes-Robertson, and C.M. Lowne, the latter two also starring in the adaptation. The only woman present, remaining silent throughout, is stage actress Irene Vanbrugh, who portrayed Peg Woffington in the film, but also instigated the idea of the prologue (Brown 143).

¹⁵² His attitude here is surprising, considering the rejection of large financial offers for the silent film rights, and the aesthetic interest he had in latter adaptations of his own work (Chapter Five). In 1925, Shaw remarked: “you cannot combine the pursuit of money with the pursuit of art” (*Table-Talk* 56); in 1915, he commented that the theatre was a far more “exacting art than that of the picture palace,” suggesting that the enlistment of established dramatic talent would help the cinema (*Metropolitan Magazine* 42: 23).

the mutual advantage that film and theatre offered one another in this period: the one in reputational, the other in economic gain.¹⁵³

This was not to say that there were no struggles between the two media, nor between different types of adaptation. Whereas simultaneous representation of a work, whether on stage and page, or on screen and page, were regarded as mutually beneficial,¹⁵⁴

Shaw and Burnett considered that the consequence of simultaneously presented depictions of a work on stage and screen was detrimental to the stage. In 1919, Shaw stated that filming a still “live” play was “fatal,” worrying that “the picture palace” would kill the theatrical play (qtd. in Dukore, *On Cinema* 23-4). Burnett raised similar concerns in 1911 whilst discussing selling film rights with her advisors: “I already know that the motion pictures are said to greatly influence the theatres and, as *Fauntleroy* is continually played still, I feel sure Mr Edwards [her agent] is right” (qtd. in Thwaite 231). However, this was before she had seen a film. After experiencing the excitement of attending the moving pictures in 1913 for the first time, and being awed by their representational potential, she accepted offers to adapt her work to film, showing the power of the moving pictures over prose writers and dramatists to allow adaptations of their work.¹⁵⁵

Burnett’s first experience of film was documented in a private letter to her family; less than a year later, her infectious excitement for cinema was shared with readers in an article published in June 1914 in the newly established American magazine *Vanity Fair* (1913-36), arguing for film’s role in mediating across nations and cultures:

¹⁵³ Although the surface message of the prologue highlights intermedial collaboration and exchange, Geoff Brown discusses how the production became “marked and marred by sibling rivalry,” before examining wider associations between theatre and early film (143-67).

¹⁵⁴ This is also the dynamic in Chapter One’s discussion of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*.

¹⁵⁵ By October 1913, Burnett had already made several deals for her work to be filmed and was negotiating others (Thwaite 232).

In a land so far way, in both distance and manners and customs [Germany] she saw stories of American life appreciated and applauded by people who could not have understood a word of English. Mrs Burnett was so struck by the universality of the appeal of the moving pictures that, from that time forward, she became an ardent student of the cinema, keenly interested in both the entertainment and the audience. (1.4)

As the author witnessed film's international appeal and reach, she broke down hierarchies between author, reader, and media, writing of herself as a cinema-goer, like her readers, and fostering film as a shared social and cultural environment for all.

The film industry was quick to exploit authors who had agreed to let their writings be adapted to promote itself in mass market magazines. After Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930) sold the film rights to some of his *Sherlock Holmes* stories for the first time, resulting in *The Speckled Band* (1912), the *Moving Picture World* in November 1912 stated that "the most interesting fact" about the series was that "the popular creator himself [had] supervised" it, adding: "[t]his will give satisfaction to the thousands of readers of these absorbing tales who at this time may not be followers of motion pictures [...] the new-comers in filmdom are bound to be favo[u]rably impressed" (14.8: 778). Doyle was not directly involved in the Franco-British film company productions, but this false claim (likely made by the studio to the uncritical fan magazine press) was made to entice readers to discover film through the bridge of literary film adaptation, with the reassurance that the literary author had presided over the adaptations of his writing. His sanction of film was implied, as he had sold the rights, and the claim that he had supervised the adaptation promised that the films had faithfully adapted his stories.

Such promotional practices were not unusual; beyond promoting particular adaptations via their familiarity in their source medium, advertisements also relied on audience familiarity with prior adaptations. For example, the advertisement for the Thanhouser production of *Aurora Floyd* (1912) in *The Moving Picture World* (30 Nov. 1912) stated: “*Aurora Floyd* is Miss M.E. Braddon’s world famous story [...] Most grown people know the story from reading the book or witnessing the play, and the picture is easy to advertise” (14.9: 934). The “ease” of advertising the picture here depended not only on knowledge of the novel as original source text, but also on the play as an earlier adaptation of it.

Appreciating film as a medium did not necessarily extend to a favourable view toward film adaptation, however, and many authors were hesitant to sell film rights to their writing. Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan confirm that, while “there were numerous literary champions of film as a new art form, few had anything good to say about adaptations in the early twentieth century” (*Screen Adaptation* 47). Despite his positive attitude to film, Shaw objected to the adaptation of his plays before mass-produced synchronised sound was developed in the late 1920s, repeatedly arguing that drama was dependent on dialogue for its aesthetic and ideological impact, as in this statement made in 1925: “A play with the words left out is a play spoiled” (*Table-Talk* 64). He supported his argument with silent film versions of classic dramas, which he judged to be harmful to the original source, except when the original dialogue was so bad that its omission was an improvement, a sentiment that he did not extend to his own plays. However, his understanding of the potential of film and the consequence of it for dramatic writing was clear, when, in 1908, Shaw told fellow playwright Pinero that a “fresh career” might be open for both of them and predicted

that the synchronisation of sound to the cinematograph would not be far away (see Dukore, *On Cinema* 3).¹⁵⁶

Even authors who consented to film adaptations of their work remained ambivalent as to the end product. Braddon, for example, saw the film adaptation of *Aurora Floyd* in 1913, yet made no surviving written comment on it, either in public or private.¹⁵⁷

Other authors similarly resisted expressing their view: Thomas Hardy (1840-1928), for instance, refused to indicate unambiguously what he thought of any film adaptation of his novels. He merely commented of the 1913 film *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*,¹⁵⁸ that it was a “curious production” and that, although he found it “interesting as a scientific toy,” he could say nothing “as to its relation to, or rendering of, the story” (*Letters* 4: 312). Paul J. Niemeyer tries to make sense of the ambivalence that Hardy and other novelists expressed towards early film adaptations of their work, speculating that Hardy could not “see himself” in the film; that his characters had been made independent of him, thus placing him in an “uncomfortable and paradoxical situation” (15). Considering that Hardy had dramatised the book himself in five acts during 1894-5,¹⁵⁹ and had involved himself further in the stage

¹⁵⁶ Shaw further suggested to Pinero that the Society of Authors should be involved in arrangements between authors and film companies, setting a model contract in terms of pecuniary terms and conditions. A Cinema Section and a Cinematograph Sub-Committee were established by the Society in 1914, under the presidency of Thomas Hardy (Low 3: 115-6). Chapter Five discusses Shaw’s engagement with sound film adaptations of his work.

¹⁵⁷ Robert Lee Wolff finds that Braddon’s diaries over 35 years make no direct reference to public events or to social change, arguing that she put those into her novels (379). Considering the success of her novels in the nineteenth century, as well as the demand for their dramatisations, the lack of interest in filmic adaptations after her death in 1915 is notable. According to the Internet Movie Database, *Lady Audley’s Secret* was adapted only four times (in 1915, 1920, 1949, and 2000) and her own stage dramatisation of Ellen Wood’s 1861 novel *East Lynne* was adapted once in 1916.

¹⁵⁸ The film was made by Famous Players Lasky, directed by J. Searle Dawley, adapting the American stage play written by Lorimer Stoddard and starring Mrs. Fiske. Keith Wilson discusses Hardy’s experiences with theatre and British stage adaptations of his work. Joan Grundy explores the influence that theatre and other arts had on Hardy and his writing.

¹⁵⁹ Commenting on the process of adapting his work, Hardy had declined help with dramatising it, likening the act itself to “a piece of carpentry” (*Letters* 6: 312), thus reinforcing the view of adaptation as a technical craft rather than a work of art.

production (and again in 1924, when he revised it for a new production), this explanation is implausible.

A more plausible explanation lies in commercial and reputational factors: Peter Widdowson suggests that Hardy “was a ‘filmic’ writer” who “had an instinctive and prescient sympathy with the form,” while demonstrating that Hardy showed considerable “business sense” concerning adaptations of his novel (51-2). This can be seen in his contractual demands, discussed later in this chapter, and it was therefore, quite likely, a politic decision to remain ambivalent. By not commenting publicly on the adaptations, Hardy neither sanctioned nor condemned them. Doing either could have had negative consequences for the future distribution of his work in both print and film forms. Had he praised the films, it would have undermined his elite status as a celebrated author, given their low cultural status; had he condemned them, it might have limited his audience and precluded filmmakers from working with him again.

In other cases, authors’ reactions spoke louder than their words, as when Burnett went to see the British film adaptation of *Little Lord Fauntleroy* at its premiere in New York at the Lyric Theatre on 22 June 1914. Her American friend, Elizabeth Jordan, recounts how Burnett gave a hundred seats offered her by the producer, to the Newsboys’ Fund, so that the premiere resembled a children’s party. The producer had praised the film to her, yet she had also been told to expect a “great many novelties” in the production. However, she was only to see the beginnings of these, as the film opened with detailed death scenes of each of the Dorincourt heirs and the resulting hysteria of one boy led other children to follow suit, so that Burnett had to accompany

them out of the theatre. Burnett viewed this as a tragedy, according to Jordan, who herself saw the humorous side of the experience (325-6).¹⁶⁰

Writers not only wrote (or refused to write) about film adaptations of their writings, they also wrote (or refused to write) film adaptations of their own work. As with nineteenth-century prose fiction to stage adaptation, authors who wanted more control over film adaptation could write film adaptations themselves. Though even this was not always appealing. Shaw, for instance, told screenwriter and film director Adrian Brunel that if he did decide to “meddle with the cinema theatre,” he would rather write expressly for film than have his existing plays adapted to the screen (qtd. in Brunel, *Nice Work* 33).

Yet without copyright laws to motivate them economically, the idea was less appealing in the early days of film, and many expressed a desire to write original material for film rather than to adapt their own work. The *Vanity Fair* article from June 1914 stated that Burnett was inclined to write an original story for the cinema, as it predicted that it would be to authors, such as Burnett, that film would look for original work in the future, “when all the famous books and plays of the past, which are supplying the bulk of feature films of the moment, are exhausted” (1.4). The view

¹⁶⁰ In her 1938 autobiography, Elizabeth Jordan briefly recounts her experiences with the film business and writing. Her experience as a journalist, fiction writer, and editor was sought after by the newly established Goldwyn Company in 1917, who felt the need for a “recruit from the literary world.” Despite Jordan assuring co-founder and playwright Mary Selwyn of her lack of film experience, she was persuaded that her knowledge of writing in other media would be sufficient and that everything else would be taught. As she had heard “too many sad stories of the brisk entrances and exits of authors in the moving-picture world,” she boldly asked for \$25,000 annually on a part-time basis, which was granted. She was soon installed with the “very impressive” sounding title of the “Editorial Director of the Goldwyn Company,” until the business moved from New York to California a year later. She expressed her relief at this end to her film venture, but nonetheless remained grateful for her “experiment.” Her account records her recommendations for adapting classic and modern books to film, titles which “had never been heard of by most of my new associates,” making her feel “depressed.” Even though some of these were later produced by other companies to great success, “at that time they were as alien to the picture world as I was myself” (358-67). Her account predates the widespread employment of literary authors in Hollywood, discussed in the following two chapters.

was that film, like any other medium, could not live by adaptation alone, but would need its own original writing.

Nevertheless, it was estimated in 1916 that over 95 per cent of films were adaptations, with a marked preference for contemporary works, the chief motifs here for being “large circulation, literary snob value, and theme values” (Low 3: 61; 203-4). As early as May 1915, Shaw discussed “What the Films May Do to the Drama” in an interview for the New York *Metropolitan Magazine*. He saw the role of the celebrated dramatic writer in film not as one of adapting plays to film but of helping to develop film commercially through original writing: “It may be commercially advisable to engage highly skilled dramatists for film work because their reputations will draw audiences in a film theatre just as they will in an ordinary theatre” (42: 23). Yet even as Shaw was optimistic about the commercial contributions of theatrical writers to film, he was doubtful about their contribution to film art and was furthermore disparaging of film writers: “But it remains to be seen whether they possess any more of the special talent demanded by the film than film authors who could not produce even a tolerable charade in dialogue.” Prefiguring later claims that you can only make a good film from a bad book,¹⁶¹ he pondered further whether bad theatre dialogue writers might make good film writers: “Take again the would-be author who is full of plots and adventures and romances, but has no gift of verbal expression. These failures of the spoken drama may become the stars of the picture palace.” Shaw thus saw the

¹⁶¹ Béla Balázs, in 1945, was one of the first film theorists to propose an “organic connection between form and content in any art form,” (although Lessing and others had done so nearly two centuries prior), arguing that a bad film could produce a good book, but a good book could not be turned into a good film, as it had already found “the most adequate expression” for its content (259).

profession of theatrical writing – even its failed writers – as having a potentially improving function in film.

ii. Adaptations: New Rights, Rules, and Confusions

The rapid mass popularity of film and its intersections with so many other media, both generally and in adaptation, created further challenges to copyright laws, signalling new disruptions, concerns, and uncertainties regarding the rights of literary authors. Pascal Kamina describes the existing copyright laws as being “ill-adapted to the new medium” due to “a tradition of piecemeal or restrictively drafted legislation” and identifies that, after the arrival of film, the two main issues for copyright law were the protection of the films themselves and the infringement on pre-existing works through film adaptation (*Film Copyright* 10-1).

One of the early attractions of film was that it crossed linguistic boundaries and could be distributed internationally with little change besides translated title cards. In terms of copyright therefore, global co-operation was essential. As discussed in previous chapters, international copyright laws with regard to adaptation had much improved by the end of the nineteenth century following the Berne Convention in 1886 and subsequent meetings of the International Copyright Union: for example, in Paris 1896 and Berlin in 1908 (see Porter).¹⁶² Changes to America’s stance on copyright protection, such as the passing of the 1891 Chace Act in Congress, also meant that literary works were now better protected on a global scale. As discussed in Chapter One, American authors had been petitioning for international copyright law and, with

¹⁶² Paul Goldstein and Bernt Hugenholtz provide a comparative survey of international copyright law for literary and cinematographic works in a section treating “Authorship and Ownership” (245-82), also detailing the terms of protection for literary and cinematographic works up to the present day (283-90).

the 1891 Act, some of their concerns were finally being addressed. However, the Act was regarded as a “hesitant and ambivalent first step” toward joining the international copyright system, with the US standing “aloof from the more robust international copyright framework of the Berne Convention” for a century to come and its law continued “to pose significant hurdles to foreign works seeking protection” (Bracha 369).¹⁶³

Initially, films, primarily due to their mechanical origin, were excluded from artistic copyright protection, before being categorised with photography in the UK, where they were protected under the 1862 Fine Arts Copyright Act by being defined as a series of photographs. However, not only was there a lack of performance right under this Act, but the technical specifications also meant that each photographic negative needed to be separately copyrighted at the Stationer’s Hall, which, filmmakers feared, would not sufficiently protect films, which were registered in reels. As film developed its narrative and dramatic capacities, films were subsequently categorised as dramatic works, which indirectly classified them as literary and artistic works in the UK under the 1833 and 1842 Acts. Yet this was also problematic, as a 1908 ruling the Court of Appeal stated that works protected under those Acts had to be “capable of being printed and published.” The legal classifications and terminologies were thus causing confusion, with Kamina suggesting that the ruling did not prevent the final film from being protected under the 1833 Act, yet under the 1842 Act, the written script was regarded as a prerequisite for protection, as it was for dramatic work (*Film Copyright*

¹⁶³ The US attended the International Copyright Union meetings as non-Union observers and Thorvalg Solberg, the first Registrar of Copyrights at the Library of Congress, provided a succinct overview of the changes and additions since the first treaty in his 1908 delegate report. Solberg, an advocate for America to join the Union, wrote subsequent articles on the matter for the *Yale Law Journal*, including a 1930 article addressing developments to date and the need for America to amend existing laws (Vol. 40, Art. 2: 184-214).

11-3). Accordingly, writing was much more central to film's copyright in film's early years and an important part of its legal protection.

Concurrently, the first legal instance in which cinematographic films and exhibitions were addressed by international copyright law was in the 1908 copyright protection for photography at the post-Berne Convention meeting of the International Copyright Union in Berlin, albeit indirectly and analogically as "works produced by a process analogous to photography" (Art. 14). Film's inclusion here, according to Kamina, was driven by dramatists, who were at this point already complaining about unfair usage of their works, rather than by film practitioners ("Film Protection" 80).¹⁶⁴ If this was the case, then the drive for legal clarification stemmed from the profession of writers, who felt the most disadvantaged by film adaptation practices, echoing the novelists' complaints regarding stage adaptation practices decades before (see Chapter One).

Isabella Alexander argues that the 1911 Imperial Copyright Act was only brought about through "international pressure to take action," as the changes in domestic law were a consequence of the revisions made in Berlin in 1908, with which Britain needed to comply in order to remain a part of the Union (*Public Interest* 290).¹⁶⁵ The Act followed regulations set out in the 1908 Convention, including Article 14's protection of cinematographic works. What changed, however, was that film was placed on a par with literary, dramatic, musical, and artistic works, which were all

¹⁶⁴ Kamina does not evidence this claim. Alexander suggests that the drive for inclusion came from France (*Public Interest* 274). Reconciling the two positions, considering France's leading position in setting out authorial rights and movements, as well as the high number of original French dramas produced for the stage, it is possible that French dramatists drove the classification.

¹⁶⁵ Alexander discusses the stages of development leading up to the Act (*Public Interest* 234-90). Similar to the formation of the 1832 Select Committee, the Government tasked a Departmental Committee (the Gorell Committee) to examine the necessary revisions to the current law and report to Winston Churchill, the President of the Board of Trade. The members within the group reflected the variety of representations with interest in the reform, including practitioners in music, art, literature, drama, and publishing (266-7).

classed together as “works,” with copyright arising on creation, without preliminary formalities or registration, and lasting for an author’s lifetime, plus 50 years. The Act also prohibited adaptation of any kind, performed or otherwise, without the author’s or copyright holder’s permission. The Act defined copyright as “the sole right to produce or reproduce the work [...] in any material form whatsoever,” including “to perform” it; it covered translation and intermedial adaptation of play to novel and vice versa, as well as recording such performances on film (Section 1 (2)). These measures, according to William Cornish, resolved decades-old arguments and set the “seal upon copyright as ‘property,’ rather than just a means of preventing loss through unfair competition,” which had been the focus of previous copyright laws in Britain (925-6).

Film copyright was also updated and clarified (Sect. 35). Rather than protecting the recorded film strip, as previously attempted, copyright protection included the script and the final cinematic work expressed through cinematography. Similar provisions were established in other countries, including America in 1912, where the “lawless state of copyright” had produced a “cannibalisation of published source material,” thus exacerbating hostile intermedial relations and authorial mistrust of adaptations (Price, *Authorship* 2). In contrast to the protracted prior struggles regarding copyrighted dramatic performances and play scripts, these rulings secured a better legislative environment for cinematic authors and adaptations at the beginning of the medium’s life.

All in all, the Act “considerably expanded the rights of creators and owners,” further providing that the rights could be extended to different formats, such as “translation, dramatization, performance or film adaptation,” thus moving further away from the

reliance on material form for definition (Alexander, *Public Interest* 275). Literary and dramatic authors were thus much better protected and more justly treated.

The Act came into force on 1 July 1912 and remained until the Copyright Act of 1956. As progressive as it seems by contrast to nineteenth-century UK copyright law, it brought new problems. Kamina discusses the problems of the 1911 classification for film, such as the establishment of authorship, and contrasts the UK system to the 1909 Act in the US, where authorship in a “work-made-for-hire doctrine” was given to the employer (*Film Copyright* 22-32), a problem that would create major problems for writers in Hollywood, as my later chapters attest. Moreover, Cornish argues that, “if the nineteenth century was the age of piecemeal, ill-related rights for authors, which led the industries concerned to demand more complete generalization of their rights, the twentieth century would become the age of neighbouring rights,” which, once given, created greater potential for conflicts between the various interests than the “nineteenth-century evolution of the ‘classical copyright’” (930). These conflicts would be exacerbated and heavily tested in practices of intermedial adaptation.

a. Testing the New Medium

Nineteenth-century copyright laws, however, held in the earliest years of film; moreover, dishonest adaptation practices supported by older laws and forbidden by the 1911 Act continued beyond 1911. As with stage adaptations of novels, both authorised and unauthorised adaptations inundated early film screens. Additionally, prior experiences with stage copyright often influenced writers’ practices and relationships with the film industry. Marie Corelli, having learnt from the dramatisation of *The Sorrows of Satan*, discussed in Chapter One, insisted on creative control and legal authority over any film adaptation of her work, which was gaining

interest from film companies as narrative filmmaking developed.¹⁶⁶ As she had done with theatrical adaptation, Corelli insisted on seeing film scripts before granting permission to adapt her work to cinema. Here too we see the centrality of the film script in early film adaptations. However, as films often worked from a shooting script which was developed during the filming, this was not always possible. Even as she negotiated film rights, others were adapting her work illegally, and her literary agent was kept busy tracking down unauthorised early film adaptations and demanding payments for the rights (Ransom 152).¹⁶⁷

Beyond these similarities, novelists were faced with unprecedented copyright confusions, when, rather than adapting directly from the novel, filmmakers adapted and credited stage adaptations of novels, creating layers of authorial ownership – and confusion about ownership – in adaptation from novel via stage to film. Prior to 1911, it was common for authors to swiftly dramatise their novels in order to be in a stronger legal position to protect their work, as Shaw attests in the *North American Review* in 1899, where he laments the “madness and confusion” of dramatic copyright, reiterating the notion that “every prudent novelist whose book contains valuable dramatic material takes the precaution to put together some sort of stage version, no matter how brief or inept” (252-3). The relevance of this practice for a

¹⁶⁶ Her experience with stage adaptations in the twentieth century continued to be fraught. In 1908, a play based on Corelli’s *Barabbas* (1893) was produced in America. Corelli refused to sign the contract giving the rights or to allow alterations unless she made the changes herself, “which will *greatly* strengthen it.” She insisted that false rumours of her seeing the play in America, spread, “just to ‘boom’ the play,” be “*very emphatically*” contradicted. While legal details regarding the production were being checked by her agent and solicitor, pecuniary matters were paramount in a letter to her agent: “I want (of course) a lot of money.” Despite her attempts to control the dramatisation, a press cutting indicated that the theatre company had already begun rehearsing without her input; because of this “dishonesty” she withdrew the agreement, and the play was cancelled. Corelli also denounced other unauthorised dramatic versions of her works as “*robbery*” and, whenever possible, took legal action, insisting that “Fraud *can* be exposed and *should* be – and *will* be – as long as I wield a pen” (qtd. in Ransom 152-3; emphasis in original).

¹⁶⁷ Some films were indirectly influenced by Corelli’s books, including *Santana/Satan or the Drama of Humanity* (1912/3), an Italian production re-released in America, and *Leaves from Satan’s Book* (1921), a Danish production, listed by John T. Soister *et al.* (537).

discussion of early film adaptation is that, as film was seeking narrative material to adapt, many novels already existed in authorised dramatic form, written either by the novelist, or collaboratively with another author, or by a hired dramatist. Thomas Leitch notes, that although novels have long been considered film's most frequent source of literary inspiration, early filmmakers preferred material that needed less drastic compression to adapt to the screen: among these options were the “intermediary stage adaptations that had broken down the novelists' often sprawling narrative to a manageably limited series of dramatic scenes” (27).

The ambiguity of copyright law, as well as unfamiliarity with film practices, resulted in entangled and confusing conditions for writers whose works were adapted to film. In 1911, just before the 1911 Copyright Act became law, the Dreadnought Company reluctantly showed Corelli their unauthorised film adaptation of *The Sorrows of Satan*, for whose release she had refused permission without her prior approval. Screened for her in her hometown of Stratford-Upon-Avon, she wrote to her literary agent on 9 March:

The “film” is simply *awful!* I could *not* see it through; and the man who came with it was fully aware of its *inadequacy* and *said so!!* It is the most vulgar and commonplace travesty of my work and not for pounds would I “pass” it!

The following day she wrote to her agent again:

I have just had the enclosed from Mr Johnston one of the curious little men who brought the “film” yesterday. I'm afraid there is something odd behind all this. They seem to have bought the rights of a *play* on my book (entirely away from my book and a travesty on it), by a man called Dacre – and they declare they are much disappointed with it and

did not think for a moment I would “pass” it! What does it all mean?

(qtd. in Ransom 154; emphasis in original)¹⁶⁸

Corelli expresses confusion here about the process of adaptation, but eventually colluded with the filmmakers against the playwright (Dacre), blaming him for having failed both her novel and the film adaptation. Her past experience fighting with stage adapters may have made her more ready to cast the blame there; that the film rights had been sold via an unauthorised play version further incensed her and made her feel robbed of her writer’s rights via the theatre. By contrast, the filmmakers had sought her permission prior to a public showing, pre-empting the legal change that was about to occur which would give authors primary control over any form of representation of their work. Despite this gesture, Corelli was unrelenting in her opposition to the film’s release. In this instance, she was also fortunate to have the backing of the Society of Authors, which covered her legal costs in the ensuing legal proceedings, and the film was ultimately prevented from release.

This did not deter the Dreadnought company: in 1916, together with producer G.B. Samuelson, they made Corelli a substantial offer for the film rights – this time with the condition that Corelli could approve the script, but that, after approval, she had to accept the finished film and would not be allowed to preview it as a condition of its release. When the first script did not meet with her approval she offered to write one herself. The filmmakers declined, and a new scenario eventually received her permission. The film, directed by Alexander Butler, was released in 1917, crediting

¹⁶⁸ Henry Dacre’s stage adaptation had premiered in London in July 1897. According to the records of the Lord Chamberlain’s office, a licence was not applied for until September 1897 (Bolton, *Women* 117-8).

Harry Engholm with writing the adaptation.¹⁶⁹ During this time she also sold the rights to other works of hers to be filmed such as *Vendetta* (1915), *Wormwood* (1890/1915), *Thelma* (1887/1918), and *Holy Orders* (1908/1917), among others, yet there appears to be no record of her response to any of these films. Her acquiescence nevertheless signalled her endorsement of film as a competent medium to represent her writing with its capacity to introduce her work to a wider audience.¹⁷⁰

The legacy of nineteenth-century copyright laws was not erased even after the 1911 Copyright Act, because unauthorised play versions that were legal before 1911 were continually offered to film companies “legally” after 1911. In 1915, for instance, C.W. Somerset, who had toured his play of *The Sorrows of Satan* for many years, despite never purchasing any rights, then tried to sell the play to the Walturdaw Company.¹⁷¹ Authorised plays were also problematic for novelists. For example, Edward Russell claimed to own the performing rights to the Grosvenor Theatre Syndicate’s ill-fated stage adaptation of Corelli’s novel and repeatedly advertised the rights for sale, before and after the 1911 Act, even asking Corelli herself to pay £1,500 for them in 1915. Corelli’s solicitor concluded that Russell had no valid legal rights, but that it would be very difficult to deal with him.¹⁷² Astonishingly, Russell refused to relinquish his demands for a share in the profits from the film adaptation,

¹⁶⁹ A prominent British screenwriter during the silent era, Engholm had adapted, among other notable works, *East Lynne* to film in 1913 (based on Mrs Henry Wood’s novel, rather than Braddon’s stage adaptation) and Doyle’s *A Study in Scarlet* in 1914.

¹⁷⁰ Her early approval of film can be further seen in her own attempt at an original screenplay, sent to her friend Hubert von Herkomer around 1913, though nothing became of it (Scott 160-1).

¹⁷¹ According to the records, this play had premiered in London in October 1898 and toured for twelve years. Co-written by Brian Daly, it combined Corelli’s novel with George Augustus Sala’s novel, *Margaret Foster* (Bolton 118). T.F. Coates and Warren Bell report that Somerset had informed Corelli of his adaptation, telling her, somewhat patronisingly, that he had combined the two works “to strengthen both” (191).

¹⁷² The Grosvenor Theatre Syndicate had been dissolved in 1902 and Russell claimed to have bought all the shares, although Corelli’s solicitor saw no official evidence to support this, according to Ransom.

until the matter was finally resolved in October 1924, after Corelli's death, when Russell was ultimately paid £1,500 to relinquish all claims (Ransom 156).

Not all stage adaptations of prose fiction were fraught with conflicts between writers, adapters, and producers, as the example of an 1899 American stage adaptation of Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* story demonstrates. The play *Sherlock Holmes: A Drama in Four Acts* was written by and starred William Gillette, who had previously collaborated with Hodgson Burnett on a stage adaptation of her fiction. With permission from Doyle, Gillette had considerably reworked the play, which had first been written by Doyle in 1897, but had not been produced (Haydock 41-3).¹⁷³ Doyle, in his autobiography, recounts that he told Gillette that he could do whatever he liked while writing it, adding that he was subsequently "charmed" with "the acting, the play and the pecuniary result" (102). Despite not having co-written the play, Doyle not only collected a share of the takings but was also included in the stage credit. Publicly solidifying his approval of the representation, Doyle praised Gillette's stage portrayal in *The Strand Magazine* in December 1917: "It is not given to every man to see the child of his brain endowed with life through the genius of a great sympathetic artist [...] my thanks to the man who changed a creature of thin air into an absolute convincing human being" (54; 535).¹⁷⁴

Yet although the dynamic between the writers remained amicable and there is no mention of ill-will between them, it is nonetheless notable that several early film

¹⁷³ Doyle persisted with dramatic endeavours and boasted of dramatising "The Speckled Band" (1910) within a week and staging it shortly thereafter (101). He involved himself as stage manager in productions of his own adapted plays and wrote of the advantage afforded by this position to break with "dramatic conventionalities" in a particular staging of a scene in his 1909 play. *Fires of Fate*, based on his novel *The Tragedy of the Korosko* (1898), asserting: "such moments to a dramatist give a thrill of personal satisfaction such as the most successful novelist never can feel" (234).

¹⁷⁴ Entitled "An Intimate Study of Sherlock Holmes" it can be found in *Collected Sherlock Holmes Story Editions*.

adaptations took inspiration from Gillette's play rather than Doyle's novel, attracted by its status as a commercially successful play. According to Ron Haydock, the film *Baffled*, produced by Thomas Edison's Mutoscope & Biograph Company, opened with the first ever appearance of Holmes on screen in 1900.¹⁷⁵ It was followed by the Danish Nordisk company's series of thirteen films between 1908 and 1911 (6).

Although these were all produced prior to conventions of film scripts and on-screen crediting, later films credited Gillette's play alongside Doyle's story, such as Samuel Goldwyn's 1922 *Sherlock Holmes*,¹⁷⁶ starring John Barrymore (55).¹⁷⁷ The Goldwyn Company, who had acquired the rights from Gillette, challenged the rights of the Stoll company to film the stories, whose rights to the novels by Doyle they had purchased. Due to the confusion between the stage and screen rights, the case was dismissed by the perplexed American court. The fact that Gillette and the film company were based in America, whereas Doyle and Stoll were British, might also have been a reason for the dismissal. In any case, the problems around authorised stage adaptations of novels as legal substitutions for the novels themselves highlighted the challenges of segueing from nineteenth-century copyright laws governing stage adaptations to early twentieth-century film adaptations, creating new problems surrounding ownership and crediting of writers in literary adaptation.

Whereas the use of Gillette's play, both as credited and uncredited source material, appears not to have caused further concerns for prose fiction author or dramatist, other dramatic collaborations were less harmonious and had to be resolved via legal

¹⁷⁵ Although barely considered a film at 35 seconds, Haydock argues that the idea most likely stemmed from the proximity of the play's staging and success, noting that the wardrobe of the film matched that of the play (2).

¹⁷⁶ The now lost film, directed by Arthur Berthelet, was reportedly "a too-literal adaptation from stage to screen" (Haydock 45). Chapter Five discusses film adaptations that remained too constricted by prior stage adaptations.

¹⁷⁷ Gillette starred in another adaptation of his play to the screen in 1916, which credits his play as source, with a scenario written by H.S. Sheldon.

interventions. For instance, early in his literary career, P.G. Wodehouse (1881-1975), had been asked by the American theatrical producer William A. Brady to adapt his new novel, *The Intrusion of Jimmy* (1910), to the stage, in collaboration with John Stapleton (McCrum 94). The play, entitled *A Gentleman of Leisure*,¹⁷⁸ premiered in New York in 1911 and, although it was based on Wodehouse's novel, Stapleton was rewarded with two-thirds of the proceeds for his role in dramatising it (Taves 10). When the Jesse L. Lasky Feature Play Company wanted to adapt the story two years later, the question arose whether it would be derived from the book or the play, and Wodehouse himself admitted in 1914 that film rights were so new to the entertainment scene that it was unclear to him whether they were covered in his theatre contract (*Letters* 105).

With the copyright rules unclear, similar dynamics arose with film adaptations that had previously characterised stage adaptations. The decision regarding the film rights turned acrimonious when Stapleton disputed Wodehouse's right to sell them, and the issue became a test case with the American Author's League, which had been established in 1912. As a result, on 23 November 1914 the rights to any silent presentation of the play "and theme thereof" on screen were bought by the film company for five percent of the film sales, with the inclusion of the "theme" presumably encompassing the novel as well. Stapleton was to receive \$500 for writing a scenario for the film, whilst he and Wodehouse were each to receive a \$500 advance as authors of the source texts against the coming profits from the film. Despite reaching an agreement with the writers, litigation continued when the play's producer took legal action against Lasky, claiming first right on the film sale (Taves

¹⁷⁸ On its revival in Chicago in 1913, the play was retitled *A Thief for a Night*, starring John Barrymore (McCrum 97).

11). A settlement here will have been speedily reached, though no further information appears to be available, as the film was finally released in January 1915, having been directed by George Melford under the supervision of Cecil B. DeMille.¹⁷⁹ Here and elsewhere, literary and dramatic writers continued to suffer the repercussions of adaptations made under earlier copyright laws, as they impinged on their film rights even after the new copyright act officially put an end to the ambiguities surrounding authorship and ownership in adaptation.

Despite the issues that persisted from the previous century, authors needed to consider film adaptation as a different entity both in terms of its audience reach and its longevity, not only for the works, but also the popularity and currency of the writer. Looking over Corelli's life, Annette Federico expresses "curiosity about a woman whose fame at the turn of the century was unsurpassed and yet who by the end of the twentieth century had become only a name vaguely, and pejoratively, connected with Victorian popular fiction" (2). While there are certainly many reasons for this decline, it may be that Corelli's opposition to adaptations without her legal and creative control contributed to her declining popularity, as her work was not as widely disseminated as the work of those granting more frequent permission to adapt their work. In 1919, the American Famous Players Company attempted to adapt the novel again, yet production problems resulted in delays until 1926, when it was directed and

¹⁷⁹ Showing a strong negotiating position for the work, the contract had a rather unusual provision that the adaptation had to be released by 1 July 1915 or \$500 in penalties and another \$500 would have to be paid to the authors every six months until the film was released. Despite this contract, legal confusion and contests continued: for a new film adaptation in 1923, Stapleton received \$5000 for the rights to the play and its source novel from Famous Players Lasky, with the rights remaining with the buyer, even when the copyright was renewed. Yet in 1925, Wodehouse and Stapleton jointly sold the rights to the play, excepting the film rights, for \$750 to the Kane and Thatcher Holding Corporation (Taves 9-12).

co-produced by D.W. Griffith.¹⁸⁰ The film released two years after Corelli's death, remains the final adaptation of *The Sorrows of Satan* to date.

By contrast, Doyle remains as popular today as in his own time. Again, while there are other reasons for this, that he freely sold the film rights and did not interfere with adaptations may well partially account for his wider dissemination and residual popularity. As a result, as early as 1908, the character of Holmes was a "genuine superstar of film," according to Haydock (9). Nor did Doyle complain of unauthorised film versions in his 1924 autobiography, even though his writings inspired numerous adaptations from the beginning of film, as well as continuations of his stories in his characters. Doyle merely remarked that films were still unknown when the stories first appeared and recounts that, on being offered a small sum for the rights, it seemed like a "treasure trove," which he was glad to accept (106).¹⁸¹ Like many other authorised adaptations, Doyle sold his rights shortly after the implementation of the 1911 Copyright Act in 1912.¹⁸² Doyle developed that "treasure trove," not only selling, but also buying and reselling the film rights to his works to continue to profit from film adaptations. As film rights increased in value following the Act, Doyle spent ten times the original amount to buy back the rights a few years later in order to authorise production of the *Sherlock Holmes* series by the British Stoll Company, to whom he sold the rights in 1920. Although he conceded that the first deal for the former was

¹⁸⁰ Kristen Thompson suggests that, rather than looking at previous dramatic versions, Griffith worked directly with the novel (193-200). However, Griffith was not credited with writing the adaptation, only with directing and producing it.

¹⁸¹ Doyle, after struggles to find a publisher, originally received £25 when his first Sherlock novel sold to Ward, Lock & Co. (Lycett 341). The Franco-British film company, a subsidiary to the Éclair Company who had already produced a *Holmes* film in 1911 prior to the deal, subsequently produced eight films in 1912.

¹⁸² These films were significant in being the first to stay faithful to the original stories. In England, little "screen-originality" for *Sherlock* could be found afterward, as the Doyle Estate exercised tight control over adaptations, by contrast to those made in other countries: for example, the American Universal film adaptations of the 1940s (Haydock 28).

“disastrous,” he nevertheless deemed the expense to recoup his earlier losses worthwhile in the end (106).¹⁸³

Writers were increasingly seeing the potential for income from film adaptations. A letter by Burnett in 1911, prior to any film adaptations of her work, states that she has no doubt that “the Moving Picture rights are becoming an important consideration and are likely to represent definite income in the future” (qtd. in Thwaite 231). Doyle’s predictions cited in the epigraph to this chapter, written to fellow novelist Mrs Humphrey Ward in 1913, proved correct.¹⁸⁴ Authors not only saw the income that could be generated by film adaptations, but also recognised that film offered a new means of disseminating their work. In 1911, aged, 78, whilst debating whether to consent to a film adaptation of *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, Hardy wrote to his publishers, saying, “I should imagine that an exhibition of successive scenes from Tess [...] could do no harm to the book, & might possibly advertise it among a new class” (*Letters* 4: 140). His interest in the filming of his novels was thus based on its reputational as well as economic benefits.¹⁸⁵

Yet just as Dickens had charged some stage adaptations with vulgarising his writing and harming his reputation as an author, so too did Hardy with film adaptation. After signing the rights to *Tess* to Famous Players in 1911, he worried that the novel would be “vulgarized or treated lightly.” Although he had “no objection to a film of the

¹⁸³ The Stoll *Sherlock Series* ran from 1921-3, producing a total of 47 films. The only criticism that Doyle made regarding those adaptations was a historical and cultural one: that they introduced “telephones, motor cars and other luxuries of which the Victorian Holmes never dreamed” (106).

¹⁸⁴ Doyle furthermore sold film rights for non-*Sherlock* related works, starting with a 1913 adaptation of *Rodney Stone* (1896), entitled *The House of Temperley*, and followed by others. Haydock surveys all screen appearances by Holmes and Watson until the late 1970s, in addition to other Doyle works filmed; Alan Barnes continually updates an extensive filmography of Holmes; Scott Nollen provides a comparative study of all works by Doyle adapted to film.

¹⁸⁵ In a later letter to his publisher, Hardy confesses that his “chief thought was whether it would affect the book-sales” (*Letters* 4: 142-3).

novel being made,” he wanted to ensure that the producers understood “that it must be done seriously,” so “that all possibility of a farcical view of the tragedy [is] prevented” (*Letters* 4: 265).¹⁸⁶ His concerns resulted in a legal clause being added to the contract, which allowed the filmmakers to “omit individual *scenes*, but not take liberties with the actual *story*” (Niemeyer 15; emphasis in original). In contrast to his stage adaptations, he did not involve himself further with the adaptation, but instead trusted that the contract would be sufficient to safeguard his work.¹⁸⁷ Directed by J. Searle Dawley, the film does not appear to have officially credited any writer other than Hardy (it is a lost film, so we cannot be certain), feeding and impinging on his literary reputation still further. Substantial changes may well have been made to this and other of his works on screen, as this was common practice. Indeed, Vachel Lindsay’s review of the 1913 film asserts that “the relentless Thomas Hardy is nowhere to be found,” before going on to compare it to the stage version (108).¹⁸⁸ Although Hardy’s concerns regarding the quality and fidelity of the film adaptation are markedly similar to those of earlier writers with regard to theatrical adaptations, the limited technologies of early film likely exacerbated these concerns. Yet ultimately, the new copyright regulations tightened the control that literary and dramatic authors were able to exert legally over film adaptations of their work.

¹⁸⁶ In this letter, Hardy leaves the financial remuneration to his publisher, but suggests that it would be “desirable” that the license should not run longer than five years. Other correspondence indicates that he received “ten per cent on the gross turnover” (*Letters* 4: 142-3).

¹⁸⁷ Similar legal stipulations were made for four additional adaptations of Hardy’s novels during his lifetime. All films are presumed lost; see Paul J. Niemeyer and Peter Widdowson (50-62).

¹⁸⁸ To fuse matters between stage and film even more, the American stage actress Minnie Maddern Fiske made her first screen appearance in the part of Tess, who she had previously portrayed on stage. The American stage rights were sold to representatives of the actress, with Hardy also giving them his own prior adaptation; yet it was considered that “it crowded too many incidents on the stage,” so Fiske hired Stoddard to write another adaptation, which he reportedly completed in five days (Kozloff 37). Fiske portrayed another one of her famous stage parts, Becky Sharp, in the 1915 adaptation of *Vanity Fair*, her next and last film role.

iii. The Craft of the Would-Be Film Writer

Just as in the nineteenth century, the art and profession of playwriting had been underestimated and undervalued, in part because of its tendency to adapt the work of prior writers, so too, early film writing was disregarded and suspect by its association with adaptation, redoubled by its perceived inheritance from theatre. Yet by contrast to theatre, when films began to create narrative fictions, writers were not deemed essential to the filmmaking process, and so were trebly devalued.

Film was regarded as a primarily visual medium, not only because of its basis in photography and moving picture technologies such as magic lanterns and phenakistoscopes, but also because of its lack of synchronised sound until the late 1920s. In film's earliest days, there was rarely such thing as a scriptwriter or even a script, as films either lacked stories or improvised them. Price points out that "Writing has always been the poor relation in the family of cooperative arts convened after the birth of cinema" (*Authorship* 1). The perception of film as visual, rather than verbal, contributed to the neglect of the craft and profession of screenwriting internationally, as well as creating concerns that the medium was threatening the written word in popular culture (see Chapter Four).

Even so, the evolution of the screenwriter as a substantial and permanent fixture within film production can be traced alongside the development of the screenplay. Kevin Alexander Boon states that "the early predecessors of the screenplay did little more than frame the narrative context for a scene," instancing Méliès's 1902 scenario for *A Trip to the Moon*, which resembled "no more than a primitive list," as one of the earliest examples (4-5). As the function of a writer was deemed insignificant to filmmaking at this point, more often than not prior to the 1910s, this minor aspect of

the film production process was assigned to someone already on the production payroll, often without any training or track record in writing. Inherently, the terminology of “screenwriter” and “screenplay” was not yet fixed and went through variable denominations along with changes in film culture, before being formally established around 1940. For example, in the 1910s, the term “screen play” referred to filmed performances of a drama, whereas the common early “scenario” was during that time replaced by the longer “photoplay.”¹⁸⁹ The focus of film was placed upon narrative images on screen rather than on film’s textual aspects, such as intertitles or scenarios. Only the emergence of longer, more narratively focused films and a more structured film industry led filmmakers to perceive the necessity of a written script, which led to the gradual recognition of the formerly indeterminate film writer.

Much like theatre, film was, from the beginning a highly collaborative medium; yet unlike theatre, it was generally film producers and directors who exercised the most creative control at the expense of writers. Musser states that, by 1907-8, the collaborative production system was firmly established, particularly in fiction filmmaking, despite unequal measures of authority and power (“Pre-Classical” 86). However, as screenplays became more “literary,” and copyright laws began to reflect this, a gradual shift in the balance of power for film writers was achieved. The consequence, according to Boon, was that in the 1910s “when creative control increased in the screenplay, it decreased for production personnel, most significantly the director,” forcing directors to reluctantly “surrender much of their domain to writers,” as the films were based around the narrative rather than merely capturing

¹⁸⁹ Steven Maras traces the screenplay from an “image-orientated entity” to a “word-based one” and highlights the importance of changes in the terminology for critical discourse (80-6).

visual images or creating camera angles without a concept (3-4).¹⁹⁰ A more regulated methodology on the narrative, and thus the written script and its writer, replaced the independence and spontaneity under which early filmmakers had hitherto been able to operate.

Despite the establishment of the profession and an increase in social recognition, film writers were nevertheless bound to the regulations of the film industry. In Britain, screenwriters during the silent film period experienced a surprising degree of creative freedom in their form, style, and manner of working, with Ian W. Macdonald likening their status and influence to that of a playwright on the stage, before the role received less control and recognition after the synchronisation of sound (“Screenwriting in Britain” 62; see also, “Struggle for the Silents”). Industry constraints were nevertheless particularly prevalent in America, where the legal aspects of rights and ownership also disadvantaged the position of screenwriters. The 1909 copyright law, described by Siva Vaidhyanathan as “the real ‘death of the author’,” had already established the worker-for-hire system, in which corporate copyright was employed and the writer had signed away any rights of authorship to the studio – the same applied to anyone who might be able to claim authorship, such as the director, producer, and actor (102). Despite further changes to copyright law in 1912, the notion of film writers as collectives of hired labourers in the studio system continued, and copyright remains with the studios to the present day, with very few exceptions.

Ian Hamilton points out that writers “did have the means of voicing complaints,” as “there had been clubs and associations that could, if so inclined, make statements or

¹⁹⁰ Thomas Harper Ince (1880-1924), an American director, producer, and ultimately screenwriter, is often credited for the innovation of the screenplay as a literary form guiding a film’s production, for example: by Boon (3-4).

representations on behalf of the writing community,” with Epes Winthrop Sargent founding “the first such club” in 1912, and Anita Loos, D.W. Griffith, Thomas Ince, and others setting up a Photoplay Authors League in 1914 (93).¹⁹¹ Similar to those created in the nineteenth century, the establishment of these associations enabled a more recognised and unified approach for the profession, although it was not until the 1920s and 30s that the social functions of these clubs were replaced by more proactive collective bargaining. Even so, the profession was gradually establishing itself from within in these early years and also being recognised externally.

Yet even as these unions and clubs identified film writing as a different type of writing from other literary forms, their collective nature encouraged film writing being viewed as a technical craft rather than being seen as an inspired, individualistic art form. The notion of film writing as a craft to be learned was underscored and exemplified in the widespread publication of writing manuals during the silent era by well-known scenarists such as William Lewis Gordon (1913), Leona Radnor (1913), Louella Oettinger Parsons (1915), as well as jointly by Anita Loos and John Emerson (1920).¹⁹² Historically, the manuals grew out of playwriting manuals (see Chapter Two) and, usefully show the rise and development of the profession, as well as vocalising the underrepresented view of the film writer.

Despite promoting writing for a screen as a craft that can be picked up by anyone with the help of their instruction manuals, it is apparent that film writers took pride in their profession. Epes Winthrop Sargent, in his 1913 manual, entitled *The Technique of the*

¹⁹¹ These were precursors to the original and still existing Screen Writers Guild, established in 1920.

¹⁹² Screenwriting manuals continue to be popular to the present day, seen for example, in the enduring popularity of screenwriting manuals by Syd Field (first published in 1979) and Robert McKee (first published in 1997), continuing through many subsequent editions, and in books about experiences in screenwriting, such as those by William Goldman in 1983 and 2000.

Photoplay (published by the *Moving Picture World*), claimed that the photoplay was not a craft, but “the newest of the literary arts,” while separating it from other literary arts: it is “not an adaptation of another branch of literary work, but is possessed of a technique all its own” (7-8). These claims not only sold the manual, but also declared film writing to be a unique art valorised by theories of medium specificity. Similarly, in his instructive manual for emerging film writers published in 1912, entitled *On Picture-Playwriting: A Hand-Book of Workmanship*, James Slevin, a picture-playwright for Pathé Frères repeatedly described film writing as an art, whilst nonetheless presenting it as a craft that can be learned via the manual. In contrast to many adverts claiming that film writing could be performed by anyone, he asserted that it was a complex art and that, due to the “complexity of the picture-playmaker’s art [...] few have the patience to learn it” (13). Despite these claims for film writing as art, the prescriptive instructions within the manuals say little about artistic expression and much about pleasing audiences. Slevin stated, for example, that a writer should never entirely surprise the audience with an ending (64). The manuals thus display tension between validating their profession within the literary arts and the need for commercialised appeal within the emerging industry.

Unlike dramatists in the nineteenth century, early twentieth-century professional film writers were fighting the battle for acknowledgement of their craft not merely from a legal, economic, and social standpoint, but also from within their own industry. The manuals, despite their claims of screenwriting as an art, are clear on the demands and limitations placed on authors by the film industry and specific writing techniques that are required for this. Even as Slevin was keenly aware that the industry and public did not share his view on the importance of the film writer, he wrote to improve the

impression, urging: “It is for us who are engaged in writing for the screen to try and better our standing” (15).

Sargent sought to elevate film writing by championing original writing for the screen, according to prevailing aesthetic theories that valorised original writing over adaptation. In contrast to nineteenth-century dramatists, who were relegated to adapting work by others for most of the century, the new medium of film foregrounded originality, at least in theory, if not in practice. The film industry actively encouraged and promoted the idea that ordinary, everyday people could contribute to film narrative. In this discourse, writing was subordinate to the more formless rhetoric of “ideas.” While on the one hand, this devalued writing, on the other, it contributed to the sense that the new medium needed new kinds of narrative and fresh and original ideas, which were valued far more in terms of commerce than in terms of art. Sargent urged the budding writer: “If you have ideas for sale, offer them” (125).

Yet Sargent nevertheless conceded the necessity for adaptation in early film, dedicating a chapter to it (XX). Despite a disdain for adaptation, Sargent valued it for developing and honing the craft of the film writer, using it to develop techniques and skills of writing for the screen: “Others will profit through making adaptations for the practice they gain in technique” (125). Sargent furthermore offered a step-by-step guide to the process of adapting, instructing readers to fully familiarise themselves with the original text, before taking it apart and dividing it into incidents, characters, threads, and chronology. Recommending a focus on the main story, he advised, “Do not try to get in all that the author got in merely because he did get it in. Make your great aim to get the story down complete without regard to the padding or the literary

style.” Writing film adaptations in his view required a disregard for literary writing and a stripping of it down to its narrative structures without regard to its style.

Adaptation was thus presented in terms of technical rather than creative skill, while highlighting the effort and knowledge required to adapt a work from one medium to another. Sargent’s manual thus echoed the 1888 playwriting manual discussed in Chapter Two, in which A. Dramatist stated: “Adapting, it is fair to add, is not such an easy task as it sounds. To any man of brains I should say writing an original piece would be simpler” (79).

However, Sargent conceded that creative and artistic expression could also be manifested through originality in adaptation. For instance, he suggested, “If you do *Romeo and Juliet* in modern dress, give it some modern twists to go with the new dressing,” and pointed out that some literary forms evidently require more creation in adaptation than others because of their lack of narrative elements: “Poems and songs lend themselves to broader treatment as a rule and permit or even require the interpolation of other scenes and incidents to supplement the rather meagre plot that can be conveyed in brief verse” (126). This allowed for a degree of originality in adaptation to create the narrative structures lacking in the source text.¹⁹³

Unless adaptation was paired with novelty, Sargent saw no point in approaching the studios. In spite of instructing his readers how to adapt, he advised aspiring film writers not to do so, indicating that “you can offer the studio nothing that it does not possess,” warning the would-be writer that, “If you lack ideas, do not seek to vend the ideas of another” (124-5). Adaptations were not in demand from outside the system, as the studios already employed writers who would, most likely, be better equipped

¹⁹³ Adaptations of verses and songs have not received much critical attention, but would offer further insights, especially into the screenplay as intertext.

with knowledge of the industry to write adaptations. Sargent qualified further that the screenwriter “may derive inspiration but not material, from the work of another,” cautioning that, “[j]ust what inspiration means is a matter between you and your conscience, since it is not easy to draw an exact line that may not be crossed,” (125) here gesturing to the complexities of copyright laws.

New copyright laws, enforced early in the decade, were protecting authors and their publishers more robustly and much more attention was being paid by the studios to the law in their choice of source material.¹⁹⁴ The damage that unlawful adaptation could bring to the career of a professional writer was substantial, as Sargent pointed out:

There is a commercial as well as moral side to this matter. You may be able to sell a few stolen stories but you’ll soon become known for a thief and have that reputation precede you into studios you have never visited. (130)

The growing public consensus about the immorality of uncredited, unremunerated adaptation resulted in the new copyright laws and gave the term “thief” more legal clout than when Dickens and other writers resorted to it in the nineteenth century, as the law affected adaptation practice much more in the industry of film than it had in the theatre. Since films existed in reels that could be shown in court, and were distributed widely, any unlawful practices were much more likely to be detected. Additionally, as the studios engaged people with an extensive knowledge of both classic and current literature, it meant that writers would be less likely to pass off the

¹⁹⁴ In America, the case of *Ben-Hur*’s unlawful adaptation lasted from 1907-11, and was instrumental in deterring unsolicited adaptation and establishing tightened legal regulations when the silent film was seen to infringe on the copyright of the published novel. Price further credits the ruling of the Supreme Court on the case with the categorisation of the “adapted screenplay” (*History of Screenplay* 52-4).

work of others as their own. Unauthorised “thievery” would be detected at the scriptwriting stage and, unlike in the nineteenth century, would often be stopped before production.

In spite of their claims for the value of film writing, the very existence of these film writing manuals implied that writing for film was a craft that could be picked up by anyone. This was reinforced by the numerous people who attempted to write films in the early years of cinema.¹⁹⁵ Sargent estimated that between 1909 and 1913 upward of 10,000 people tried their hand at photoplay-writing, with some editors suggesting the figure was nearer to 50,000 (10). Yet such figures also reinforced the low regard given to film writing both in terms of talent and a work ethic. The value of the writer was thus delimited not only by the industry, but also by a marketplace flooded with competition that contributed to devaluing the profession economically as well as aesthetically.

One of the problems regarding the universalist approach was that it deterred established writers from other literary fields from entering it and detracted further from the economic and reputational value of writing for films. The American dramatist Channing Pollack relating his own experience in film writing, points out the fallacy surrounding the promised economic remuneration of writing for film and the conditions of actual film writing in an article for *The Bulletin of The Authors League of America* written in February 1917: “under present conditions, the novelist or dramatist who neglects his old profession for the new is a plain fool” and the film manufacturers will need to “fatten the bait” as they wrongly believe that “authors still

¹⁹⁵ The period is commonly known for its “scenario fever,” as the industry put out calls for fresh ideas and writers, resulting in a surge of public interest in writing for film, variably placed by critics both before and after the American copyright ruling of 1912 (Maras 137-41).

live in Grub Street” (4.11: 7-8). Other articles in the same issue of *The Bulletin* echo the sentiment that, despite the claims of the industry, writing for film was not financially valued and therefore not tempting to most dramatists or novelists. However, this situation was soon recognised by the industry, and the end of the decade saw a more focused attempt from the American industry to recruit literary and dramatic writing talent to the screen (see Chapter Four).

Both Sargent and Slevin expressed high hopes and expectations for the profession of film writing in future. Whereas Slevin was more concerned with the wider moral responsibility of the writer due to the wide reach of the medium,¹⁹⁶ Sargent was more concerned with a shift from adaptation to original writing, optimistically predicting in a 1914 article published in the *Moving Picture World*:

it is only reasonable to suppose that in the time to come, when the best of the book rights shall have been exhausted, the author who writes photoplays for photoplay production will command a better price than the man who writes books that may be adapted. (199)

His prophecy echoed nineteenth-century calls by Wilkie Collins and others for playwriting to turn from adaptations to original compositions for both reputational and financial reasons, and his hope for the screen and its authors to be elevated in rank and income via original writing, a near consensus among screenwriters of his day, is further reminiscent of nineteenth-century discourses regarding dramatic writings, discussed in Chapters One and Two.

¹⁹⁶ He finishes his manual with these words: “It is the mission of the picture-play to teach by showing the light and not the darkness, the beautiful and not the repulsive, the sublime and not the abyss. Let this be your motto from a high moral principle and sense of responsibility to the millions of men, women and children throughout the world who will profit from your art” (92). The film industry worked hard to protect itself against allegations of immorality and vice by attempting to regulate itself through self-censorship, rather than state led legal censorship: see Low (2: 84-90; 3: 126-42) for British film censorship and Eileen Bowser (37-52) for American film censorship.

Sargent was not alone in his views and the industry was ever calling for the end of adaptation in favour of original writing (a call that is still not being heeded). A December 1917 *Motography* article claimed that interest in adapting both stage plays and novels was declining. The claim was made by “two of the best authorities in the business,” John A. Roscoe and Clover Roe, managers of the Book and Play Department for the Los Angeles firm of Willis and Inglis, who had deduced this from their sales, and were convinced that: “the features of the future will be original stories written by men and women who make a study of writing for the screen” (18.24). Despite adaptation remaining a prominent aspect of film writing and film making, discourses of film writing continued to propound both ideas of originality in authorship and medium specificity, which would set it apart from other arts, as well as touting the skill required to write for the screen, as my next chapter attests.

Regardless of whether films were based on adaptations or original writings, as film continued to develop as a primarily fictive narrative medium, this led to its closer alliance with the written word and the writer. Film was associated with literary arts through both adaptation and screenwriting, which diminished and undermined its claim to the medium specificity required to qualify as an art in its own right according to the time’s aesthetic theories, rather than being seen as a recording device for other arts or a compilation of other arts (see K. Elliott 116). Champions of film art therefore pressed film away from words and writing towards pure images, claiming that moving pictures alone were sufficient for film narrative. The following chapter discusses these debates during the 1920s, as the medium was straining to move away from its associations and involvements with literary arts, yet was subsequently pushed back toward them with the introduction of synchronised sound, which demanded dialogue. It continues this thesis’s focus on how literary authors were involved with adaptations

of their writings by the film industry, and what they wrote about and for film while navigating the challenges of such involvement.

CHAPTER 4
LITERARY WRITERS AND FILMMAKING PRACTICES

[T]he only reason for a film should be that it does the things the stage can't do.

– James Matthew Barrie in
1924 (*Letters* 201)

Studies of literary authors' associations with film have tended to focus on adaptations of their writings – sometimes on their response to and involvement with them – yet authors engaged with film in multi-faceted ways. Even authors unwilling to have their works put on screen were fascinated with film: some, like Virginia Woolf and Somerset Maugham, wrote film criticism; others actively participated in making films, both in front of and behind the camera. Prior to their appearance in the prologue to the film *Masks & Faces* (Chapter 3), George Bernard Shaw and James Matthew Barrie were involved in amateur film productions, including a short cowboy film entitled, “How Men Love” (1915), with Shaw in front of the camera and Barrie directing.¹⁹⁷ Not only did H.G. Wells likewise appear in an amateur short film, playing a Reverend in “They Forgot to Read the Directions” (1924), written by his mistress Rebecca West, but he also invested financially in a film company, for which fellow-author A.A. Milne wrote scripts.¹⁹⁸ Moreover, both Wells and Shaw were founding members of the London Film Society in 1925, which is credited with being a turning point in the cultural life of British film, with “some of the acutest minds of

¹⁹⁷ A production image remains from the lost film, showing Barrie flanked by Shaw, G.K. Chesterton, William Archer, and Lord Howard de Walden, who are all in cowboy costumes. The photograph appears in Chesterton's *Autobiography*, where he recounts the experience, along with another film sequence written by Barrie, where he and Shaw appeared – *Rosy Rapture* (1914), filmed at the Duke of York Theatre (237-41). Barrie also wrote and filmed an adaptation of *Macbeth* for charity, entitled *The Real Thing at Last*, parodying Herbert Beerbohm Tree and D.W. Griffith's American adaptation of 1916 (R.D.S. Jack “From Drama”).

¹⁹⁸ The company, Minerva Film (initially British Comedy Films, Ltd.), was formed in 1920, by, among others, Leslie Howard, Adrian Brunel, and A.A. Milne. It folded later in the same year, with Brunel blaming the American industry's hold over British cinemas. Everyone involved lost money, including Wells, one of the biggest shareholders, who, according to Brunel, would probably not have noticed the £250 he had lost (*Nice Work* 57-64).

the age” engaging in the “art of film” through viewings and debates (see Betts 66-8).¹⁹⁹ This, in itself, showed that some writers were quite willing to accept film not only as a new medium, but also as an art form, and to invest in it in various ways.

In terms of literary adaptations, as with Dickens’s involvement with nineteenth-century theatricals, authorial involvement with film was not the problem, but rather tensions between authors and film practices and practitioners and literary authors’ reluctance to relinquish control over their work in adaptations to the screen. Whereas Shaw had already made it apparent that his work was not to be filmed while the medium remained silent, some authors were persuaded otherwise and, even though the results were variable, as the examples of Barrie, Maugham, and Elinor Glyn in this chapter show, they highlight a much more complex relationship between authors and film in this period than prior scholarship has shown.

This chapter, addressing the years between 1919 and 1927, begins by discussing collaborations between literary authors and the film industry before theories of medium specificity took hold in discourses of literary film adaptation. It delineates tensions between literary writers and the industry over the craft of writing for film, arising in part because literary writers were often experimental in their film writing, in contrast to formulaic industry conventions. As a result, the film industry often exploited the status and names of literary authors whilst rejecting their actual writing for film. Initially, popular writers had been sought to participate in filmmaking to strengthen it as a narrative form and valorise its claim to be an art form; yet the

¹⁹⁹ Part of one of the preliminary manifestos of the society states: “The Film Society has been founded in the belief that there are in this country a large number of people who regard the cinema with the liveliest interest, and who would welcome an opportunity seldom afforded the general public of witnessing films of intrinsic merit, whether new or old” (qtd. in Brunel, *Nice Work* 112-3). For the Society’s agenda and impact on British film culture in the 1920s, see Jamie Sexton; and Jen Sampson. Both Wells and Shaw remained members until the society disbanded in 1939.

widespread failure of these early associations and the need for film to conform to theories of medium specificity in order to qualify as an art form resulted in claims that it required a different form of writing than literary writing both in order to emerge as art and to be commercially successful. This ultimately contributed to a more favourable position for the film writer, and a more prejudiced stance towards literary authors' direct involvement in film adaptations of their work. These arguments are exemplified in the final part of this chapter through a case study of J.M. Barrie's proposed screenplay for the film adaptation of *Peter Pan* (1924), which illustrates how, even when authors wrote adaptations of their own works for film that seem to us today to be completely viable for the screen, and that widely adhered to industry requirements of the time, their writing was rejected, and ordinary studio screenwriters were tasked with writing literary film adaptations instead.

Even though film's claim to aesthetic distinctiveness was by no means erroneous, an over-zealous insistence on medium specificity resulted in a failure to appreciate film's affinities with other arts in this period, and how they were mutually beneficial to one another, by contrast to nineteenth-century artists, writers, dramatists, and critics.²⁰⁰

Film in the early and mid-1920s had reached the point where, from a technical aspect, it could have formed and experimented with far more innovative relationships between words and pictures. Although their relationships were developed subsequently,²⁰¹ early film's paradoxical insistence on its dependence on literature

²⁰⁰ Martin Meisel attests that in the nineteenth century and before, both picture and drama influenced the style and structure of the novel (*Realizations* 52). Scholars would later acknowledge similar dynamics in film.

²⁰¹ Meisel points out that early film was "the age that danced on the grave of the nineteenth-century narrative pictorial style," as it "perfected the means for implementing a more perfect union between narrative and picture" (*Realizations* 436).

and its failure to work amenably with literary practitioners delayed its progress, as this chapter shows.

i. Literary Authorship and the Art and Industry of Film

As the narrative capabilities of film developed in the 1910s, more emphasis was placed on the story and the role of the writer. Christine Gledhill argues that, throughout the 1920s, the concept of “story” and “story value” were wielded as “a gold standard of filmmaking by producers, critics and fans alike” (151).²⁰² William Somerset Maugham (1874-1965), who had previously written both prose and drama, published an essay in 1921 entitled, “On Writing for the Films,”²⁰³ confirming the necessity of good story-telling for any medium: “The picture companies are discovering, what the theatrical managers might have told them long since, that no matter how eminent your stars and how magnificent your production, if your story is bad the public will not bother with you” (184). The elevation of narrative within film led to a conviction that writing for the screen was “the biggest factor in the realization of better pictures,” with a July 1919 article from *The Moving Picture World* stating that “No branch of the business of motion picture making should receive such fostering care,” as “all the labor and expense which is to follow the work of adapting material to the screen” depends upon it: “It is the vital spark, the very breath of life to the industry” (41: 66). Even though the position of the film writer was now regarded as pivotal to film’s visual realisation, the industry turned to established prose and

²⁰² Gledhill discusses the significance of “story” to the cultural poetics of British filmmaking from 1918-28 (151-77).

²⁰³ This essay was originally published in *The North American Review* (May 1921). Maugham admits that he had only busied himself with film for a matter of weeks (after having been hired by Paramount), but had “already learnt a good deal” and would only like to “jot down his first impressions” (181).

dramatic authors to write films, in the hope that their previous literary achievements would develop and elevate film narrative.

Public support for popular authors to become directly involved with film, either through adaptation or original writing for the screen, had already been expressed, as seen in Chapter Three's discussion of Frances Hodgson Burnett. Rather than being a way to promote the writer and his/her work through adaptation, this discourse was now more tangibly tied to the benefit such involvement would bring to film and its development as a narrative medium. Collaborations between established literary writers and film were therefore pursued not only to endorse specific films and companies, but to strengthen film's aesthetic position alongside other media through literary status and writing talent.

The American industry led the way, as popular authors were invited to join the film business and promote production companies; the British film industry soon followed suit. The initial surge of recruitment of literary authors in Hollywood took place between 1919 and 1922, with John Schultheiss arguing of this period: "in the beginning Hollywood's motives were honorable. But, because of a kind of literary arrogance on the part of the writers, and an artistic and organizational intransigence in the studios, the mating did not work out" (13-4). Ian Hamilton faults authors more than the industry for its failure:

from what little we know about the Eminent Author fiasco, the authors were probably at fault, being too grand, too disdainful of the "mere technicians" who had the impudence to tamper with their sense of how a story should be told. But then Goldwyn himself had been no more conscientious than they in his planning of the scheme. (18)

These views are reflective of other discourses of literary authors writing for early film;²⁰⁴ yet they diminish the complexities of these engagements, with many utterly negating their value for either the development of literary writing or film. My discussion seeks to review some of these complexities and to locate some positive outcomes of these alliances.

The rapid development of the film industry had furthered the image of a mechanical medium based on mass production and consumption, which opposed rather than supported its status as art. Although the industry widely promoted itself through the rhetoric of “motion picture art,” theories of aesthetic value and media hierarchies carried into the new century, with film placed at the bottom, if it ranked as an art form at all. As with nineteenth-century theatre, film’s reliance on literature was seen as aesthetically degrading, both from without and within the industry.²⁰⁵ Yet this was by no means an unanimous position: the American producer Samuel Goldwyn, who owned one of the largest film companies, claimed that film’s failure as art was not because it was too literary, but because it was not sufficiently so: “In the poverty of the screen drama lay, so I felt, the weakness of our industry, and the one correction which suggested itself was a closer cooperation between author and picture producer” (235). As a result, in 1919, he led the way in hiring literary writers to collaborate on his films, not only exploiting their names and fame, but also in asking them to advise

²⁰⁴ It is notable that in many critical discourses no distinction is being made between this early endeavour and the second surge of writers to Hollywood in the thirties and early forties. Kamilla Elliott argues with regard to Hollywood’s wider failure to infuse literary talent into screenwriting that the blame is placed depending on which “side of the interdisciplinary fence one sits” (85-6). See: Richard Fine (43-70); Tom Stempel (52-4); Steven Maras (163-6).

²⁰⁵ Low points out that writing about film art was gaining in importance in this period, in the general press, industry how-to guides, in books on film criticism and the emergence of more “ambitious” film theory works (4: 20-1). The notion that film needed to move away from literary frameworks was also being expressed in theoretical writing, discussed further in this chapter.

on adaptations of their work, and to write for films more generally.²⁰⁶ Goldwyn advertised his initiative on a grand scale with a multi-page advertisement in *The Moving Picture World* on 12 July 1919 (41.2), informing the public of his intentions that each author should be represented by at least two stories a year. All authors were introduced individually in a two-page spread, which included a portrait, information about previous work, and a personal statement proclaiming their enthusiasm about the collaboration. The original group under the leadership of Rex Beach consisted of Gertrude Atherton, Mary Roberts Rinehart, Rupert Hughes, Basil King, Gouverneur Morris, and Leroy Scott. Goldwyn thus sought to shift the emphasis of film production from the performer to the story, with Schultheiss arguing that this was done to compete with Jesse Lasky's Famous Players Company (13), which had been marketed through the presence of theatrical star actors repeating their stage performances (including the celebrated actor Mrs Fiske in the 1913 film adaptation of Thomas Hardy's novel *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*). Regardless of his motives, Goldwyn's plan firmly established the writer as central to film production.

The premise of Goldwyn's endeavour was that literary writers, who were to receive a weekly salary as well as a percentage of box office receipts, would develop story material together with the scenario department and, as playwrights do, take part in the production (Fine 49). Fusing business and literary reputation, Goldwyn named his enterprise "The Eminent Authors, Inc.," comprised of established American writers

²⁰⁶ Earlier collaborations with authors had existed, but were less marketed and publicised. Collaborations with individual authors had been announced in the 1910s: for example, Pathé had secured rights to works by Rudyard Kipling in 1915, with the stipulation that Kipling would write the scenarios. By 1921, only one film had appeared: *Without Benefit of Clergy* based on an 1891 story (Leibfried 10). A letter dated February 1922 from Kipling to Pathé shows his insistence on authorial control over a production: "but *the final judgment must, of course, rest with me*" (*Letters* 5: 109; emphasis in original). Janet Staiger points out that the "eminent author" idea pre-dated Goldwyn by a decade, as Edison had already advertised the signing of writers, including Rex Beach, in 1909, and that shortly prior to this, French Gaumont had announced collaborations with French dramatists (100-1).

with prose and drama backgrounds. Goldwyn was also keen to compete with other media forms, as indicated in another advertisement placed in the film fan magazine *The Movie Mirror* in October 1919: “the motion picture will now rank with the drama and the novel in importance” (qtd. in Fine 49). Goldwyn determined to create a new twentieth-century media hierarchy in which film was equal to theatre and prose fiction; as with prior visual and verbal art forms, one medium was to be elevated through its association with another (see K. Elliott 85-6; 119).

To begin with, Goldwyn’s initiative was hailed an achievement for film, “marking a new epoch in the relationship of the author to the screen” (*The Moving Picture World*, 23 April 1921, 61.1: 827). Others within the industry, such as Adolph Zukor of Paramount Pictures, followed Goldwyn’s example, hiring renowned authors. In 1921, Zukor advertised that “The Greatest Living Authors Are Now Working with Paramount,” hiring European (pre-dominantly British) writers such as Barrie, Maugham, Elinor Glyn, Joseph Conrad, Arnold Bennett, Robert Hichens, E. Phillips Oppenheim, Sir Gilbert Parker, Edward Knoblock, Thompson Buchanan, Avery Hopwood, Henry Arthur Jones, Cosmo Hamilton, Edward Sheldon, Samuel Merwin, Harvey J. O’Higgins, and George Pattullo. A *Photoplay* advertisement in June 1921, implicitly critiqued Goldwyn’s selection of only American authors:

Paramount has first call on the greatest American stories in the greatest American magazines when the stories are suitable for films. Every form of printed or spoken drama that might be suitable for Paramount Pictures is examined. Everything useful published in Italian, Spanish, German, or French is steadily translated. (XX.1: 4)

Moreover, writers from a range of literary backgrounds, not just celebrities, were recognised as valuable to the development of film narrative.

Yet, even as the film industry aspired to literature's aesthetic cultural prowess and promoted its alliances with writers in advertisements, it went further to endorse film's superiority as a medium:

For Shakespeare was right when he said "The Play's the Thing." [...] It is by the genius of great authors that plays are created. Many of these people you know: for even in spite of the cold limitations of the printed page, they are famous; through the unpicturesque medium of printers' ink they already stirred your emotions, evoked your wonder, inspired your admiration [...] All these famous authors are actually in the studios writing new plays for Paramount Pictures, advising with directors, using the motion picture camera as they formerly used the pen. They have every one of them realized the infinitely greater scope for expression offered to their genius by the medium of modern motion pictures when re-enforced by the stupendous producing and distributing resources of the Paramount organization. (*Photoplay* XX.1: 4)

Not only does Paramount's announcement imply that these authors have left their literary writing behind, it also suggests, with the hyperbole typical of the industry advertisements, that film technology will allow literary authors to evolve beyond the limits of literature's technologies and that only now are they able to develop their potential fully through the technologies that film could offer them.²⁰⁷ In addition to controversial notions that technology was the basis of aesthetic evolution, the concept of transferring from one medium to another was here presented as effortless, achieved

²⁰⁷ Goldwyn had similarly promoted the idea of literary authors achieving more popularity through film than elsewhere, stating that, "[n]ever was an art or an industry so keyed to high accomplishment as is the motion picture today" (*The Moving Picture World* 41.2).

through merely changing the device that is being used to write. Contrasting Schultheiss's claim regarding the arrogance of hired literary writers, the advertisement highlights the arrogance with which the industry regarded itself at this time, not only in its technologies, but also in "stupendous producing and distributing resources of" studios such as "the Paramount organization."

Despite this arrogance, film's reliance on other media is evident in the period's industry advertisements. For example, Paramount's list of up-and-coming releases in the advertisement from June 1921, cited above, was boldly promoted as "founded on the work of the world's great authors," such as "Gloria Swanson in Elinor Glyn's 'The Great Moment'. Specially written for the star by the author of 'Three Weeks'" (*Photoplay* XX.1: 4). While original writing was being produced, film's prestige was still predicated on its writers' previous successes in other media, which also diminished the sense that any change of writing was required for the screen.

Additionally problematic for literary writers, the hype raised expectations of their authorial performance in the new medium. Maugham, one of the Paramount authors, commented astutely in his essay:

It remains to be seen how the author will meet the situation. I do not think it will be surprising if he does not create very great works of art, for they come as the gods will, sparingly, and should be accepted with surprise and gratitude, but not demanded as a right. (185)²⁰⁸

²⁰⁸ Maugham's own Hollywood venture was considered a disaster. His one script, for which he was paid \$15,000 commission, was never filmed. Selina Hastings points to the irony of Maugham's failure to master the technique of film writing, considering that during his lifetime he was to have more of his literary works adapted to film than any other writer in the English language – her count being 98 adaptations to film and television, with Doyle, his nearest rival, counting 93 adaptations (267-8).

Ultimately, the literary writers failed to achieve the standard of aesthetic quality that had been anticipated from them and these programmes were terminated after only a brief period.

While Goldwyn began by hoping that medium specificity could be ignored and that literary writing could be imported wholesale into film, he ended up supporting medium specificity theory in his explanation of the failed collaboration between literary authors and studio scenarists in 1923, concluding that “The great trouble with the usual author is that he approaches the camera with some fixed literary ideal and he cannot compromise with the motion-picture viewpoint,” further deciding that “the tradition of the pen ran athwart the tradition of the screen” (243). His affirmation of the importance of medium specificity in writing for the screen joined other discourses calling for film to move away from other media and explore its own aesthetic qualities to realise its potential. However, he only blamed the literary writers’ inability to adapt to film, rather than acknowledging any problems within the film studio system. My research into some of these collaborations finds that there was inflexibility on both sides that hindered the relationship between film and literature, as well as the development of film.

Moreover, credible information on the guidance that literary authors were given by the studios is scarce and how much they observed the rules of film writing is scant. Richard Koszarski, for instance, in his study of this period merely footnotes that, of Goldwyn’s troupe, only Rex Beach and Rupert Hughes had any real success, while “the rest seem to have actively resisted the requirements of the screenplay form” (347). Koszarski takes for granted that success was predicated on following studio

instructions: my research indicates that the situation was much more complicated than this.

Although Goldwyn's remark quite rightly suggests how much writing for film was underestimated, devalued, and misunderstood by literary authors, the industry itself was also very much to blame for this failed collaboration. Many writers had accepted positions on the promise of free creative scope, which was impossible given the bureaucracy of Hollywood (Schultheiss 16). The industry placed more importance upon authorial status than on their creative freedom and was more interested in profits than in art. As Maugham identified: "There is no reason why the picture should not be a work of art. But on this question the attitude of many of those who are concerned with the production of pictures is somewhat depressing" (182). Individual creativity was subject to the studio and its various departments; authors discovered that any romantic notion that individual genius would guarantee freedom of creative expression or offer authorial control was eviscerated by the film industry.

The approach to production consequently ended up forging antagonistic relationships between literary and filmic practitioners that had less to do with art than with power struggles. One author who successfully adjusted to the situation was Elinor Glyn (1864-1943), with Vincent Barnett and Alexis Weedon arguing that one of the reasons was that, unlike other authors, she was willing to adapt her "artistic *modus operandi*" to the Hollywood environment, as well as successfully promoting her image of celebrity-author and working across media (180-2).²⁰⁹ In 1922, Glyn even published

²⁰⁹ Glyn's multifaceted cross-media practices in both Hollywood and Britain are explored by Barnett and Weedon. Amongst others, Glyn experienced copyright issues and took legal action against a spoof version of her 1907 novel *Three Weeks* in 1915, which was dismissed on grounds of the immoral tendencies of her book. Barnett and Weedon argue that this experience led her to become more engaged with film making, so that others would not profit from her work (64-5).

The Elinor Glyn System of Writing, a manual for short story and photoplay writing, which demonstrated her understanding of the medium and the industry at that time, both in terms of writing and other filmmaking aspects. Yet despite this, Glyn attested in her 1936 autobiography that she was not happy with the process to which she had adapted so successfully:

All authors, living or dead, famous or obscure, shared the same fate. Their stories were rewritten and completely altered either by stenographers and continuity girls of the scenario department, or by the Assistant Director and his lady-love, or by the leading lady, or by any one else who happened to pass throughout the studio; and even when at last, after infinite struggle, a scene was shot which bore some resemblance to the original story it was certain to be left out in the cutting room, or pared away to such an extent that all meaning which it might have once had was lost. (295)

Glyn's account indicates not only the lack of respect for literary authors and their writing, but for film writing more generally: the idea was that anyone could write for film, and most of them better than literary authors.²¹⁰

In his first advertisement, Goldwyn had identified a widely circulated view about film writing that countered his literary pretensions: "The Industry of America has created a new art – a democratic art such as no people have known since the beginning of history" (*The Moving Picture World* 41.2). Democracy was at odds with the

²¹⁰ Glyn is often cited along with other female writers such as Anita Loos, Frances Marion, Frederica Sagor Maas, and Thea von Harbou as having made significant contributions to the screen and writing for it. Scholars estimate that during the 1910s, 1920s, and early 1930s, one-fourth of the screenwriters were women, with a steady shift toward male writers developing in the 1920s (J. Madison Davis 32-5). Lizzie Francke discusses the importance and contributions of women scriptwriters in Hollywood during this early period.

importation of celebrated literary authors as elite writers, and clashed with the popular notion that anyone could write for film. The view that cross-media writing was suited to anyone with literary skill was clearly flawed, and very much to blame for some of the disappointment surrounding early film writing, just as it had been in discussions of writing nineteenth-century theatrical adaptations. Such flawed thinking was acknowledged by some industry sources at the time: for example, *The Moving Picture World* on 5 July 1919:

The cry for proper stories is a mistaken one. They are not to be had. What is needed is uniformly expert handling of the material contained within the stories. Original stories, stage plays or novels all come under the same rule: Without the proper handling by the persons [e]ntrusted with the preparation of the working scenarios no accident of authorship or intrinsic merit will save them from failure. (41.1: 66)

This article within a trade magazine was written in response to rumours of Goldwyn's endeavour, where, despite its prophetic warning, it welcomed the attention that was being given to this aspect of filmmaking and prophesied that the next twelve months would be "the most progressive, artistically and commercially, in the history of the screen."

Yet even as the importance of the celebrated individual literary writer to film had been announced both to the public and to the writers, within film production this was not the case. Not only had the advertisements vaunted authors' collaboration with other film writers and directors both before and during filming,²¹¹ Goldwyn himself had also promised the public in his inaugural announcement that the picture would not

²¹¹ "[I]t has become the custom of authors to collaborate with the continuity writer and frequently with the director during the filming of the scenes" (*The Moving Picture World*, 23 April 1921, 61.1: 827).

be released until it had been passed by the “severest critic it will ever meet – the author of the story.” Even as, within the “democratic art” of picture-making, the writer was being prominently positioned at the top of the apparently non-existent hierarchy, Schultheiss confirms that neither the stars or the directors took kindly to “Goldwyn’s concept of the writer’s importance” (16) and that they showed this in over-writing the literary authors’ work in film production.

There were also power struggles between film writers, as the hiring of literary authors diminished the status of ordinary film writers, even as it acknowledged that writing was crucial to the filmmaking process: “The influence of the Eminent Authors Corporation, which conceded to the writer of photoplays an importance never before granted by producers, has been far-reaching” (*The Moving Picture World*, 23 April 1921, 61.1: 827). The increasing importance of the film writer was advanced through other means: for example, by such institutions as the American Screen Writers Guild, established in 1920, and more frequent appearances of screenwriting credits in the 1920s.²¹² Steven Maras argues that the venture was not only representative of “the deference of writing for the screen as a particular formation of writing,” but also had a particular kind of formative impact on film writing, as “[i]t was through conflict with authors imported into Hollywood that continuity writers already in Hollywood refined their notion of writing for the screen” (164).

Nonetheless, the “ordinary” screenwriter was by no means on par with the celebrated literary author at that time, nor any time since, with industry film authorship and credit often being collective and thus more anonymous than that accorded individual

²¹² Denis Gifford locates the earliest recorded scriptwriting credit in Britain in 1903, given to Cecil Hepworth for his adaptation of *Alice in Wonderland* (672), with very little credit given thereafter until the 1910s, followed by a marked increase in crediting in 1915 and again in 1920 (Macdonald, *Screenwriting* 46).

playwrights or novelists.²¹³ What this effectively meant was that film writers had no opportunity of rising to the same kind of celebrity as literary writers. Yet, even as Goldwyn labelled the eminent author too inflexible to adapt to film writing, he affirmed the position of non-celebrity screenwriters and scenarists writing for film that he had formerly devalued through hiring literary authors. Nonetheless, the struggle for recognition and significance continued for the ordinary film writer through the early decades of the twentieth century (see, for example, Price, *Authorship* 1-23).

Moreover, in this period, the development of original film writing had been hindered by the studio's alliance with literary authors. Goldwyn and others had advertised and continued to declare that literary writers would benefit film through producing original writing for it, rather than adapting their works to it.²¹⁴ Even so, adaptations of their work were more prominently promoted by the studios than writings by ordinary industry writers. A reaction against literary adaptation and in favour of original writing emerged in apologetic, retrospective accounts of the literary authors movement, as a 1922 advertisement in *Screenland* for creative writing talent by the Palmer Photoplay Corporation indicates:

After two years of disappointing experimentation with the adaptation of novels, short stories and stage plays, producers have awakened to a realization that the public is tiring of "warmed over" literary material and they now believe that stories written especially for the screen by

²¹³ As seen in Chapter Two, collaborative writing also occurred in theatres. The 1888 playwriting manual advised that other writers could be engaged: for example, one "to write songs" and another "to write him a love scene" (95).

²¹⁴ Originality rather than adaptation was required from these writers, as in the film writing manuals discussed in Chapter Three. For example, *The Moving Picture World* stated in April 1923 that "leading novelists and playwrights [were] to write original stories for screen production instead of relying upon adaptations of plays and books" (61.1 827).

writers possessed of a knowledge of photoplay technique is the only practical solution of the problem.²¹⁵ (3.5: 55)

Although this call for new writing talent also disparaged the existing studio writers in Hollywood, along with literary adaptations, its demand for fresh and original writing for a new technological medium undermined literary authors even more, implicitly rejecting their literary credentials along with their literary work for film. Moreover, despite the assurance by writers' programmes that "specially written screen stories" would be produced by literary writers, the majority of films involving them had been based on adaptations. Even then, authors advertised as working with the studios were not writing adaptations, but had signed over the rights to their works to other writers. Therefore, studio screenwriters were not only more involved with adapting literary works than their authors, but were also adapting more than producing original writing for the screen, which could have created a more independent and medium specific film writing.

Before the failure of the American industry's writers' programme was recognised, the British industry attempted to emulate what was happening across the Atlantic with an even more focused approach on adaptation. Here, literary writers were further used to endorse the national film industry, which had "forfeited [its] independence as an industry" to America by the end of the War (Betts 35). Stoll Productions, formed in 1918 and one of the biggest British film production companies during the silent era, launched the "Eminent British Author Series" in January 1920, which involved a

²¹⁵ The Educational Department within the Corporation sent a questionnaire, as a "novel test of the two essentials – creative imagination and dramatic insight," to potential writers. This was returned with a report, free of charge and obligation.

series of adaptations, including works by Marie Corelli,²¹⁶ H.G. Wells,²¹⁷ and Arthur Conan Doyle.²¹⁸ The notion that literary authors' involvement with film could be advantageous to the national film industry had been expressed earlier,²¹⁹ yet this was the first time that such a concerted effort had been made. However, this endeavour similarly failed, as neither the company nor the industry benefitted from the result. As Rachael Low attests, it was a "common misconception that the size of a popular novel's public, as well as a sort of naïve appeal to patriotism, would ensure the success of a film" and filmmakers were beginning to question whether it was better to adapt or to write original scenarios (4: 124).²²⁰

By all appearances, the demand for adaptations of popular works was waning, or, at least, an unimaginative re-telling of them was no longer sufficient for audiences. The dominant view of the history of Stoll films suggests that their mass purchase of film rights to the works of British contemporary novelists proved fatal to the company, as many of them were deemed unsuitable for adaptation, yet had to be filmed nonetheless, often with disappointing results, so that they were repeatedly edited and altered (see Low, 4: 124-5; Trevor Smith 51).²²¹ Yet this interpretation is limited by

²¹⁶ Stoll Pictures bought the rights to *God's Good Man* (1919), based on Corelli's 1904 novel, and *Innocent* (1921), her 1914 novel.

²¹⁷ Despite selling the film rights, Wells generally kept his distance from their productions during the silent film years, which included a 1921 adaptation of *Kipps* (1905), directed by Harold Shaw for Stoll. Similar to G.B. Shaw, his participation with film, and writing, took on new forms with the arrival of synchronised sound (Chapter Five).

²¹⁸ Other authors included Edgar Wallace, A.E.W. Mason, Geoffrey Farnol, Baroness Orczy, and Ethel M. Dell, among others.

²¹⁹ For example, when Wells's first major film contract was announced in *The Times* in January 1914, the article, entitled "Mr Wells and the Cinematograph," expressed the hope that Wells would now "construct stories especially for cinematograph production," as a patriotic means of boosting the British film industry (6). This was not immediately the case, and there were many delays in adapting Wells's novels until Stoll appeared, also due to the war and high production costs.

²²⁰ Whereas Stoll films focused on recent and contemporary works, other companies chose historical fiction for adaptation. For example, the Ideal Film Company specialised in Victorian novels by Dickens, Thackeray, Disraeli, and Eliot, amongst others (see Low, 4: 119).

²²¹ The company had reportedly lost £200,000 over its seven-year span and, as it was folding, an attempt was made to sell the rights to "Fifty-Three Books by Famous Authors" (Smith 59).

the outdated (and yet ongoing) negative discourse of adaptation based in essentialist theories of medium specificity and does not sufficiently consider the failure of filmmakers to adapt literature well, instead placing the blame on the works themselves. While the failure of literary adaptation to invigorate the British film industry cannot be placed solely on Stoll films, it is clear that their practices of filmmaking contributed to the demise of their own company. Low points out that “it was a film factory without creative leadership” (4: 125), and the common mantra at the time, “Stoll films are dull films,” corroborates my own viewings of these films, in which bad adaptation in the form of undue reverence for the literary texts, an overreliance on prior theatrical adaptations of them, deprived of the vitality of spoken dialogue, and a lack of adaptation to the visual capacities of the new medium, being probed elsewhere by filmmakers, were responsible – not adaptation in and of itself.

Although dramatic adaptation had been a celebrated feature of nineteenth-century culture, drawing in audiences, and theatrical adaptations were prominent in the earliest years of film, they became less popular as twentieth-century film developed. The approach to adaptation, as well as the industry itself, needed to be revised, and in this respect resembled discourses of theatre in the nineteenth century, where both novelists and dramatists had called for a revitalisation of the stage generally and adaptation particularly. The plight of the British film industry was not considered solely from a business point of view, but also from a cultural one. Literary writers voiced their concerns: for example, a letter to *The Times* published on 20 June 1925, signed, among others, by Thomas Hardy and titled “The Future of British Films,” voiced alarm at the fading national industry from a cultural perspective and appealed to the Prime Minister to “take measures to establish a film industry in this country on a sound foundation” (*Letters* 6: 439-40). In an attempt to end American dominance

over British cinema and to revive the British industry, the Cinematograph Act of 1927 therefore enforced a strict quota of British films. Even though the Act has since been considered a failure for promoting quantity over quality,²²² it nonetheless kept British film production going and positioned film firmly within the cultural consciousness, with Ernest Betts stating that, for the first time, this was a public recognition that films were of national interest (82-3). Although the importance of film as a medium had been acknowledged by literary writers before, film was dependent on the government providing funding for the industry.

Whilst Britain continued to produce literary film adaptations prolifically as part of its effort to forge a national identity via cinema, following the failure of Stoll and changing views about writing for film, British literary writers were relegated to the margins of filmmaking practice. Their writings about film often expressed concerns about the future of film and its impact on the theatre, the novel, or culture and society more widely. Their involvement was regarded as superficial and perfunctory by the industry, as medium specificity theories became mainstream in film discourse and practice and, with few exceptions, writers within the industry took precedence over literary writers.

II. The Art of Film and Film Writing

Although continually promoted as a craft to be learned, the art of writing for film was increasingly recognised during the 1920s. The need for writers in film to work within the scope of medium specificity had been regularly propounded, not least because of

²²² See Low (4: 97-106) for the establishment and outcome of the Act; Robert Murphy (47-69) discusses the government's actions and industry outcomes in view of American competition.

the failure to integrate literary writers and writing into the industry. Yet the emphasis on medium specificity was also due to conventions that defined art by medium specificity, so that, in order for film to be recognised as an art and valued as such, it had to lay claim to medium specificity. In such contexts, the medium's reliance on literature and adaptation was seen as detrimental to film's aspirations to be recognised as an art. These issues were widely discussed by literary writers and filmmakers, and emerging film theorists in the period.

Although the theoretical landscape of film gained substantial momentum in the 1920s, theorists such as Vachel Lindsay (1916) and Hugo Münsterberg (1916) had led the way in the 1910s. Film struggled for cultural as well as aesthetic legitimacy. Film theory was therefore forged to contend against hierarchical media structures as well as social prejudices that denigrated film, drawing on humanism as well as medium specificity theory to do so. Béla Balázs illustrated the cultural objections facing film in the introduction to his influential theory of film *The Visible Man*, published in 1924, where he argued for film's worthiness to be included within the academic study of art on humanist and democratic grounds, stating that: "Film is a fundamentally new revelation of humanity" (5). Showing the popular bases of film value at this time, he challenged film's exclusionary elitism of academic "aesthetes" in democratic rhetoric: "The art of film [...] stands at the portals of your aesthetic parliament like the despised and expropriated rabble at the gates of a palace, and demands the right to enter the sacred halls of theory" (3).²²³ Declaring that film "has now become a fact" and is "the popular art of our century," he argued for the universality of its social,

²²³ Low suggests that many books of criticism adopted a tone of hearty condescension, and were at pains to avoid a "highbrow appearance" by being too "stuffy or serious," while still claiming that cinema was an art (see 4: 21). Here, Balázs's writing resembles the grandeur of the film industry's advertisements, as it attempted to convince the public of the importance of film.

psychic, and cultural effects (4). He also refuted the argument that its claim to art was hindered through its “commercial interests and technology” by asking, “*how can you tell that a film is not art?*” (5; emphasis in original). Throughout the 1920s, theorists such as Balázs together with practitioner-theorists such as Eisenstein, claimed the value of film for serious study both on the basis of its similarities to other arts – that is, its humanist and cultural effects – and its right to be classified as an art on the basis of its medium-specific differentiation from other art forms.

Film’s initial claim to medium specificity was widely located in its mobile visual capabilities, which set it apart from other visual art forms. Eric Elliott stated the case succinctly and unequivocally in 1928: “The photoplay [...] shall show material motion, human motion, natural motion and illusion of motion, singly and compositely, in one scene and in the progression of scenes, but always designed. Then it will indeed be the motion picture” (105).²²⁴ Similarly, Balázs defined film as a “*surface art,*” aligned with other visual media, while foregrounding film’s difference from other visual arts in terms of its “temporal art of movement and organic continuity” (19; emphasis in original).

Yet this distinction was compromised by film’s literary content and theatrical forms. Balázs believed that the “majority of people with a literary background” focused “exclusively on the story content,” judging film “to be simplistic and crude,” while

²²⁴ Writing in 1928, Elliott opined that, at present, science exploring the “motion picture’s field of expression” was more important for film than art: “All the developments so far have come through minds either scientific or supremely logical. The artists and sophists always arrive later at their own convenience, to refine what has already been wrought in the rough, in the same way that gas and electric light are laid on after the colonist has uncomfortably marked the trail” (133). The dynamic of film as both a scientific and aesthetic medium is recognised here.

ignoring its visual aspects, which made them “incapable of appreciating the art in film” (19).

In her 1926 essay, “The Cinema,” Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) similarly promoted film as art by opposing its association with literature and championing its claim to medium specificity via independence from literature.²²⁵ Published in *The Nation and Athenaeum* on 3 July 1926 (39.13: 381), the essay argued that it is “only when we give up trying to connect the pictures with the book” that we can guess what the cinema might be capable of doing if left to stand on its own. Rather than opposing film as a narrative medium, as Balázs had implicitly done, she called for it to stay away from words and focus on its distinguishing feature of moving images, stating that all “which is accessible to words and to words alone, the cinema must avoid.”

Even as Woolf condemned film’s “parasitic” reliance on literature and adaptation, she suggested that film might outdo painting as well as poetry in its visual scope: “if so much of our thinking and feeling is connected with seeing, some residue of visual emotion which is of no use either to painter or to poet may still await the cinema.”

Here, the painter is excluded as well as the poet from film’s medium-specific domain of moving images.

Yet in order to lay claim to art and be classed with other arts in the academic humanities, film had to be capable of revealing something new about humanity as

²²⁵ Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan also point out that modernist writers such as Woolf, “productively engaged with the cinema by absorbing cinematic devices in their writing” (*Impure Cinema* 42). Notions regarding aestheticism in fiction and the art of writing were expressed by Woolf in other articles and essays: for example, “Is Fiction an Art?” (*New York Herald Tribune*, 26 Oct. 1927), reprinted and revised shortly after to “The Art of Fiction” (*Nation and Athenaeum*, 12 Nov. 1927) (reprinted in Woolf, *Collected Essays* 51). Laura Marcus discusses Woolf’s relationship to film and its influence (99-178). Vera Nünning explores Woolf’s theories of aestheticism through her numerous essays on the subject and contextualises these in view of her ideas regarding modernist modes of writing and literature.

well as differing formally from other arts. Balázs affirmed its expressive emotive capacities (“Whatever is inside is outside”) (19); Woolf wrote: “it seems plain that the cinema has within its grasp innumerable symbols for emotions that have so far failed to find expression” and pondered film’s potential to provide a “new revelation of humanity”:

Is there, we ask, some secret language which we feel and see, but never speak, and, if so, could this be made visible to the eye? Is there any characteristic which thought possesses that can be rendered visible without the help of words? (381)

Balázs went further than Woolf’s rejection of words in film to argue that “pure intellectual values” also needed to be abandoned: “In exchange, we are enabled to see things that cannot be conceived intellectually or grasped by concepts. And we are able to *see* them – an experience in itself” (20; emphasis in original). In this account, film provides an immediate experience of things unavailable to intellectual reflection, which is not only distanced from direct experience, but also unable to grasp aspects of human experience, and is therefore not only worthy of entrance into the humanities academe, but is an art that exceeds academic understanding.

However, “moving pictures” and the emotions they expressed and evoked were not original or specific to film, but had been present in earlier forms. Meisel discusses the “severe tension” between picture and motion in nineteenth-century theatre, pointing both to theatre’s “achievement of the static image” and “achievement of total dynamism,” arguing further that a reconciliation between the two produced “something like the serial picture in painting” in the theatre – another art form that, if not exactly a moving image, created a sequence of images that told a story, akin to (and yet differing from) the narrative of syntactic sentences. However, he does

concede that the theatre failed to resolve the tension or to fully actualise its resolution, and that the synthesis instead had to wait for the organisation of the technical resources of “studios, laboratories, and movie house of the next century” (*Realizations* 50-1). Of course, in between were all sorts of optical devices that used motion to tell stories (see Joss Marsh), but these never amounted to a serious or sustained claim to art: that awaited film, and film had to shake off its associations with optical toys in order to stake its claim. Even so, the idea that the theatre of the nineteenth century had pre-mediated motion picture art has been variously advanced in cultural and formal terms, with Meisel also citing A.N. Vardac’s theory that the cinema took over the popular audience that had earlier supported the nineteenth-century pictorial stage (436; Vardac xxv-vi).

In contrast to those who argued that film was betraying its unique identity by alliances with literature, film’s pre-existence in the “cinematic” nineteenth-century novel has been even more prominently advanced as, paradoxically, forging film’s claim to medium specificity. Indeed, one of the most enduring concepts linking the Victorian novel with the aesthetics of early film was most prominently maintained by Eisenstein, a pioneer of the aesthetic cinema movement in the 1920s, locating film’s medium specificity and claim to art through its striking moving images and powerfully edited sequences of images, which he nominated montage. Eisenstein likened both film’s individual moving images and narrative movement across sequences of edited images to the nineteenth-century novel, while differentiating both from the novel. Crediting D.W. Griffith with the creative formation of montage, Eisenstein drew parallels to his implementation of the style and the composition of Charles Dickens’s writing in terms of their “optical quality,” arguing that Dickens, by

Griffith's own admission, inspired his pictorial practice (see "Dickens, Griffith").²²⁶

The novel was thus seen as inspiration for film not just in terms of content, but also in terms of formal techniques.²²⁷

However, such mixing and crossing of media were often perceived "in terms of impurity, contamination, or corruption," as Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan state, before pointing out that it has only latterly been regarded as a "fruitful and complex cross-fertilization of narrative forms" (*Impure Cinema* 42).²²⁸ This was also the case with nineteenth-century novel and theatre, where, for example, Dickens was charged with emulating dramatic techniques from the stage in his prose, as discussed in Chapter Two. Correspondingly, the theatre had also relied heavily on the novel, extending from adapting its prose to copying its illustrations (see Meisel, *Realizations* 250), redoubling its pictorial dimensions via both art forms. The interchange of art forms was, and is, inevitable, yet the modes in which such interchange was recognised and executed changed, in part because film, as the art "born fully-clothed" (Woolf 381), both relied on and rejected media interdependence in order to establish itself as an art.

These discussions are well-known; what has been less attended to is the role of writing across media, and that is the focus of my discussion here. Chapter Three has

²²⁶ Griffiths had made this claim in 1922. Eisenstein's essay, written in 1944, focuses on film in the 1910s and 1920s. Balázs had also referred to Dickens's "visual imagination," crediting his work with having "the inner structure of the substance of film," yet he argued that the very quality that makes a work appear suitable for adaptation, renders it not so, as it would have to be "painted anew." He suggested that Dickens would have to do this, thus showing support for medium specificity and author intent as the presiding aesthetic principles for good aesthetics and aesthetic interpretation (24).

²²⁷ Rick Altman argues that, even though Eisenstein's writing serves as an important strain of criticism stressing the direct link between film and novel, he was not the first to recognise this, nor was the link as direct as scholars have suggested, as Eisenstein also points to the importance of theatrical texts in setting the pattern for cinema. Altman, however, also points out that Eisenstein failed to acknowledge the influence of the theatrical intermediary in early adaptations of novels, despite the obvious debt that early cinema owes to theatrical adaptations of novels (145-7).

²²⁸ Münsterberg, for instance, noted in his seminal work of 1916 that it was "always possible to mix arts," although these experimentations no longer result in "pure" art (31).

shown that many film practitioners in the 1910s were untroubled by filmic media hybridity, acknowledging that film writing drew on other art forms, while insisting that film writers must understand film form as well as other art forms in order to write successfully in that medium. For example, in 1912, James Slevin explored the complexity of film writing and defined film writing as an art form. Yet he predicated film's aesthetic complexity on its capacity to draw on many forms, thus requiring the talents of many arts:

Firstly, a picture-play may be regarded as a piece of writing. This is the art of the author.

Secondly, as an expression of human life. This is the art of the dramatist.

Thirdly, as a picture-play or series of situations properly arranged for representation on the screen. This is the art of the picture playwright or scenario editor. (9)

Rather than diminishing the written word and celebrating the image as so many others did, Slevin, quite boldly for his time, made writing the first principle of screenwriting, placing the image last. Slevin further elevated the work of screenwriting by stressing that it required expertise in various kinds of art, proposing screenwriting as a hybrid entity, combining the art of literary, dramatic, and cinematic forms. In so doing, he rejected medium-specific notions that film writing should be purely literary, purely theatrical, or purely cinematic.

In the context of the medium specificity theory that was to subsequently push film aesthetics away from words and writing, his ideas were historically and culturally progressive, even as they continued nineteenth-century celebrations of media mixing,

and to my mind, remain so today. Slevin's perceptions were shared by fellow writers, including Maugham in 1921:

I venture to insist that the technique of writing for the pictures is not that of writing for the stage nor that of writing a novel. It is something betwixt and between [...] It is a technique of its own, with its own conventions, its own limitations, and its own effects. (186)

While medium specificity theory was undoubtedly useful and illuminating to literary authors seeking to write for film, my research suggests that the too-rigid boundary lines drawn by medium specificity theory by both literary authors and the film industry hindered the development of film, film writing, relations between literature and film, and literary film adaptation and prevented innovative film writing and adaptation from developing, as my next section illustrates.

a. The Art of Film Adaptation

Maugham envisioned a future for literary film adaptation in hybrid media relations:

For myself I look forward to the time when, the present dislike of costume having been overcome, all the great novels of our literature are shown on the screen. I hope, however, that the scenarios which must be prepared for this purpose will be devised by a writer who is not only acquainted with the technique of the film but is also a man of letters and of taste. (186)

Yet even so, on the next page he deliberated on the futility of adaptation to film and concluded that any advance towards artistic writing for film "lies in the story written directly for projection on the white sheet" (187).

Griffith had similarly proclaimed in 1914 that “when the plays of other days, and of these days are exhausted, as they will be, motion pictures will come into their own.” Despite adapting many literary works to film, both as director and writer, Griffith, and others, argued that the first stage of coming into its own as a unique, specific medium was to rid film of its reliance on adapting literature:

If motion picture producers had no access to stage plays, they would be obliged to depend upon their own authors for their material, and, since the picture dramas that would thus result would be composed entirely for picture production, they could not fail to much more nearly reach a perfection of art than could ever be hoped for while writers and directors are trying in vain to twist stage dramas into condition for picture use. (*Interviews* 18)

“A perfection of art” required original, medium-specific writing, nor “twist[ing] stage dramas into condition for picture use.” His theory did not, however, exclude literary authors from writing for film. Asked in 1924 by *Collier's* about the future of film in 100 years, Griffith estimated that: “we shall have novelists devoting all their energies towards creating motion-picture originals. By this I mean that the novelists giving their exclusive time to the films will create characters and situations and dramatic plots in terms of pictures” (73: 66). The prediction that novelists will devote “all” their energy to original film writing suggests that film will displace the novel, making it redundant. Bearing in mind that Griffith believed that diegetic sound should not be a part of film, this further implies that both the spoken and written word would be

displaced by image narratives and picture storytelling, forecasting not only the demise of the novel and adaptation, but also that of the written word.²²⁹

In spite of Griffith's and other similar arguments, film in the 1920s continued to rely on adaptation, and writing for film faced further challenges when audiences expected adaptation to both respect the writing it adapted and the requirements of the screen.

Even though prose and drama were no longer the ferocious rivals they had been in the nineteenth century, discussion revolving around which practice of writing was better suited to adaptation nonetheless continued to position one against the other.

Maugham's deliberation on film writing highlights this debate, as well as taking a position within it. He considered that the novel was better suited for adaptation than drama, as the former required selection, while the latter required expansion and elaboration. Yet, the propensity of the early film industry to turn to stage adaptations of novels, rather than novels themselves complicated literary film adaptation far more than Maugham's simple dichotomy suggests, as such productions had already made selections from novels to suit performance and production on the stage.

Maugham, who had written in both forms, must have been aware of this, and did offer advice for dramatic adaptation as well: "a writer might make a good picture from a theme upon which he has already written a good play, but he will probably need incidents other than those which he has used in the play, and, it may be, different characters" (186). On the same page Maugham made two other important points for my discussion on writing across media in early film:

²²⁹ Griffith's point recalls Wilkie Collins's contention that the decline of nineteenth-century theatre was due to adaptation and the devaluation and paucity of original playwriting (Chapter Two).

[The writer] is absurd if he expects real invention to be done by the scenario writer to whom the management who has bought his play will entrust the work of arranging it for the screen. That is work that he alone can do. No one can know his idea as well as he, and no one can be so intimately acquainted with his characters. (186)

First, Maugham insisted that the dramatic adapter will have to engage in *original writing* and reject past writing in order to write successfully for film, thereby validating and modifying other claims that film requires original writing. Second, Maugham valorised prevalent theories that made authorial intent and imagination the cardinal principles of literary value, claiming that the original author was the best adapter of his/her writing. The notion that the original writer was best suited to adapt his or her own work had already been expressed by the authors' programmes.

Yet medium specificity overrode authorial prerogatives when authors were charged with refusal or inability to adapt to the medium of film. The case of J.M. Barrie's attempt to write *Peter Pan* for the screen in the early 1920s and the rejection of his writing by the film industry not only supports Maugham's warning that studio writers are not the best adapters, but also allows us to probe various theoretical and critical claims and to at least complicate, if not contest, them.

Cartmell and Whelehan point out that *Peter Pan* was from its incipience, already an adaptation, although there is no definite source or urtext of the story, and Barrie had no recollection of first writing it (*Impure Cinema* 58-9).²³⁰ It is also an adaptation

²³⁰ Additionally, Anne Hiebert Alton points out that Barrie had refused to publish the play text even after the release of the novel, only publishing it in 1928, by which time the original three-act play had extended to five acts (47). Alton discusses the variations between the versions and their social and cultural circumstances, including reviews of both play and novel, and images and illustrations from performances and publications. The legal circumstances of *Peter Pan* raise further questions regarding authorial control amidst social, cultural, and legal complexities, critically addressed by Catherine Seville in "*Peter Pan's Rights*" (119-54).

because Barrie had adapted and expanded his most famous play, first performed in 1904, into novel form in 1911, entitled *Peter and Wendy*, and also revised it numerous times.²³¹

After numerous lucrative offers and much resistance,²³² Barrie's experience with the first film adaptation of *Peter Pan* began in 1921 when he sold the film rights to Famous Players (later Paramount), who brought it to the screen in December 1924.²³³ Despite having granted permission for other works to be adapted to the screen,²³⁴ Barrie had been reluctant to sell his rights to this particular work. Yet, as he had started writing a scenario for a silent film version of *Peter Pan* before signing any contract, it is likely that Barrie was interested in adapting his most famous work for the screen himself, or at least that he needed to try for himself whether it was conceivable to transport his play to the less verbal screen. Whatever the reason, it is clear that he wrote the scenario on his own initiative, with no pressure from contracts

²³¹ Barrie's position as authoritative author of *Peter Pan* could also be questioned on these grounds, as the work was shaped by audience, reader, and performer input. During its numerous runs, Barrie attended rehearsals, occasionally adding dialogue improvised by one of the performing boys, additional acts, and, after requests from concerned parents, made fairy dust essential to the ability to fly (see Seville 134). This is reminiscent of nineteenth-century serial fiction, where authors had time to change their published work in response to reader feedback.

²³² His letters show that he received an offer for the film rights in 1912 for £2,000 in advance royalties (although he declined, it struck him that other works could be offered instead). In 1918, he had been offered an advance sum of £20,000, but declined again without explanation ("*P. Pan* film I'm not having done at present") (*Letters* 60-1). The differences in monetary value over that short period signal the growing interest, as well as the rise of the pecuniary remuneration for literary film rights.

²³³ Although 1921 is commonly cited, Seville gives the date as 1919. She states that Barrie received \$100,000 on signing the agreement and a further \$100,000 before the release, which needed Barrie's written permission during his lifetime. Paramount's motion picture rights, later reassigned to Disney, caused tension when Barrie bequeathed his copyright to Great Ormond Street Hospital (136-7).

²³⁴ Andrew Birkin estimates that Barrie lived to see 14 adaptations (259). For example, by the British Neptune Film Company, who had filmed *Rosy Rapture*, as well as *What Every Woman Knows* (1908/1917) and *The Little Minister* (1891/1915), for which Barrie is also credited with writing the screenplay. Others include Cecil B. DeMille's 1919 film *Male and Female* based on *The Admirable Crichton* (1902). Perhaps motivating the title change, Denis Mackail finds that the film was more publicised through DeMille's name than Barrie's. Although Mackail records that Barrie had no involvement and "was pretty well disgusted by what he eventually saw" (554), Barrie's letters show that he thought the scenario "very well done," suggesting, among others, a few alterations to the intertitles as well as expressing interest in seeing the picture being made (*Letters* 61). My research suggests that literary critics and biographers often present literary authors as being much more hostile to film and film adaptations of their work than the authors themselves express.

and filmmakers (Tatar 275). Moreover, he must have considered his attempt successful as he not only accepted the offer but also gave the filmmakers his screenplay.

Yet, the author's adapted version ended up being replaced by one written by film studio scenarists, crediting one of them, not Barrie, for the screenplay. Barrie was credited for the play: his authorial function was reduced to authorising the legal rights, casting Peter, and an authorial note on a film title card, forever signalling his authorial approval of this adaptation.²³⁵

This may be in part because the timing of Barrie's experience with the American film company coincided with the end of the writers' programme and the move away from faith in literary writers' ability to develop film art and toward confidence in filmic writing done exclusively by studio employees. This was likely influential in disregarding his proposed scenario, tellingly so, as no stipulations or remunerations regarding his scenario had been made in the contract.

Barrie was not only enthusiastic in writing for film; he also understood writing across media, having gone from theatre to prose writing with great success in his adaptation of *Peter Pan*. His proposed scenario for the film similarly shows keen understanding of what adaptation required for film cinematography, editing and other cinematic components.²³⁶ Moreover, we have seen that he had already involved himself in film

²³⁵ The film was released with only Willis Goldbeck credited as the screenwriter and Herbert Brenon as director and producer. The opening title card credits Barrie as the author: "Adolph Zukor and Jesse L. Lasky present J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* A Herbert Brenon Production". The subsequent title card credits Willis Goldbeck for the screenplay. Before the start of the narrative, "A Note" is printed across two title cards "On the Acting of a Fairy Play," signed at the bottom by "J.M. Barrie," implicitly signalling his authorial approval of this adaptation. His authorship is further valorised by nominating the film a "play."

²³⁶ Unlike the now lost screenplay, both the film and Barrie's version were preserved: the proposed scenario can be found in Maria Tatar's edited and annotated *Centennial Edition of Peter Pan* (275-320). Barrie's script has been studied predominantly in relation to the author and to adaptations of his

production in various ways. Furthermore, as a playwright, Barrie was used to exerting authorial control not only over scripts but also over stage productions of them, and had written stage directions and visual descriptions to inform the visual aspects of performance.

My analysis of the scenario, detailed below, suggests that Barrie's scenario for the film was ignored largely as a consequence of the film industry's failed collaboration with literary authors generally, rather than this scenario's lack of conformity to the requirements of the screen specifically: indeed, his proposed scenario not only conformed to cinematic conventions, but further promised cinematic originality and innovation.

Barrie's value for medium specific writing appears in the epigraph to this chapter, where he argues that "the only reason for a film should be that it does the things the stage can't do." This statement appears in a letter to his secretary written in November 1924, in which he relates the experience of having seen the studio's film of *Peter Pan*. Barrie's own account of seeing the film is at odds with his biographers';²³⁷ his letter states: "I saw the *P. Pan* piece of film today with all the cuts I had made in it carried out, and I thought decidedly more favourably of it, but so far it is only repeating what is done on the stage" (*Letters* 201). In contrast to prevailing views that studio

work, rather than as a mode of experimental writing across media. See R.D.S. Jack; Bruce Hanson; and Casie Hermansson.

²³⁷ For example, Barrie's biographer Mackail, reiterates the author's disappointment with the film, stating that "it was the wrong kind of success" making him revert to detachment, not even going to see the "the talking picture of *The Little Minister* ten years after that" (555). Mackail claims that this adaptation experience caused Barrie's prior fascination with the medium to vanish. Whether this notion is valid is difficult to ascertain: other works of Barrie's were still adapted during his lifetime and he is also credited for the film treatment of the 1936 adaptation of Shakespeare's *As You Like It* – though his exact involvement with it remains uncertain.

scenarists understood medium specificity and literary authors did not, Barrie's scenario is much more aware of film's unique capacities than the studio's film.

Barrie's sensitivity to the particular capacities of film in his proposed scenario are noted by Bruce Hanson: "It is rich in visual details that could never be seen on stage and even more Barrie charm and wit had been added for this proposed film adaptation" (127). This suggests that Barrie was able to extend his established ability as a writer adapting his work across media to a new medium that he embraced because it allowed him freedom to express his visual imagination beyond the limitations of the stage.

Analysis of the making of *Peter Pan* supports these arguments about the capacities of some literary authors to write for film, as well as film's self-limitation in not trusting literary authors such as Barrie. Barrie's status as a distinguished contemporary author was exploited early in the production process by the Famous Players studio.

Stipulations within his contract that had given him the final casting choice for the actress to play the pivotal part of Peter (the unknown Betty Bronson) were consequently used to promote the adaptation through a highly publicised casting search before filming even began (Hanson 127-8). The public validation of authorial casting was a canny way of assuring not only the audience, but also the critics, as well as establishing the Famous Players' film's lasting "author"-ity over future adaptations, in which the creator of "Peter" had not cast the lead actor.

Barrie's primary attempt to exert control and authority over the adaptation of his work, however, was expressed in his scenario writing, which served not only as shooting script, but also as directorial and critical guide to the production. Notes on such aspects as the type of acting required by various characters manifest a distinctly

directorial role. In some instances, these notes sought to improve upon and correct stage performances of his play: for example, he instructed that the part of Hook (played by Ernest Torrence) be performed completely seriously: “the actor must avoid all temptation to play the part as if he was conscious of its humour. There is such a temptation, and in the stage play the actors of the part have sometimes yielded to it, with fatal results” (288). Here, Barrie shows that he sees continuities as well as differences between theatrical and film adaptations, moderating a too-rigid insistence on absolute medium specificity differences; moreover, his advice on film acting was based on witnessing and being involved in prior stage adaptations of the play.²³⁸ Barrie’s scenario thus attempted to assert control over the physical performance of his writing, exercising his authorial authority as writer over both film director and film actor.

Additionally, Barrie’s scenario extends his expansive view of an author’s authority over film adaptations of his work to other aspects of filmmaking when it presents detailed technical instructions for making the film. These instructions indicate a knowledge of cinematography: for example, his instructions on framing the shot when the Darlings discover their children flying in the nursery, and a suggestion to use a particular aperture.²³⁹ His writing for film is thus cinematic. His knowledge of cinematic narrative extends in the scenario beyond individual shots to instructions for sequences of shots:

²³⁸ Debates surrounding the differences between stage and film acting were prevalent during this time. Linda Fitzsimmons and Sarah Street’s edited collection looks at modes of screen performances between 1890-1920 and their theatrical influences.

²³⁹ It reads: “About eighteen inches will be ample, and that only in the middle of the curtains, not the whole length. Through an aperture of about eighteen inches wide and deep the whole of the nursery window, about 80 yards away, will be seen” (286).

Then a view of Peter and the others through the window on whose sill Tink is sitting.

Then Mr Darling, Mrs Darling with others at a dinner-party.

Then the nursery again. The children are trying to fly by jumping about and falling.

Here, he uses cross-cutting between different locations to suggest simultaneous temporal action, a technique used by Griffith and defined as the hallmark of cinematic medium specificity by Eisenstein (see “A Dialectic Approach to Film Form”). It equally attends to the cinematic *mise-en-scène* that later film scholars, most notably André Bazin, would deem to be the hallmark of cinematic art. Barrie’s scenario, then, functions not simply as scenario, but seeks further to direct the acting, cinematography, direction, and editing of the film and, by extension, the film viewer’s gaze through his writing.

For Barrie, film’s technologies opened up limitless potential for narrative innovation. In December 1920, he wrote: “I am entertaining myself successfully by going over the *P. Pan* film scenario and again putting in new things. One could go on doing this till doom cracks, and then put in the crack” (*Letters* 187). Barrie recognised that aspects of his story could be expanded through cinematic techniques to which the theatre had no access. Film had moved away from conventions of filming staged plays in the 1910s and, despite theatre’s own capabilities with special effects, film technology was now able to further enhance the illusion of flying. Barrie’s scenario instructs:

The flying must be far better and more elaborate than in the acted play, and should cover of course a far wider expanse. This incident should show at once that the film can do things for *Peter Pan* which the

ordinary stage cannot do. It should strike a note of wonder in the first picture, and whet the appetite for marvels. (278)

Barrie's ideas in his scenario were innovative and ambitious to the point that they were challenging film technology, especially the animated scenery of *Neverland*.²⁴⁰ His instructions for a procession through the woods – that “a peculiar effect should be tried for” with “the effect wanted [...] that, as Peter passes along a sort of path, flowers come moving after him in a long procession” (293-4) – might have been achieved via characters costumed as flowers or by primitive animation technologies, but both would be more artificial than Barrie's vision. His awareness of the challenges that he was presenting to early film is apparent, as he ponders whether he is overestimating the capabilities of film: “The technical matters are obviously of huge importance and difficulty, and it remains to be seen whether the cinema experts can solve them” (277). Even as he made suggestions in his scenario as to how certain elements might be visualised, he relinquished control over technical matters to the “experts,” both deferring to the filmmakers' expertise over his amateur status and leaving the practicality of realising his vision to others.

That the characters costumed as flowers might be at odds with Barrie's vision for the film adaptation is further supported by his instruction that Nana, breaking her chains and rushing down the street, “should be a real dog now” (286). For Barrie, film dissolves and special effects offered the opportunity for a greater degree of both fantasy and realism than theatre. The filmmakers ignored Barrie's instruction. While cinema was certainly capable of such a transformation, this direction was not carried over into the finished film, where Nana remains portrayed by a costumed actor

²⁴⁰ Beside technical factors, there were also financial ones to consider.

(George Ali). It is curious why this suggestion was not adopted; a trained dog could have played the part in film and would have added to the magical naturalist feel that Barrie sought, as with the flower procession mentioned above. One can only conjecture that the filmmakers – for all their claims that writers needed to observe medium specificity – aimed to replicate the play as closely as possible, perhaps fearing that audiences would protest against a more naturalist version that departed from their experience of viewing the play or gave a vicarious experience of seeing it to those who could not afford to do so in the theatre.

Barrie's scenario recognises film's limitations in replicating the stage as well as its capacities in going beyond it, further manifesting awareness of medium specificity theory in its strong visual focus and minimal verbosity. Film's lack of synchronised sound in its early decades meant that writers' work was limited to being represented on screen in the form of printed words on intertitles (title cards).²⁴¹ Barrie remarked: "The aim has been to have as few words as possible [...] The scenario is very condensed: here we give only the bones of the story" (277). In contrast to his detailed scenario instructions, Barrie's title cards are short and precise and complement the action, showing his awareness of the film conventions and limitations that made images more prominent than dialogue and the need to prioritise them at the expense of words. Therefore, he devoted far less word count to dialogue, and even less to narrative film intertitles, wanting the pictures to "speak" for themselves: "We have

²⁴¹ Opinions on the use of titles differed widely: Woolf derided them, as did Shaw, who nominated them a "vulgar and silly" feature (*Table-Talk* 61). Balázs begrudgingly accepted them if used effectively to further film drama and not merely as "literary titles" (74); E. Elliott shared his view that titles should not be a purely literary form (80-1). Griffith viewed the issue more pragmatically in terms of saving film stock by using titles, although he also advocated using them effectively to further dramatic narrative (*Motion Picture Magazine*, July 1926). More recently, Gregory Robinson, in his history of "Writing on the Silent Screen", discusses the dynamic of image and text in silent film adaptation, arguing that experiments with the written word developed the unique character of silent cinema.

now about twenty minutes of pictures without words” (294). Against common notions that author-adaptors were more likely to utilise titles,²⁴² Barrie’s scenario contains fewer verbal intertitles than the finished film, indicating his understanding of and commitment to letting the pictures “speak” and narrate the story.

By contrast, the studio sought to retain more of Barrie’s celebrated literary language in their film than he did in his scenario, probably because audiences would be looking for and expecting to encounter the play’s memorable and oft-quoted lines. This is confirmed by a *New York Times* reviewer, who complained that the film did not replicate enough of the language: “There are some lines we would like to have seen in the captions, but most of the important phrases have been used.” At the same time, he critiqued the inclusion of language that was not Barrie’s: “In some of the text the title writer has employed some combinations of words that are hardly Barriesque” (29 Dec. 1924, 11). The writer of the source text was still regarded as the foremost authority when it came to the textual elements of adaptation. Yet Barrie, by contrast, was prepared to dispense with his language and cede his words to the images of film. He was considerably ahead of the literary mainstream in so doing. More than this, his scenario writing countered the widespread industry view at the time, a critical view that persists to the present day, that the writers’ programmes failed because writers were not prepared to give up their literary language, indicating instead that it was the studios, the reviewers, and perhaps the public who held back literary film adaptation in this period.

²⁴² Brian MacFarlane observes “how much use is made of the *written* word in the silent adaptation. Even more than most silent films, those adapted from literary sources were likely to feel the need for verbal assistance in narrative clarification. I refer to the use of both inter-titles and diegetic writing. The way the former are used suggests uncertainty about what their best function might be” (125; emphasis in original).

In contrast to his willingness to relinquish the play's words, Barrie insisted in his scenario that the music, written for the play must also accompany the film, indicating his perception that music, unlike dialogue, was an auditory part of the play that film conventions could and did accommodate. Film, as many scholars have pointed out,²⁴³ was never screened in silence; it was almost always accompanied by some sort of music, and sometimes with lecturers or actors voicing characters behind the screen. It is testament to Barrie's understanding of cinematic conventions that he did not demand that actors voice the film's dialogue or that a lecturer narrate the story. Prior to synchronised sound, no score could be placed on the film stock, so that studios rarely had control over what music was played with each film, and the music would be up to each viewing venue to determine. Barrie was here attempting to exert an authority that he had in the theatre, but that was unenforceable in the cinema.²⁴⁴

In terms of literary film adaptation studies, Barrie's instructions about the music, which was not a part of his written texts for either theatre or film, go beyond studies that focus solely on textual aspects of theatre-to-film adaptation. Yet Barrie considers music to be an integral rather than detachable part of the experience and scholars such as Norman King have argued that its importance to silent film art is often underestimated in early film studies (31-44).²⁴⁵ In the context of medium specificity

²⁴³ See Chapter Five.

²⁴⁴ After it was re-discovered in the 1950s, it was given a new musical score with a full orchestra (Hanson 150-1).

²⁴⁵ Griffith, in his 1924 predictions for film, stated that there were going to be "three principal figures in the production of a picture play – the author first, the director and music composer occupying an identical position in importance" (*Collier's* 73: 66). While this hierarchy does not hold in film today, in Griffith's own day, the view that the author superseded all other filmmakers acknowledged the importance of screenwriting and screenwriters in creating a film and the legacy of literature in establishing creative authority for narrative art, even art without many words. As we have seen, this authority becomes complex and contested in films that adapt literature, especially canonical literature.

debates under consideration in this chapter, Barrie clearly saw music as providing more of a bridge between his play and the film than words.

Despite Barrie's efforts to have the film made according to his scenario, studio publicity after the film's release presented his authorising role in the film adaptation as one of inspiring the studio's creative work and approving their adaptation of his work:

Obviously inspired by his discussions with Sir James Barrie, Mr. Brenon has fashioned a brilliant and entrancing production of this fantasy, one which is a great credit to the Famous Players-Lasky Corporation and also to the whole motion picture industry. It is not a movie, but a pictorial masterpiece which we venture to say will meet the approval of the author. (*New York Times*, 29 December 1924, 11)

The brilliance, the magic, and the masterpiece are Brenon's (and the film company and industry's), not Barrie's; Barrie's input is limited to pre-production discussion and post-production approval: he is not credited with any role in the film's actual production.²⁴⁶ The claim that the film is a "pictorial masterpiece" furthermore reflects film's aesthetic aspirations via medium specificity based in moving pictures, yet predicates its achievements on the verbal inspiration provided by the author. This publicity departed from the goals of the writers' programmes, that writers would write the films. Here, the author's input is downgraded from the authorial written word not only to the informal, unrecorded, spoken words of speech, but also speech in "discussion" with the filmmaker, who speaks as well. In sum, the author's function

²⁴⁶ The existence of Barrie's scenario appears not to have been common knowledge at that time.

has been relegated to bookending the production as pre-filmic inspiration and post-filmic validator.

Even though an analysis of the scenario undoubtedly conveys the sense that Barrie was a better scenarist than he was credited with being, and more adventurous in exploring the medium than the studio writers who adapted his play, most prior claims to the superiority of his screen play over studio film writing have been based in his superior worth as a *literary author* who had stooped from above to accommodate the conventions of film theory and practice. Hanson, for example, argues that “the 1924 *Peter Pan* stands as a testimony to the silent-film era, yet it was not the film its author had envisioned. For some incomprehensible reason the producers discarded Barrie’s scenario!” (237). Hanson gives all the credit for the film’s best parts to Barrie’s scenario and blames all of its shortcomings on the filmmakers:

To give them credit, they did take a few of his ideas and these are shining moments in an otherwise conventional screen translation of the play. As for the rest, it is merely a retelling of the stage play with an unusually rigid camera. (137)

Mackail, in his 1941 biography of Barrie, extends this view to the prerogatives of authorial intent originality, and hard work, nominating the scenario “authentic,” because it comes “from the one and only source of the saga, who took enormous trouble over it, and never forgot for one moment the special medium for which it was meant” (555). While Mackail also applauds Barrie for adapting his work to the medium of film, he maintains hierarchical notions of a divinely-inspired author stooping to write for film:

Twenty thousand words of the most carefully rewritten scenario, with all the subtitles, and a mass of fresh visual detail which to anyone but a

film producer and his attendant experts must surely have seemed like a gift from heaven. (555)

Neither critic observes that he was writing in pursuit of filmic innovations, nor of the immense untapped potential he perceived, beyond his 20,000 words, that would enable him to keep adapting his story to the medium of film. Instead, they fault the film for being unusually conservative in exploiting film's already existing techniques and for being too faithful to stage conventions.

While comparisons to other film scripts of the 1920s clearly indicate that his script went beyond the usual scenario of the day with its inclusion of detailed descriptions and advice to the filmmakers, such distinctions were not absolute. Ian MacDonald has pointed out that, unlike American scenarios, British screenplays until the 1930s were often written with just such comprehensive instructions, with writers "picturising" the page, subsequently resulting in a struggle over control with the director over the visual style of the film ("The Struggle for the Silents" 115-28).

Film theorists such as Balázs supported directors over literary authors in these struggles with arguments that pressed medium specificity theory into forging a media divide: "A writer's success depends on the power and the subtlety of his writing. The artistic nature of film resides in the power and subtlety of its images and its gestural language," which therefore "*explains why film has nothing in common with literature*" (18; emphasis in original). Balázs used this divide to exile literary authors from screenwriting, arguing that "the screenplay that forms the basis of the film must never be the product of the literary imagination" because, "despite every effort it never contains more than words" and misses "the most essential element" which can only be expressed through the moving images of film and that these "must be the product of

the director's own vision" (26).²⁴⁷ Balázs's writing, coinciding with the release of the *Peter Pan* adaptation, taps into the industry's failure with the writers, while also suggesting that filmmakers were eager to assert their authority and creative control over the film, a fact supported by the legal terms of contracts and the increasingly industrial modes of film production, which relegated literary authors such as Barrie to a perfunctory position in adaptations of their work.

Schultheiss assesses that there were two opposing views explicating the failure of the writers' programme, with one focused on the inability or unwillingness of writers to understand or adapt to film, and the other on those writers who "had a tendency to stress the other extreme – they became intoxicated by the freedom of screen style" and refused to conform to film conventions of their day (55). Barrie's writing, however, constitutes a middle ground between these two extremes: while envisioning film's limitless potential to expand his story in future, his scenario respected film conventions, while seeking to exploit current technologies more than most productions. The failure of the film had more to do with limited views of adapting celebrated literary works than either the limitations of Barrie's writing or the limitations of filmmaking.

Similarly, the wider failure to integrate literary authors into the film industry had less to do with absolute distinctions between media forms than with a lack of compromise on both sides, including a refusal to experiment across media. The industry wanted literary writers to work within the formulaic writing structures that it had established,

²⁴⁷ This view precludes the writer from also being the director, which was often the case with the period's most celebrated directors, such as Griffith and Eisenstein, as well as Vsevolod Pudovkin, whose work as both filmmaker and theoretician is cited less frequently than Eisenstein's. In contrast to Balázs, Pudovkin's view, expressed in "The Film Script" (1926), was that writers needed to move into the direction of the director, providing "material that approaches the ideal form," with everything being "precisely calculated" in advance (35). The function of the script was often debated during this period (see Price, *History* 111-9).

to which literary authors were not generally willing to conform; yet while some authors were unwilling to adapt their writing techniques to film, when others did, their writing was rejected by film studios in favour of formulaic industry writing. Had both sides been willing to compromise, film might have developed in markedly different ways than it did and relations between literature and film might have also evolved differently. As it stood, studios ended up merely using the prestige of celebrated authors and their presence during film production to promote their films; this eventually led to greater recognition of studio film writers, who currently suffered from cultural prejudices against film as low art, hierarchies that situated literary authors above film writers officially, while actually engaging and exploiting film writers.

Pitting words against images put the studio film writer in a far more difficult position in terms of medium specificity than the composer, actor, production designer, make-up artist, costumer, or director, all of whom could work across media with very little critical focus on medium specificity for their profession. Insisting that film could only develop by separating itself from literary writing, I argue, limited its development. Greater compromise and collaboration between writers and other filmmakers might have produced a kind of writing that experimented with and pushed the limits of both the text and the screen in this period. Instead, medium specificity theory and the cultural and economic rivalries that it enabled forged antagonistic relationships not only between media, but also between their practitioners.

At the end of the 1920s, as my fifth and final chapter shows, the discourses of writing for film and literary film adaptation took another turn with the introduction of synchronised sound technology. Tensions between literature and film practitioners

resurfaced in new forms, as literary writers were once again recruited by the industry to write dialogue for sound film.

Chapter 5

Literary Writers and Early Sound Film: Experimental Writing

[I]t was appalling to think of learning over again the conditions of a medium.
– Herbert George Wells in 1929 (*The King Who Was a King* 15)

D.W. Griffith's estimation in 1924 of what the movies would be like in a hundred years ended up containing many accurate predictions,²⁴⁸ yet his greatest misconception about the future of film was with regards to sound: He was "positive" that "all thought of our so-called speaking pictures will have been abandoned," as "it will never be possible to synchronize the voice with the pictures." He vehemently opposed the human voice within film, regarding its inclusion as being at "cross purposes with the real object of this new medium of expression," arguing that, "the very nature of the films foregoes not only the necessity for but the propriety of the spoken voice" (*Collier's* 73: 47). Griffith's view was emblematic of many who located film's medium specificity in its silent montage of moving imagery. Yet with the introduction of synchronised sound, beginning in the late 1920s,²⁴⁹ the establishment of silent film within the critical aesthetic framework of culture and society was thrown into disarray.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁸ For example, he prophesied that colour would be a conventional element of film and that film would be studied academically.

²⁴⁹ Bill Baillieu and John Goodchild point out that experiments involving the synchronisation of sound can be traced back to Edison in the 1890s and had been continuously taking place since then (26); Rachael Low discusses this in terms of sound development in Britain (2: 265-9; 4: 200-14).

²⁵⁰ Although the notion was applicable to film more widely, Ernest Betts attests with regard to British film, that by the late 1920s, it "had acquired form and character, it was on good visual terms with itself. It was a premeditated art able to bear comparison with those other arts to which it was related. The language and grammar of the film were established and its terms were in common use. These advances were of little value without a stable background of production and release and this was defeated by the revolution in sound" (62).

This final chapter, focussing primarily on the years 1928-38, considers some of the tensions and changes brought about by the introduction of synchronised film sound for literary authors writing in relation to film, their new uses by the film industry in the age of early sound film, their relationships to studio writers, and the new forms of hybrid writing that some nineteenth-into-twentieth-century literary authors produced when writing in relation to film.

The first part of this chapter probes the effect that sound film placed on earlier medium specificity theories of film, the new roles it brought for literary writers in the film industry, and its effect on literary film adaptation, demonstrating that the uncertainty of how sound would be integrated into film narrative provided not only new possibilities, but also new tensions in the theory and practice of filmmaking for literary writers. The second part offers case studies of experimental hybrid-novel film writing by H.G. Wells and play-to-screenplay-adaptations by George Bernard Shaw.

What conjoins the two parts is that both grapple with and rework earlier theories of medium specificity with the coming of sound film. Overall, this chapter finds that writing for film had a progressive influence on literary writers and their writings, but that many potentially progressive aspects of their experimental writings were limited by the film industry and by the writers themselves.

i. Sound Film, Literary Writers, and Film Writing

Writing in 1930, six years after his first theoretical book on film, Béla Balázs, like many other contemporary film theorists, believed that sound had halted the

development of silent film before it could reach its full potential.²⁵¹ Yet the uncertainty that sound brought to the aesthetic future of film prompted him to draw an allegory to Columbus's unexpected discovery of America on his voyage to India, as he suggested that, even though one form had ended, the "new beginning" needed to be embraced, reminding that: "New theories open up new vistas for new voyages" (93). Film, rather than being thrust back by this development, needed to welcome the opportunities and possibilities that lay ahead. This view was not embraced by all, as this chapter shows.

As Chapter Three indicates, Shaw had hoped for sound film from 1908, and the last part of this chapter addresses his engagement with the long-awaited advent of synchronised sound before he would adapt his plays to film and present his dialogue to a wider audience than the stage allowed. Yet before he began this process, he demonstrated his approval of film by making a personal appearance in a five-minute talkie in 1928 for "Movietone News," entitled *Greeting by George Bernard Shaw* and directed by himself and Jack Connolly. The film shows Shaw walking down a garden path until he stands in front of the camera, where he addresses the audience in a monologue. Authoritative, and yet digressive, it seeks to rectify the unfavourable impression that he perceived the public had of him at the time.²⁵² Shaw here recognised the propagandist uses of the talking pictures and used one as a platform for

²⁵¹ As with title cards, some concerns regarding synchronised sound films were aimed at the application rather than the technology of sound. For example, Sergei Eisenstein and Vsevolod Pudovkin, together with fellow filmmaker Grigori Alexandrov, released a joint statement in 1928, stating that a misconception about the new technical discovery could threaten the development of film as an art, and instead championed a contrapuntal use of sound in relation to montage, arguing that montage needed to remain the foremost aesthetic feature of cinema to be developed and perfected, engaging sound as a new element (see Eisenstein, *Film Form* 257-60).

²⁵² He does this again in a voice-over for *Pygmalion* in 1938, discussed later in this chapter.

personal promotion. Mediated via sound film, literary writers were able to reach audiences through the spoken as well as the written word.²⁵³

However, not all literary authors viewed sound film with Shaw's enthusiasm,²⁵⁴ and, overall, the introduction of sound to film was not as seamlessly realised as it is at times made out to be after the first showing of *The Jazz Singer* in 1927.²⁵⁵ Indeed, Deborah Cartmell, in her analysis of adaptations during this first decade of sound, argues that the novelty of sound persisted into the 1930s, often demonstrated through a dual-approach, trying to appease both those who lamented it and those who celebrated it (*Adaptation in the Sound Era* 56). The "uneasiness" between silent and sound film was discussed as late as 1938 by Rudolf Arnheim, who argued that, rather than presenting a united effort to capture the audience, the two media were still fighting each other, striving to express the same matter in a twofold way (199). These tensions also manifested in hybrid approaches to film writing, which blurred the boundaries of film's medium specificity established in the silent era and destabilised the differences between film and literary arts in that period.

The film industry, led by Hollywood, had acknowledged the importance of film writing in the 1920s, including the fact that it was a medium specific craft in which the writer needed to be familiar with filmmaking techniques and conventions.

Although Wells's epigraph to this chapter refers to the unwillingness of authors to change their writing for film, claiming that "it was appalling to think of learning over again the conditions of a medium," this imperative continued with the introduction of

²⁵³ Arthur Conan Doyle appeared in a talking picture prior to this in 1927, a 13-minute film entitled, *Sir Arthur Conan Doyle*. Described as a "warm-hearted meeting with the author," it depicts Doyle speaking about writing the Sherlock stories and his interest in spiritualism (Haydock 66-7).

²⁵⁴ See Aldous Huxley's view in his 1929 essay "Silence is Golden." He nevertheless overcame his initial scepticism toward sound film to write for film in Hollywood from 1937 onward (see Dunaway).

²⁵⁵ Alexander Walker provides an account of the years 1926-9 in Hollywood, discussing the coming and reception of synchronised sound and how the industry had to re-configure itself subsequently.

synchronised sound to film. All aspects of filmmaking needed to engage with and adapt to the conditions of sound film, resulting in theories of medium specificity regarding silent film being revised or discarded. Not only did sound affect the production, distribution, and technical areas of filmmaking, it also had a specific impact on the relationship of the film writer to the medium.

The art of the writer was now made more prominent, despite the decline of intertitles. Balázs argued that sound pushed the work of the scriptwriters to the foreground and, as a result, the role of the writer would be crucial: “Now at last [...] is the time for poets to become active in film. The best and the greatest. The time is now!” (204).

However, he was careful to clarify that writing needed to adapt to cinematic aesthetics and forms:

In the sound film what matters is not just the content of what is said but also the position of the statements in the montage. They acquire the same positional value as the elements of a poem. What we will therefore need is a new kind of lyrical musicality. And this calls for poets, for yet more poets! The skills and routines of mediocre drama will not suffice if sound-film dialogue is to acquire a specifically cinematic character and to become more than mere filmed theatre. (205)

Writing for cinema had to move away from theatre towards poetry and to adapt to film montage to achieve “a specifically cinematic character.”

Yet in practice, the profession of screenwriting entered a period of disarray with the introduction of sound, as old and new forms of filmmaking continued to work

alongside each other, before the industry began to standardise itself again, as Lizzie Francke attests:

With the growing sophistication of film-making techniques, each of the creative departments became more specialised. None more so than screenwriting, which was radicalised with the event of the “talkie”. But, to begin with, the transition from silents to talkies had put the screenwriting departments into hiatus.²⁵⁶ (29-30)

Steven Price records that, other than the question of how to incorporate dialogue into the script, decisions needed to be made regarding ongoing projects, in terms of adapting to sound, remaining silent, or balancing both aspects (*History of Screenplay* 120).²⁵⁷ Film was still viewed by many as a primitive narrative medium, due to the crudity of its sound devices, and many hoped that synchronised sound would have a positive effect on the narrative progress and aesthetic sophistication of film.²⁵⁸

With the advent of sound, film’s renewed potential for narrative storytelling was championed by the industry, which perceived the need to develop this aspect further through the work of literary writers. Doris F. Halman championed the art of film following synchronised sound as a narrative form in *The Writer* in May 1933:

They are the new drama of the machine age, the most fluid and plastic form of theatrical expression ever yet invented; and they are probably the finest means of *telling a story* which the world has found. They combine, within themselves, the scope of a novel and the subjective

²⁵⁶ Until 1933, there were no minimum wages nor minimum periods of employment, putting writers in constant danger of being “fired without notice or laid off for short periods without pay – although still ‘under contract’” (Hamilton 92).

²⁵⁷ Price provides examples of these early silent-sound hybrids (*History of Screenplay* 130-9).

²⁵⁸ Walker argues that “the possibilities of talking pictures were barely glimpsed by the industry they were to turn upside down” and that, “like most of the developments in the talkie era, accident and afterthought were the determining factors: foresight very, very rarely played a part” (15; 60).

emotion of a play. They are the book and the illustrations, too. They are still young and often faulty, and the people who manage them have not always been inspired. Each year, however, the leadership comes into more capable hands. (45: 130; emphasis in original)

Halman's claim for film's superiority as an art was predicated on film's ability to draw on many other arts: that is, as a hybrid art comprised of many other arts. In so doing, she defied film's claim to art on the basis of difference from other arts – that is, on medium specificity theory as it was promulgated during the silent era. In this article, entitled, "If You Must Write for The Movies," she advised that, despite film being a business, no author should "write down" to it. Believing that film was developing into a powerful art form, which deserved "to be speeded on the way by the best that any writer has to give," Halman argued that writing's position in the film industry did not yet do it justice, nor had film yet received sufficient credit for its capacity to *tell* (as opposed to show) a story, either from writers or critics.

The "machine age" called for a new approach to narrative and its development through the writer and within the industry needed to be prioritised, although the methods as to how this was to be achieved were yet to be decided. Unlike the screenwriters giving writing advice in the 1910's, Halman cautioned writers to stay away from original writing for the screen and encouraged them to adapt another kind of writing first: "Get your novels and short stories published, or your plays produced on Broadway; then, if they are distinguished by physical or mental action, they will sell to the film companies without further effort from you." The validity of this advice can be seen in the increase of contemporary literary film adaptations during this time, which Timothy Corrigan attributes to the fact that it was now possible to relay them on screen (35).

In addition to rejecting original film writing in favour of adaptation, Halman's article pointed to Hollywood's dismissal of film writing talent in favour of once again wooing established popular literary writers and adaptation. Rather than relying on its own established film writers, the industry once again turned back toward literary authors as the silent screen gave way to synchronised sound:

Having discovered the sound film, or rather, having sound unwillingly thrust upon them, the producing companies, in a frantic agony of competitive desperation, immediately bethought them of the treasures of the stage. A play had action and words, they argued; the new sound film needed action and words; therefore it seemed reasonable to suppose that herein lay material ready for cinematic exploitation.

(Nicoll, *Film and Theatre* 124)

The key factor that encouraged comparisons between theatre and film and turned filmmakers' attention to theatre rather than to the novel at this point was the need for dialogue performed on set.

Since plays were already written with performance in mind, from a production viewpoint, it made sense for the industry to turn to dramatists and plays for material to adapt to sound film, though how different this new form of film writing with sound truly was, remained debatable.²⁵⁹ This meant looking east to New York, where authors, journalists, and Broadway playwrights were to be found, with John

²⁵⁹ Tom Stempel suggests that "The new craft, in fact, was not all that different from the old" (62). Price agrees with Stempel, supporting the view that film acquired its shape during the silent period, with straightforward alterations made following the introduction of sound (*History of Screenplay* 3). With regard to the British industry, Ian W. McDonald points out that there is a "folkloric assumption that many silent film writers 'failed' to make the transition to sound film production," which "suggests an incompetence that may not have actually been there," listing many writers who started before 1924 and continued into the 1930s as evidence, stating that they "were the ones who adapted to the new ideas, and to the new practices that came with them" ("Screenwriting in Britain" 50-1). Adrian Brunel's 1933 book on film production makes similar claims, pointing out that amateur film craftsmen were also not equipped for making sound pictures (vii).

Schultheiss identifying this as the second, and more famous era, of the Eastern writer in Hollywood in the thirties and early forties (13).

Richard Fine indicates that “[t]he industry’s need for experienced writers mushroomed between 1927 and 1930” and, simultaneously, “[t]he desire of serious writers for a studio paycheck reached a peak a few years later when the Depression crippled the publishing industry and the commercial theatre” (1). For Hollywood, this proved economically advantageous, as many writers saw little choice other than to turn to the entertainment industry that was thriving by comparison to the publishing industry. For example, Aldous Huxley, who had previously declined writing for film, rejecting the collaborative aspects of filmmaking (*Letters* 266), among other reasons, went readily to Hollywood to be a film writer.

However, the advantages of importing writers was, once again, not universally appreciated or successful. Seeing this outcome as inevitable, Eric Elliott had stated in 1928 that the “speaking film” would bring “our established literary craftsmen – in a veritable gold rush – into the cinema with all their skill, fame, and backing of tradition,” although he prophesied correctly that the consequence of this would be that it would “outcrowd the original genius of the screen” (138-9), a prophesy borne out by Halman’s article and other evidence.

As with earlier importation of literary authors into the film industry, writers were often employed through the prominence of their name and their involvement with the productions was often insignificant in reality to the credit they received. Causing a stir within the industry, P.G. Wodehouse,²⁶⁰ hired by Samuel Goldwyn in 1929, admitted

²⁶⁰ Brian Taves details Wodehouse’s long and varied collaboration with Hollywood, pointing out that despite the “talkies” taking Wodehouse to Hollywood, it is surprising that the silent era was the most

in an interview arranged by his studio with *The Los Angeles Times* on 7 June 1931, that “the actual work is negligible”:

It dazes me. They paid me \$2,000 a week – and I cannot see what they engaged me for. They were extremely nice to me, but I feel as if I have cheated them. You see, I understood I was engaged to write stories for the screen. After all, I have twenty novels, a score of successful plays, and countless magazine stories to my credit. Yet apparently, they had the greatest difficulty in finding anything for me to do. (Reprinted in *The New York Times*, 9 June 1931, 36)²⁶¹

Rather than the earlier enthusiasm for the medium of film, financial reasons for writers turning to film feature prominently in later accounts of literary writers’ involvement with Hollywood (see, for example, Fine).²⁶² Writers were now being charged as “betraye[r]s of [their] literary art,” with Schultheiss arguing that the “image of the artist who ‘sold out’ would persist for the next three decades,” which “most writers themselves believed, and which only the strongest managed to discard” (14).

The divide between expectation and reality for both writers and industry produced varied results. The advantage remained with the prominent literary writer, while the established film writer was once again relegated to a secondary and more invisible position, despite his or her more substantial involvement in the film writing process.

prolific in adapting his writing, given that he was an author “so dependent on dialogue and language” (22).

²⁶¹ This was not the first, nor the last, time that Wodehouse discussed the writer in Hollywood; for example, a previous article from 7 Dec. 1929, entitled “Slaves of Hollywood” (*Saturday Evening Post*), had satirised the process of transitioning from writer to scenarist.

²⁶² A prominent example was F. Scott Fitzgerald, whose negative experience in Hollywood is often discussed.

Literary writers were fully aware of this situation, as Wodehouse described in a letter in 1936, after returning to Hollywood:²⁶³

So far I've had eight collaborators. The system is that A gets the original idea, B comes into work with him on it, C makes the scenario, D does preliminary dialogue, and then they send for me to insert class and whatnot, then E and F, scenario writers, alter the plot and off we go again. I could have done all my part in it in a morning but they took it for granted that I should need six weeks. (*Letters* 125)

In most cases, the credit would be traced back to the popular author, rather than B, C, D, E, F, or even A. In spite of copyright laws, there was still no controlled or clear ownership of writing in the film industry, as Ian Hamilton points out: it “could be scrapped, rewritten, retained for future action, and even attributed to someone else.” No shares of the profits were given to the writers, and the “credits system worked according to the whim of the employer” (92-3). This state of affairs showed that, despite the hope that sound film would foreground the film writer in production and crediting, the reverse was the case. Film writers were marginalised in crediting practices, while literary writers were marginalised in production practice.²⁶⁴

In contrast to earlier literary authors' movements in the 1920s, the film industry was now blamed for its treatment of writers. Hollywood was recognised as an industry whose general objective, like any other industry, was to make profits from its products rather than to nurture creative talent, and, accordingly, Hollywood started to

²⁶³ Wodehouse left Hollywood a few months after the 1931 interview. After this, he satirised the industry further in his fiction, such as *Laughing Gas* (1935), and non-fiction (all collected in *The Hollywood Omnibus*). He returned to Hollywood briefly in 1936 under contract to Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer for \$2,500 a week (Taves 86).

²⁶⁴ This form of shared writing was common at this time in Hollywood, though for literary writers used to working under different conditions, it would be challenging to accept.

earn a reputation for diminishing and even destroying writing talent. Fine's tongue-in-cheek account illustrates the so-called "Hollywood-as-destroyer-legend":

Novelists and playwrights of acute sensibility and talent, so the legend goes, were lured to Hollywood by offers of huge amounts of money and the promise of challenging assignments; once in the studios they were set to work on mundane, hackneyed scripts; they were treated without respect by the mandarins who ruled the studios; and they were subjected to petty interferences by their intellectual inferiors. In the process, they were destroyed as artists. Hollywood was a loathsome and demeaning place which invariably corrupted writers. Although writers prostituted themselves by accepting Hollywood paychecks, the film industry itself was the true villain of the tale. (3)

Rather than faulting writers' non-conformity to medium specificity theory, as formerly, the industry was now faulted for its treatment of the writer. Even so, it can also be credited with the development of film through fostering writing generally.

ii. Hybrid Experimentation in Literary Film Writing

Experiments in literary forms of writing during the 1920s and 30s, characteristic of aesthetic Modernism more broadly, have often been discussed in terms of film's influence on literary writers. David Seed, for instance, argues that there was "an approximate congruence between the emerging techniques of film and the experimental methods of novelists in the period of Modernism" in writings by authors such as Virginia Woolf, H.G. Wells, Joseph Conrad, and Aldous Huxley, who established new conventions of narrative representation, "which were greatly helped if not directly suggested by the emergence of parallel conventions in the cinema" (48–

73). In this period of experimental narrative writing that intersected and exchanged forms across media, film writing by literary authors explored hybridity between media, disregarding prior theories and practices of medium specificity in an attempt to develop literary and film writing in relation to each other and to explore the no-man's land that medium specificity had forged between the two.

However, in the first half of the 1920s, medium specificity theory and practice discouraged creative, experimental mixes of prose writing and film writing, disregarding attempts that pushed the boundaries of film alongside that of literary writing, as seen in the example of J.M. Barrie in Chapter Four. Yet with the advent of sound, when film was in a kind of interim period, Wells attempted a new kind of hybrid literary film writing in 1928-9. His so-called "film novel" of *The King Who Was a King* shows not only the possibilities and the difficulties in writing in the no-man's land between prose fiction and film, but also presents struggles to conform silent film to the coming of synchronised sound.²⁶⁵

Of course, as Chapter Four acknowledges, "silent" film was hardly ever silent, as non-diegetic sound was often, and diversely, used as an accompaniment to the screen in public showings. Not only orchestral music and sound effects, but also other non-diegetic sounds were added to film showings. For example, voice-over acting by behind-the-screen actors took place, and sometimes lecturers gave a running commentary at screenings (see Altman 166-73).²⁶⁶ Conditions and conventions,

²⁶⁵ The idea for the film originated with producer and director Edward Godal, who suggested that Wells adapt a series of his war-time newspaper articles into a film scenario. The proposed film, entitled *The Peace of the World*, never got past the first synopsis due to Godal declaring bankruptcy, but Wells managed to retain the script rights (Williams, *Wells* 99-100). He set about converting the synopsis into the book *The King Who Was a King*, dividing the film scenario into six parts.

²⁶⁶ Rick Altman provides a broad historical analysis of sound practices and strategies from the late nineteenth century through the early twentieth century; in their edited collection, Anna Katharina Windisch and Claus Tieber offer a cultural analysis of silent cinema in different countries, placing case studies alongside theoretical concepts. Michael Slowik provides an analysis of film music from 1926-

therefore, did not often allow film images to speak for themselves in practice. From a more theoretical purview, Eric Elliott's conclusion in 1928 that the nearest art analogy to silent film is music, with images building "upon one another as notes, making elaborate variations and accompaniments, by blending, combining, reflecting, recurring, and so forth," offers a theoretical affinity between sound and image (150-1).

Wells's scenario reflects the belief that silent imagery and non-diegetic sound can and should converge, interacting together. Throughout, Wells wrote specific instructions regarding the music composition for his scenario: "Here the music should go strong [...] If the music is good enough, the scene can be held for some little time [...] Then slowly the scene fades out and the music becomes remote as the picture fades" (117). By explaining how they would complement one another in these and other ways, he highlighted his sense of the importance of musical sound for silent pictures and presented music as a crucial component of his filmic vision.²⁶⁷ Like Barrie before him, Wells recognised the influence and effect that sound could have to supplement images, setting the atmosphere for the moving pictures they envisioned and sought to write into existence. Unlike Shaw, Wells was not primarily concerned with using sound to foreground dialogue. More broadly, Keith Williams points out that Wells initially shared a Modernist hostility toward "remortgaging cinema's creative fluidity

34, exploring the different forms and ways that music was employed during the formative years of synchronised sound.

²⁶⁷ Wells believed that synchronised sound film would enable film and music to be composed together (16). In a "Note on Music," he wrote that "[Hector] Berlioz is badly needed to co-operate in the development of this Music-Spectacle Film, and it is a great pity we cannot recall him from the silences" (106-7). In 1924, D.W. Griffith also considered that music, "one of the most perfect of all the arts," will be the "voice of the silent drama," with the greatest composers of the day at hand to create it (*Collier's* 73: 47).

to the naturalistic continuity demanded by synchronised sound dialogue” (see *Wells* 99-106).²⁶⁸

This chapter’s discussion of Wells’s scenario is more invested in Wells’s experimental hybrid writing between film and literature than between film and music, and how his hybrid writing extends Barrie’s experimental hybrid writing (see Chapter Four). In contrast to Barrie’s scenario, however, the complexity and verbosity of Wells’s film-novel render it unrecognisable as a script or scenario, and would baffle any filmmaker attempting to create a film from it. Equally, it is barely readable as a novel, so that its interest derives from it being “a document of its time” and an illustration of “an experimental scenario” (Bailey 31). Indeed, in his conclusion to the film-novel, Wells offered it as his contribution to debates over film form and aesthetics and, more boldly presented it as his “idea of what a popular film might be” in the future (249). This was because it includes many ideas that would be nearly impossible to translate to the screen at the time, as exemplified below.

However, some notions in his scenario foreshadow future filmmaking practices. For example, one of Wells’s suggestions was to place the credits of the film at the end rather than the beginning. His reasoning was that the “ordinary film” opened in a very ragged manner, with “unmeaning decorations and distracting irrelevant matter” that needed to be simplified to a black screen bearing only the title, and all other

²⁶⁸ Wells regarded diegetic sound as an effective, rather than permanent, element, contrasting its application to film to that of the stage: “The incessant tiresome chatter of the drama sinks out of necessity [...] When once people have been put upon the actual stage, they must talk and flap about for a certain time before they can be got rid of. Getting people on and getting them off is a vast, laborious part of dramatic technique. How it must bore playwrights! But with the film the voice may be flung in here or there, or the word may be made visible and vanish again” (17). Wells here is reminiscent of film aesthetic theorists, as he demotes the necessity of sound and views it as merely another cinematic tool that needs to be purposefully implemented.

information deferred to the end, “when the audience is grateful for and excited by its entertainment and anxious to know whom it has to thank” (44).²⁶⁹

In his introduction to the film-novel, Wells criticised the fact that so little had been done to date to explore the possibilities of film, noting that the few people who had tried were discouraged and did not receive sufficient help from literary writers, whose high popular standing could have helped them (13-4). Wells here concurred with Goldwyn’s conclusion regarding the failed collaboration between film and literary authors (Chapter Four), affirming the notion that novelists in general, himself included, had resisted acknowledging the representational capacities of film, and that it was only with

extraordinary reluctance, if at all, that we could be won to admit that on the screen a greater depth of intimation, and more subtle and delicate fabric of suggestion, a completer beauty and power, might be possible than any our tried and trusted equipment could achieve.²⁷⁰ (15)

Although Chapter Four addresses exceptions to this generalisation, Wells here validated medium specificity theory even as he set out to cross its boundaries and to fuse his literary writing with his filmic vision. And yet these two views can be reconciled by viewing his experimentation with filmic and literary forms as testing the boundaries between them and seeking points of connection and interchange.²⁷¹

²⁶⁹ Kenneth V. Bailey remarks that if Wells’s “Prelude” was to be translated into film footage, it would bear “an uncanny resemblance” to the opening of *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), with this also being the case for his central sequence, “A Vision of Modern War,” found later in the same film (30-1).

²⁷⁰ Despite this, Wells had already benefitted substantially from film, less by writing for it than by lending his prestigious name to films and being falsely credited as a film writer when he had no direct involvement in their production. For example, he had agreed to provide scenarios for three comic shorts in 1928, which were promoted using his name, but the stories were actually written by Ivor Montague and Wells’s son, Frank (Williams, *Wells* 97).

²⁷¹ The correlation of film writing to other forms of writing had already been acknowledged by film writers, including James Slevin (see Chapter Three).

Indeed, the hybridity of *The King Who Was a King* extends beyond film and novels: in addition to its dense prose narrative and technological cinematic instructions, it presents dialogue as play and film scripts do, and dictates film visuals as play scripts provide set designs and stage descriptions, thus placing it between novel, play script, and film scenario, offering a striking example of a novelist's experimental attempts to bridge gaps between literary writing and film writing in various ways, included via theatrical writing forms.

In so writing, Wells invoked a predecessor who had influenced him and on whose practice he sought to build. Like Wells, Thomas Hardy was first and foremost a novelist involving himself with a different medium and, whilst adapting his writing to this, produced work that defied medium-specific writing. Hardy's historical three-part epic drama *The Dynasts* (1904, 1906, 1908) had similarly attempted to test the parameters of the theatrical stage in ways that Wells deemed to be proto-cinematic. Wells viewed *The Dynasts* as a proto-film synopsis, which could advance film from "mere spectacle" and "mere story" towards "an intellectual and aesthetic entertainment," which he was likewise attempting to achieve (19). Joan Grundy, among others, describes the uniqueness of Hardy's multimedial vision:

[I]t is the stage directions above all that make it clear that this is a play that could be played on no ordinary stage. Theatre, in other words, here expands into cinema, and the directions are those not of a playwright or play-producer, but rather of a scriptwriter or film-director. Hardy here uses vision as if it were a camera, and in a strikingly flexible and sophisticated fashion. (117-8)

Fifty years earlier, Wells too enthused over the "marvellous stage directions," which "so impossible on any stage," would be "so easy for the cinema producer with money

to spend” (19). Both Hardy and Wells experimented with narrative forms and challenged media conventions, including the medium specificity theories of their day, resulting in new, hybrid forms of writing and other modes of aesthetic representation.

Shaw concurred regarding the developmental potential of writing across media for writers in a 1928 article for the *Evening Standard*:

A novelist can describe all sorts of physical impossibilities without being found out either by himself or anyone else. Both stage and screen bring him to the test of practice, and force him to use his brains as well as his imagination. (qtd. in Dukore, *Shaw on Cinema* 55)

Writing for performance requires practical thought. Yet even as Shaw criticised the novelist for his impractical imagination, he implied that his imagination can bring innovations to the more pragmatic domains of stage and cinema production, introducing ideas that might not have been considered by practitioners bound by the conventions of their own media. Writing across media, then, has the potential to improve both writers and writing.

In a similar vein, Wells was hostile to formulaic industry scenario writing. Admitting that prior to writing his synopsis he had read several books “professing to expound the whole art of writing scenarios,” he indicated that they troubled his digestion and that, from the very first, he “mistrusted” them. Although he initially wrote a scenario that conformed to these instructions and satisfied the producer, Wells discarded this first draft after pondering the aesthetic and narrative possibilities of film and after assurances that there was “ample financial backing” for any production he could write: “when I ask if I may make my scenario as difficult and expensive as I like, I am told to go ahead” (20-1). The proposed scenario, therefore, was not bound by any

typical film conventions and constrictions and consequently enabled a novel approach to the art of film writing.

What Wells and others realised in the late 1920s was that film, due to its continuous technological innovations and infinite possibilities as a mass medium of the twentieth century, presented itself as medium to be developed further by visionaries with imagination and practical ability. If Barrie's 1924 scenario shows awareness of silent film art, its widening of diegetic space beyond theatre and the possibilities of photographic special effects for representing the magical, even beyond the awareness of the film studio which was adapting his work, Wells's scenario attends to such technical effects as colouring and tinting, which were popular between 1929-31.²⁷² In one instance, he not only describes the colours that he wishes to appear on screen, but also indicates how to achieve them technically:

A sort of glare like the glare of a fire appears behind the King. It becomes a dull coppery red. The subsequent scenes of this part are to be tinted or coloured to strengthen the effect with reds, golds and flashes of intense green-white, moonlight blue, green and cold mauve.
(169)

Wells's placement and choice of filmic colouring lends effect and luxuriousness exceeding the limits of black-and-white film. Instructions like these indicate Wells's move away from naturalist and realist approaches to literature and film, as well as from the view that film's function was merely to record theatrical actions in front of the camera. Instead, Wells utilised photographic technologies to create surrealist and

²⁷² A "color vogue" in films occurred between 1929-31, followed by more standardised Technicolor practices in the early to the mid-1930s (Bordwell 593-8). Paolo Cherchi Usai discusses colour processes during the silent period.

supernatural effects, developing and expanding the non-realistic elements of his prose fiction through film technology and imagery.

Joining his use of available film technologies to enhance his writing, Wells sought to infuse film writing with a narrative and descriptive style more reminiscent of prose fiction than conventional film scenarios. His narrative relies heavily on textual materials: not just dialogue on title cards, but also the diegetic use of newspapers, posters and telegrams.²⁷³ However, Williams considers that this shows an ongoing dependence on textuality and difficulty in abandoning verbal for visual, citing other critics who have similarly critiqued Wells's tendency to favour literary over cinematic writing and form (*Wells* 98).²⁷⁴

Nevertheless, a case can be made that his use of texts creates an experimental hybrid between literary and cinematic representation as despite the profusion of textuality, these texts are remediated by cinematic technology to take on the properties of *and become* moving images. For instance, in "Part Four of the Film: A Vision of Modern War," Wells sets the scene as follows:

§1

On to War

PAUL sits thinking deeply – not sleeping at first – not at first dreaming.

The shadows descend about him. He reappears – but now this is in his meditation – still sitting on his throne, but in great darkness. Then, like thistledown, the newspapers begin to fly about him. They droop

²⁷³ Williams notes that, in the first part alone, there are "62 expository and 211 dialogue titles, plus inserted posters, newsbills, banners, telegrams, etc." (98).

²⁷⁴ Williams cites Sylvia Hardy (250), but also refers to contemporary reviews by Dorothy Richardson (1929), and Paul Rotha (1930), that say much the same thing.

and curl about. Some fly up towards the screen so as to be seen in detail. (I suggest producer shall study skate swimming about in an aquarium.) One sees:

Sons of Clavery. War! War!

The Claverian Patriot. War! War!

The words, War! War! detach themselves and fly across amidst the papers.

They become like a snowstorm and change in shape, changing into aeroplanes that pass ever more swiftly. (168-9; emphasis in original)

The scenario here strikingly animates the printed texts as moving film images, some of which are legible, and some of which are simply illegible visible objects. As printed words take on the properties of moving images, this brings a new dimension to the idea of adaptation from prose to film. This is not a process of finding visual analogies for verbal words, but rather of adapting printed words to cinematic modes of representation. Moreover, the scenario shows the process of this adaptation, as words begin on the page and metamorphose not only into filmic moving objects, but further into the objects of the war the words describe. This passage of the scenario thus breaks down not only barriers between prose and film representation, but also of form and content, as the words metamorphose into the aeroplanes that are the instrument of war. As such, this style of writing also represents a remarkable attempt not only to create formal literary-filmic hybridity, but also to develop new modes of literary film narrative adaptation.

However, Wells claimed that he never specifically intended for this film to be made;²⁷⁵ indeed, rather he wrote it as a challenge to film producers and technicians, inventing scenes freely with the intention of discovering how far the possibilities of film could stretch under the auspices of literary imagination, presenting the film in an “imaginary cinema theatre” created solely of his writing (21). In so doing, he made any attempt at filming as difficult and as expensive as possible, thereby shielding himself from criticism regarding any actual adaptation of his film-novel scenario, as well as undermining filmmaking by comparison to his writing, proclaiming that it would be near impossible to realise his written version and vision in that fledgling medium: “The writer discusses an imaginary film with the reader [...] at the least the writer hopes this will prove a provocative and interesting failure.” The failure here is not of the writing, but of the film. Wells used the scenario to engage with film, reflecting both on its failures and potentials, hoping to entice his reader to engage similarly with these issues.²⁷⁶ At best, he considered that the scenario might make “a producible film” which would advance film art in the way that he deemed Hardy’s *Dynasts* might do, as an “intellectual and aesthetic entertainment” (18-9). Moreover, his hybrid illustrates how different forms can extend and build on one another, rather than diverge or separate according to traditional medium specificity theory.

Ultimately, Wells’s film-novel never did transfer from page to screen. From a film historical viewpoint, this was partly due to the conservatism of the British and American film industries in refusing to explore the less realist, more psychological,

²⁷⁵ The published book includes an introduction, where Wells discussed film’s future potential as an art form, its need for special effects, and its relation to other media, as well as pointing out, before and after the scenario, the difficulties that could be encountered if his film were ever developed.

²⁷⁶ However, he was aware that his published scenario would never have the same effect or reach that a film adaptation of the work would have, closing his book with the following words: “Unhappily not one in a thousand who would see this gladly on a screen will ever read it as a book” (254).

supernatural, intellectual, experimental vision that he had of film, including moments where written texts are not dissolved into film or statically represented on title cards, but become moving objects on screen while remaining legible documents, and metamorphosing into the concepts they represented. Yet the film-novel equally shows Wells's reluctance to let go of his prose writing and more fully engage with film scenario writing as it was practiced at the time.²⁷⁷ While his scenario was more focused on integrating film technologies than film writing, the experiment nevertheless represents the extension of Wells's visionary futuristic science fiction to a visionary, future film. Even though in retrospect, in 1933, Wells would end up calling this endeavour "entirely amateurish" (11-2), his hybrid writing remained innovative. Thus, not only was Wells prophetic in his science fiction, he was also adventurous and prescient in imagining the future of film and film writing.

Although *The King Who Was a King* failed to be adapted to the screen, Wells continued with experimental film writing and, a few years later, his writing was not only adapted to the screen, but also proved a critical success: Wells's 1933 novel, *The Shape of Things to Come*, was adapted to film in 1936, the most expensive British film made to date.²⁷⁸ James Chapman and Nicholas J. Cull claim that there had never been anything like it before and that its originality was based in its hybridity: it was "unusual in so far as it was a hybrid of a literary adaptation and an original screen story" (28).

²⁷⁷ Low, for instance, dismisses his approach as "highly intellectual and verbal," arguing that his presentation indicates that he had "little understanding of film as visual-storytelling," and criticises his decision to disregard synchronised sound in favour of silent film action (4: 242).

²⁷⁸ The overall production cost is estimated at around £300,000. Alexander Korda bought the film rights from Wells for £10,000, plus royalties, and agreed to a contract that "virtually conferred dictatorial rights" to Wells (Williams, *Wells* 107).

Wells involved himself fully in the film's production process, only to find the difficulties of adapting his writing to the screen: "how little I knew about the cinema when I wrote the scenario. Many of the sequences which slipped quite easily from my pen were extremely difficult to screen, and some were quite impossible" (*Film Weekly*, 29 Feb 1936, 8). Wells, who had already admitted to the "amateurish"-ness of his previous attempt, now had to concede to conventions and constrictions of actual filmmaking. Despite this, the end result was a film that, by all accounts, had moved closer towards his imagined idea of film as "intellectual and aesthetic entertainment" than conventional films (see Chapman and Cull 27-42; Williams, *Wells* 106-20).

Theatre and film critic Allardyce Nicoll, writing in 1936, was one of the earliest critical theorists to acknowledge the challenges of writing for the screen, arguing that, "for the securing of that mastery is required not only a great amount of experimentation but also an exhaustive examination of cinematic devices and of cinematic principles, such as the stage has had in its possession for centuries" (*Film and Theatre* 162). Even Nicoll, who fiercely championed medium specific writing, acknowledged that the path toward film's development lay in experimentation with writing and the techniques that film had to offer, which did not preclude hybrid media writing, but rather required it. Wells, through his writerly trials and errors, inventively explored and experimented with writing across media in the early years of film.

iii. Regressive Progress – Rivalling the Stage

Far from being a literary partisan, as so many authors were, Wells declared in 1935 that film had the "possibility of becoming the greatest art form" that had ever existed. His claim was based not on it being a medium different from all other media, but from

its ability to incorporate many media, including literary writing. He argued that, due to voice production having now “reached a point of perfection,” it was able to go further than any other art, which could involve “literary collateral” in the form of the novel or the theatre (*The Era*, 11 Dec. 1935, 20).²⁷⁹

Yet not all authors shared his enthusiasm for dialogue in film art. Synchronised sound film faced considerably more opposition than silent film had from literati who feared that film would rival and replace the theatre. Nicoll attempted to counter these worries: “we ought to rid our minds of the fear that the cinema may kill the theatre,” arguing that the theatre had endured many difficult times before and has had “far worse rivals than the cinema” in the past (24).²⁸⁰ Recalling the first chapters of this thesis, we have seen the low regard in which the theatre and theatrical writing were held in the early and mid-nineteenth century, and many of the social, cultural, and legal obstacles faced by theatrical writers. We saw too, coinciding with early film technology at the end of the century, that theatre had been revitalised through original works by celebrated dramatists such as Barrie and Shaw, whose profession was no longer deemed to be that of a “hack.” Subsequently, however, the emergence of film as a mass medium placed theatre back into a less certain position, especially once sound enabled the audible representation of dramatic dialogue on screen.²⁸¹

²⁷⁹ By 1936, however, Wells expressed that he was “more than a little disillusioned with films,” stating that “They *could* be magnificent art, but all the art has still to be learnt.” Turning from film, he championed the directness of prose writing: “the temptation to go back to writing books with nothing between you and your reader but the printer – no producers, directors, art directors, camera men, actors and actresses, cutters and editors – is almost irresistible.” Despite the attitude expressed here, Williams points out that Wells did not give up on writing for the cinema, indicating his ongoing enthusiasm for it (*Wells* 128; emphasis in original).

²⁸⁰ Nicoll likened the opposition and position of film in the early twentieth century to that of theatre in the sixteenth century, lamenting and criticising the fact that, despite its possibilities and positive achievements, little attention had been paid to film by theatre scholars (6-7).

²⁸¹ Contrary to the notion that sound film was detrimental to theatre, Balázs believed in 1930 that sound film was “rescuing the theatre,” arguing that theatre would be forced to revert back to “its pure form, its essence, which is not visual (or even auditory!), but imaginative.” He reasoned that a certain form of theatre had been rendered obsolete by sound film, which had “pushed its way onto the stage,” but that

Concomitantly, pressure increased upon film to conform to medium specificity theories if it was to continue to be viewed as an art form: in order to differentiate itself from theatre, film had to literally and metaphorically find its own voice and maintain its status as an art. Nicoll's 1936 book was devoted to this endeavour, correctly prophesying that,

once we have passed by the period when the younger form has, imitatively, been forced to rely on the achievements of the elder, there will come a time when the two will settle down to pursuing their own independent paths. (24)

Prior to this, however, the advent of synchronised sound technologies pushed film back into a regressive alliance with its closest media relation: "film, which had been developing its own technique, [was] swept back to depend on the stage once more" (124).

Film not only turned once again to stage material for adaptation and to theatrical writers to write film dialogue, but also modified its cinematography to accommodate spoken dialogue and stage conventions. Roger Manvell finds that early adaptations of "stage plays for the '100 percent talkie' film kept relatively close to recorded theatre," adding that, in order to show plays off as films, "a few bold outdoor scenes or 'montages' [were] thrown in between acts or scenes" (31).²⁸² The increasing importance of theatrical material and writers for the early talkies meant that

this would enable theatre to "become theatre once again." By renouncing all claims of naturalism and realism to film, theatre could "resume the development of its own autonomous existence" by drawing attention to its own mechanisms and forms of expression and performance, in order "to represent abstraction [and] the purely imaginative," cardinal high modernist aesthetic values (142-3).

²⁸² Manvell was the first director of the British Film Academy in 1947.

playwrights had more power to demand faithful reproductions of their work, after decades of having to adapt to silent film imagery and title cards.

This was particularly the case with Shaw, who now deemed film to be a medium competent enough to screen his plays. However, his conditions concerning their adaptation made clear that he had no intention of adapting his plays to film, but saw only that film should adapt itself to his plays. Like Wells, he believed that his writing could help film to advance. But, as he refused initially to engage in hybrid or collaborative writing, the early adaptations of his plays proved abysmal failures, as the case studies below demonstrate.

As Shaw did not turn to film primarily for financial remuneration or to gain a reputation, but rather from a desire to have the widest possible audience for his work, he had more bargaining power with filmmakers than most other literary writers. Therefore, at first, Shaw's vision for his plays on screen unfolded just as he decreed and intended. It did so because of his celebrated status, sought after by the film industry, his experience with producing stage adaptations, the force of his personality, and his financial independence. Shaw was able to establish complete and exceptional legal control over adaptations, as an excerpt from one film contract shows:

The films produced under this agreement shall be faithful reproductions of the Play as written and designed for ordinary theatrical representation by the Author according to the current authorized published editions of the same without transpositions interpolations omissions or any alterations misrepresenting the Author

whether for better or worse except such as the Author may consent to himself or suggest. (qtd. in Costello 32)²⁸³

This authority enabled Shaw's initial play-to-film adaptations, *How He Lied to Her Husband* (1904) and *Arms and the Man* (1894), to be adapted to the screen in the early 1930s exactly as he specified, without changes. Both films ended up as critical and financial failures, proving the case that writing that succeeded on the stage did not succeed in film without modification or, as I am arguing in this chapter, hybrid writing.

The reason that Shaw refused to have his plays adapted until the advent of sound was that "their greatest strength was in their dialogues" (*New York Times*, 19 May 1929, 26). His enthusiasm regarding the film adaptation of his plays was based on a view of film as essentially a recording device that was able to broadcast his original and unaltered work to the masses, rather than an emerging art form with its own modes of narration besides dialogue and acting on a set with props.²⁸⁴

Shaw had experienced numerous successes with theatrical adaptations of his plays over several decades and tried to utilise synchronised sound film as an extension and improvement of their theatrical staging. However, this did not necessarily comply with the needs or demands of the medium and its audiences. As in the adaptation of his play texts to the stage, Shaw was determined to be involved in the production, and

²⁸³ These advantages were exclusive to Shaw. His case contrasts sharply with those of other writers, who might have made a name for themselves that gave them some clout, but had neither Shaw's experience with theatrical adaptations nor the economic resources to resist the lucrative lure of the screen for long. A later "Sample Licence for Film Rights" is also reprinted in Dukore (*Shaw on Cinema* 173-80), showing how meticulously Shaw protected and dictated his legal rights.

²⁸⁴ Cartmell argues that the introduction of synchronised sound changed how adaptations were defined, due to the arrival of spoken words, foregrounding a comparative approach between film adaptation and source (*Adaptation in the Sound Era* 1). She states that comparative adaptation discourse began with the marketing campaigns of early sound films, and carried over into critical discussion, with lasting consequences for academic adaptation study. Cartmell discusses classical film adaptations; the first adaptations of works by Shaw provide case studies of the failings of a full fidelity approach.

appeared to relish the opportunities afforded by film. He gave instructions on costumes and set design, and was present on set and at rehearsals. In spite of this, both films bombed critically and economically.

Despite these failures, Shaw proudly distinguished his ventures into film from the typical Hollywood adaptations and defended the films, initially refusing to see any problems in the adaptations of his plays to film. In “My First Talkie” (*Malvern Festival Book*, August 1931),²⁸⁵ he described *How He Lied to Her Husband* as an “experiment” and blamed Hollywood’s filmmaking deficiencies for its failure, critiquing Hollywood’s notion that “a screened play was really only a Movie with spoken sub-titles,” in which dialogue was cut, expressionlessly voiced, and unnecessary actions as well as outdoor scenery were included to show it off as a “Movie.” Pre-empting Manvell’s assessment of the first “talkies,” Shaw did not include his attempts at film adaptation in this typification, although those involved did,²⁸⁶ but instead, located their virtues and distinguishing features in the dramatic performances and the “verbal fencing matches.” As such, Shaw’s verdict on his adaptations was that, not only would film enhance theatre as a recording device for it, but also that film would be enhanced through the dramatic capabilities of theatre and the brilliance of Shaw’s writing.

However, this view was not shared by others with different visions for the development of film and was furthermore regressive in returning to the cinematic techniques of stage plays adapted in the 1910s. Nor was Shaw’s vision as

²⁸⁵ Reprinted in full in Costello (36-7) and Dukore (*Shaw on Cinema* 76-7).

²⁸⁶ Cecil Lewis, a friend of Shaw and co-founder of the BBC in 1922, worked as a director on both films. He provided the foreword to Donald P. Costello’s book on Shaw in 1965, where he comments on the adaptation: “I had never directed a film in my life, but this was clearly nothing more than a licence to film a stage play” (x).

experimental as he claimed, as his film was viewed as “a screen-picture of the written drama,” echoing his own criticism of Hollywood films, and, according to Nicoll, “[t]he result was that no more dismal film has ever been shown to the public” (*Film and Theatre* 164-5).

Rather than striving to adapt and develop his plays to the possibilities of film, Shaw’s failure to see film as anything more than a mass showcase for his written words and staged plays adversely affected not only the reception of his work by film audiences, but also his further involvement in film. Manvell suggests that these two “artistic and economic disasters,” made “under his dominant influence,” resulted in the neglect of other plays “for several years until [Shaw] learned the necessity for adaptation to a medium so radically different from the theatre” (32).

Shaw continued to blame film rather than himself for his failures in cinematic writing and production. A Fabian socialist, he faulted the capitalist and mechanical structures of the film industry for aesthetic failures generally, and failures in adaptation specifically: “When it gets a good bit of stuff it takes infinite pains to drag it down to its own level, firmly believing, of course, that it is improving it all the time” (15 February 1935, *Letters* 401).

Shaw’s enthusiasm for film remained, however, even after his failed initial efforts at adaptation, and he reaffirmed his belief in 1938 that “[t]he cinema from the very beginning has been of much greater importance than the theatre,” explaining that, “[i]ts possibilities are tremendous, though they are as yet perverted by childishly inefficient control” (*Star*, 6 Dec 1938). In 1936, Shaw admitted that he still had a great deal to learn about film, but that so did the film industry:

Really the whole business of the screen is a most wonderful art.

Nobody I think has yet had the least idea of how much can be done with it. In fact we are at present in the stage when anybody who really knows what can be done with it gets cast out of the studio because he knows nothing about it. (qtd. in Dukore, *Shaw on Cinema* 118)

The acknowledgement that film is “a most wonderful art” moves away from his earlier view of cinema as a recording device for his plays, marking an evolution in Shaw’s attitudes to film and progress in his views regarding theatre-to-film adaptation.

In the years between his failed talkies and the 1938 release of the successful film adaptation of his play *Pygmalion* (1938), Shaw wanted to have more plays adapted, but only if he maintained control over the film adaptations, fearful of what would happen if he agreed to let Hollywood adapt his plays without that control. He repeatedly indicated that he did want to have his plays filmed, but “not by the office boy,” explaining: “Hollywood and Elstree mostly consider that I do not know my business and that the office boy does. Hence our misunderstandings” (September 1936, qtd. in Dukore, *Shaw on Cinema* 99). Shaw judged himself to be of paramount importance to any production of his work on stage and screen, and his close involvement with adaptations of his work is detailed in Richard Huggett’s dramatic reconstruction leading up to the first stage production of *Pygmalion* in 1914 (*The First Night of Pygmalion*, 1969).²⁸⁷

Over the years, Shaw had received many offers from Hollywood, not with regard to any specific plays or work, but generally, as a name, to attract audiences. By rejecting

²⁸⁷ Based on letters, diaries, press reports, and witness accounts, it focuses on the dynamic between Shaw and his two principal actors, Mrs. Patrick Campbell and Herbert Beerbohm Tree.

these offers, like Barrie with *Peter Pan*, he only ended up receiving more offers, with rising fees. Despite his initial willingness to write original screenplays, he turned down offers to write them, feeling incapable of doing so at his advanced age (see Dukore, *Screenplays* 6-7). Nevertheless, he saw the necessity of adapting his plays to film, realising that, as he was getting older, sooner or later someone else would attempt to adapt his plays if he did not: “I am extremely anxious to have all of my own plays filmed before I die,” he said in 1933. “But the studios ar[e]n[’]t yet doing the class of work my plays require” (qtd. in Dukore, *Shaw on Cinema* 83). In contrast to his initial willingness to adapt his plays to sound film, Shaw’s reluctance signalled a more considered and careful approach that would inform his next filmic endeavour.

As a result, in 1938, when *Pygmalion* was adapted to filmic conventions, it was an all-round success both with critics and audiences, hailed, for example, by *Variety* as “one of the wonders of post-depression Broadway” (see Costello 77-8). *Pygmalion*’s accomplishment as an adaptation was further confirmed by the fact that Shaw, along with his fellow credited writers, received the Academy Award for Best Writing (Adapted Screenplay) in 1939.²⁸⁸ On the back of his success with the adaption of *Pygmalion*, Shaw declared ostentatiously in an interview with *Film Weekly* that

People in the film industry insist on interfering with the natural way of telling a story [...] Film producers must understand that the art of telling a story is really a knack which you either have or don[’]t have.

Very few people have it. I’m one of them. (12 Feb. 1938, qtd. in

Dukore, *Shaw on Cinema* 131)

²⁸⁸ To date, this has made him the only person to receive a Screenwriting Academy Award and the Nobel Prize for Literature (1925).

Apparently forgetting his earlier attempts at adaptation, Shaw here took credit for a film that was by no means straightforward in its creation, as the following discussion of the British film adaptation of *Pygmalion* attests.

After so much opposition to, criticism of, and disdain for Hollywood, Shaw's decision to entrust an independent filmmaker with his work rather than the studios was unsurprising, yet his choice surprised many at the time: in 1935, the relatively unknown Hungarian producer Gabriel Pascal had approached the nearly 80-year-old Shaw and managed to persuade him, where many others had failed, to agree to a film adaptation of his 1912 play.²⁸⁹ Shaw explained his reasons for trusting Pascal with his play in a 1941 letter intended for publication: Pascal, he wrote, "thought that everything I did was right [in contrast to the script writers in his studio] Naturally I quite agreed with him," adding "The man is a genius: that is all I have to say about him" (qtd. in Dukore, *Shaw on Cinema* 153).²⁹⁰ Shaw was evidently flattered by Pascal's admiration of his work and believed that he would therefore follow Shaw's directives for the film adaptation of *Pygmalion* exactly.

In the same letter, he explained his worry that, after his death, worse fates may befall his creations:

I could find nobody who wanted to do anything with my plays but mutilate them, murder them [...] The result was to be presented to the public with my name attached and the assurance that nobody need fear

²⁸⁹ Due to Shaw's age and Pascal's obscurity, scholars often puzzle over how he achieved this. Brunel records his surprise at Shaw's choice, stating his own wish to have been selected (*Nice Work* 33).

²⁹⁰ Shaw and Pascal continued working together, less successfully, on other adaptations: *Major Barbara* (1905) in 1941 and *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1901) in 1945 (see Dukore *Screenplays*; Costello 83-146).

that it had any Shavian quality whatever, and was not real genuine
Hollywood. (qtd. in Dukore, *Shaw on Cinema* 153)

But it was not enough to be flattered. He therefore further secured total legal rights for the production in an exceptional contract for a literary writer. Rather than selling his rights, he would only “proceed by licensing their exploitation” (*Letters* 860). He was keenly aware that owning the film rights was the only way to maintain control over his adaptation and that by retaining them, he would theoretically have complete power over the production, as he had to give his approval for any changes made by the adapters. He furthermore obtained an additional five-year license for the film, which stated explicitly “the right of the author and no one else to change the script, and a royalty of 10 per cent on gross receipts from exhibitors rather than distributors” (Dukore, *Screenplays* 66). As such, all authority and power over producer, script, and other film properties and staff belonged to the literary author. Shaw also reserved the right to refuse a renewed license if he was unhappy with any aspect of the film. He could thus prohibit further distribution of the film and have a completely new adaptation made. By contrast to nineteenth-century theatrical contracts, Shaw had achieved what Dickens and his contemporaries could only dream of, retaining legal authority not only over the production, but also over future film distribution. Since Pascal, producers, and financiers had little power over the film, Pascal experienced difficulties in finding financial backing.²⁹¹

As with his prior adaptations, Shaw was theoretically, in complete power; yet this film made many changes to the original plays, both with and without Shaw’s agreement, which scholars agree played a crucial part in its success, by contrast to the

²⁹¹ He finally managed to form a syndicate in 1937 called “Pascal Films,” and started to produce *Pygmalion* (Costello 51).

earlier adaptations, where he refused to allow changes (see Manvell 63-73; Costello 49-82; Dukore, *Screenplays* 71-87). Studying the production of the film, Bernard F. Dukore remarks that “[i]n most of these particulars, Shaw had his way,” but finds that he “did not win every battle. Indeed, he was not always aware there were battles” (*Screenplays* 70). Despite Shaw’s contractual power, he was often overruled or not consulted, with his age undoubtedly a contributor to the declining control he held over production. In a note to Pascal written in November 1937, Shaw indicated: “I do not propose to interfere in the direction of the picture, since I cannot, at my age, undertake it myself” (qtd. in Dukore, *Screenplays* 69). Thus, apart from the first day of shooting, Shaw was not present on set, unlike his role in the previous adaptations, but gave advice from afar on the costumes, scenery, and more.

Another major obstacle that the finished film of *Pygmalion* had to overcome before it could be released in America was that of censorship. This was something that Shaw, like many other writers before him and continuing for decades after him, could do nothing about. Film censorship regulations known as the Production Code Administration (P.C.A.), and later the Hays Code, objected both to profanity (words such as “slut” or “damn” and their variants) and sexual immorality. The P.C.A. interfered directly with the dialogue and took control away from the writer. Shaw, who had protected himself legally through his contract, was nevertheless powerless against agencies which were able to prohibit the release of the film.²⁹²

Sometimes dialogue was “sanitized without Shaw’s knowledge” and the character of Alfred Doolittle, who was cohabiting with a woman to whom he was not married and

²⁹² Pascal, however, did retain copies of the censored scenes and appealed successfully for their reinsertion a decade later (Dukore, *Screenplays* 76-7).

essentially “selling” his daughter to men, had to be corrected, despite Pascal’s protesting not only on behalf of the film, but also on behalf of the writer:

You can’t translate Bernard Shaw or any genius to the screen if you make compromises. Otherwise you put water in your wine and – what the hell! The dialogue of a great writer is to him like champagne. You can’t change it and keep it. (qtd. in Dukore, *Screenplays* 75-6)

Bearing in mind that Pascal himself made changes to the script and story, his protest (including the emphatic, censor-defying “what the hell”), against compromises and changes required by film censorship boards appears slightly hypocritical. For example, one of the main disagreements that Shaw had with Pascal, as well as with director Anthony Asquith, was the casting of Professor Higgins and the presentation of him as a lover to Eliza. Although Shaw was consulted on casting decisions, his advice was not always taken. Shaw believed Leslie Howard to be completely miscast as Higgins, as “the public will like him and probably want him to marry Eliza, which is just what I don’t want” (qtd. in Dukore, *Screenplays* 67). Shaw thus rewrote the ending so that it was made more explicit that Eliza and Freddy, with Higgins’s blessing, had a romantic future together.

However, this was not the only or most significant undercutting of Shaw’s authority and authorship: the crediting of the American film placed another name, Ian Dalrymple next to Shaw’s (albeit in smaller font), also crediting W.P. Lipscomb and Cecil Lewis as scenario writers. Additionally, the standard work on British films adds Anatole de Grunwald to the list.²⁹³ It appears very difficult to distinguish what

²⁹³ The International Movie Database finalises this list with a sixth name for “additional dialogue (uncredited),” that of Kay Walsh. Walsh was in a relationship with David Lean at this time, who was the editor of *Pygmalion*, before he began his directing career, so this might explain why she wrote dialogue and yet was not officially credited for it (McFarlane, “Kay Walsh”).

contribution was made by whom, as Dukore observes: “Who did what to Shaw’s screenplay is unclear, but what is clear is that various hands tampered with it” (*Screenplays* 75). It is clear that the screenwriting and crediting resulted in a breach of contract with Shaw and violated his legal rights. Whether he was aware of this and how he reacted remain uncertain and undocumented, though, as seen before, this practice was common in Hollywood, where writers were often credited when very few of their words remained in the films. Shaw had written the initial screenplay, and believed himself to have been involved in all decisions, according to his legal contract; yet he nevertheless had to share his authorial credit with other writers who had contributed fewer words than he had and had added to or re-worked his writing.

In spite of his diminished status in the writing credits, the American version of the film *Pygmalion* gave Shaw a voice in a spoken preface to the film,²⁹⁴ exploiting sound technology to allow the writer to directly address the American audience.²⁹⁵ This speech, in which he expresses some of his former sentiments regarding his first talkie, offers a multitude of insights into his view of film and his treatment as a literary writer at this time. From the filmmakers’ perspective, who had most likely been the ones who asked Shaw “to say something very agreeable” to the audience, his speech should have taken on the form of an introduction or explanation to or authorisation of the film *Pygmalion* by its celebrated author, rather than the critical monologue that it ended up being.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁴ Dukore discusses differences between the American and English version (*Screenplays* 75).

²⁹⁵ The preface was transcribed in *The New York Times*, on 11 Dec. 1938 (129), with the title “Oh, Shaw Again.” It is also reprinted in Dukore (*Screenplays* 478-9).

²⁹⁶ The speech is no longer included with the film, possibly because of Shaw’s criticism of Hollywood. Dukore attests to it being “anti-Hollywood”, with some contemporary reviews also commenting on this (*Screenplays* 86).

Firstly, he expressed enthusiasm for the technological capacities of film when he speaks of his delight that, whilst being in London, he can address an audience in America. He tells viewers that his early visions of film have been realised, and that he is now able to reach a wider audience, not just through his written words, but also with his own voice synchronised with images of his person speaking. In announcing that he is not only the author of the film, “but I’m also Bernard Shaw,” he exploits the filmic preface to present himself not just as a nominal, textual credit, but also as a historical, embodied, living person.

Secondly, as in his former short talkie, Shaw justifies himself to the audience concerning the adverse publicity he has received and defends the previous failed adaptations of his plays. As in most of his statements about film, he ends by slighting the American film industry, claiming that he could make better films if given a chance, asserting that, with the audience’s approval, this might be possible.

Thirdly, he defends literary writers and objects to their treatment in contrast to others in the film business: “One thing that you[’]ve never dreamed of doing is – when you want to know how to make a film – send for the author. You’ll never send for the author.” The second-person plural attacks Hollywood rather than the general audience. Importantly, he had never himself experienced such neglect, but felt the need to protect his fellow writers. Indeed, Shaw had taken many progressive steps to support the profession of other writers, founding, among others, the League of Dramatists in 1931 and being a long-time member of the Society of Authors. Redressing their neglect in Hollywood, his voice-over preface states that he is “the author of the film,” emphasising his title and position, not just as the writer of the film, but more authoritatively, as *the film’s* author.

He does not, however, ignore Pascal as a maker of the film, but praises him as a subordinate for having “tried the extraordinary experiment of putting a play on the screen just as the author wrote and as he wanted it produced.” This claim reinforces the view that Shaw remained unaware of the changes made both by Pascal and the American censors. But it also suggests another possibility: that he wanted to take credit for them himself, a point to which I return in the final paragraphs of this study.

Ultimately, it appears that Shaw had learned from his previous endeavours and accepted that it was his writing that had to adapt to film, and not merely the other way round. The screenplay of *Pygmalion* cut the play’s dialogue and its alterations and additions resulted in over one-third new material. Shaw had taken the opportunity to adapt his play to cinematic conventions, as he stated himself, to write “all the new scenes that the screen makes possible and that are impossible in the theatre” (qtd. in Manvell 66).²⁹⁷

In 1939, Shaw confidently proclaimed: “My stuff is as good on the screen as it is on the stage” (*Cine-Technician* 23.5: 72-3). His willingness to adapt not just his work, but also himself to another medium can also be seen in his decision to join the Screenwriters Association in 1939 and, despite being in his mid-80s, his willingness to pay a ten-year fee in advance (see Dukore, *Screenplays* 19-20). Shaw thus supported innovation and adaptations in interdisciplinary writing and associations.

²⁹⁷ Costello provides a comparative analysis between the film and the play (55-77). The scenario is published in Dukore (*Screenplays* 223-72), prefaced with a short explanatory note: “This scenario is not technically complete; but it indicates exactly what the producers had to work on in the studio, with all the omissions from and additions to the text of the original play. These are so extensive that the printed play should be carefully kept out of the studio, as it can only mislead and confuse the producer and the performers.”

His evolving attitudes to theatre-film adaptations and journeys into interdisciplinary, hybrid writing between theatre and cinema can also be seen – quite astonishingly so – in his decisions to allow the screenplay to replace the first edition of the play and to *become the authoritative edition of the play*. Nicoll had prophesied in 1936 that, once film began to develop its own themes, “then the time will have arrived for the presentation of those themes in screen-play versions” (33).²⁹⁸ He likened the future emancipation of the screenplay into print to that of the theatre, in which the published play had been initially held back due to inadequate copyright protection for such publications.²⁹⁹ Nicoll’s reason for championing the screenplay as literary art was that it would increase the efforts and quality of screenwriters and establish film as a more eminent medium within “the realm of artistic creation.” In so doing, he invoked Shaw as a model for the publication of plays.³⁰⁰ Shaw realised that mere dialogue and technical instructions were not sufficient to make a play readable for the public. He therefore “provided both readable matter to accompany the dialogue and prefaces intended to add to the impression made by perusal of the dramas themselves.” Nicoll called for “a new Shaw of the films [to] arise,” whose “wit need not fear lack of appreciation” so that screenplays might be similarly published “not with technical directions calculated solely for the studio but with a re-rendering of these directions in terms of a general reading public” (34).

²⁹⁸ Two of the earliest advocates of the literary value of the screenplay were John Gassner and Dudley Nichol, who published their first collection of *The Twenty Best Film Plays* in 1943, including an essay on “The Screenplay as Literature” by Gassner (xxviii).

²⁹⁹ Nicoll also references playwright Henry Arthur Jones, who believed that if drama was issued more habitually in book form “the theatre inevitably would gain in prestige and the authors would take greater pains in the penning of their works.” Jones wrote an article in 1921, “The Dramatist and the Photoplay,” championing the art of film writing for the dramatist, considering that it provided infinite opportunities in contrast to the stage (*The Mentor* 9.6: 29).

³⁰⁰ Shaw’s initial motivation for publishing his plays is given by Anthony Jenkins as arising from the frustration at the actors and conditions of theatres, as well as a wish for his plays to be read by a wider public than the theatres would bring (260). Martin Meisel (*Shaw*) explores how nineteenth-century theatre, its conventions, techniques and genres, influenced Shaw in his ideas and dramaturgy.

Strikingly, Shaw himself rose to Nicoll's challenge, becoming the "new Shaw of the films" when he decided to publish the screenplay to *Pygmalion* in print. His decision to publish it may have been the result of wanting to show his film writing, untampered with by other writers, as the published screenplay resembles the play more than it does the finished film, which changed during the production process, including additional writing by other writers.³⁰¹ Yet this makes the screenplay, according to Roger Manvell, "an interesting hybrid, lying halfway between stage and screen" (66). In the process, for all Shaw's differences from Wells and Barrie, he joins both by being an experimental, hybrid writer between literature and film in the early years of the twentieth century.

The published screenplay contains changes made for the film, such as the added scenes indicated above; more interesting still, these were promoted by Shaw *as being the actual play*. First published in print in 1916, the play was overwritten by Shaw following its adaptation to film and now presented as the authoritative print of his play, echoing Mary Shelley's actions regarding the re-publication of *Frankenstein* following its stage adaptation 110 years earlier.

That the film version now took precedence over the theatre version indicates how far Shaw had developed in his ideas about theatre-film relations since his previous adaptations and reluctance to adapt his work to the technologies, conventions, and aesthetics of a different medium. It shows how much he had adapted his work and writing to the new medium of film and that he saw rewriting *Pygmalion* for film not as a second and separate work, but (as the film industry had advertised) as an evolution in his writing that positioned this particular work between the former play

³⁰¹ For example, only seven of the fourteen new variations for the film appeared in Shaw's printed version (Manvell 66).

and the finished film. In the 1941 newly published version of the “play” – a hybrid that lay half-way between stage play and film play – Shaw explained how he saw the text in his “note for technicians”:

A complete representation of the play as printed for the first time in this edition is technically possible only on the cinema screen or on stages furnished with exceptionally elaborate machinery. For ordinary theatrical use the scenes separated by rows of asterisks are to be omitted. (xi)

Shaw clearly viewed the text as a hybrid piece of writing equally suitable for performance and production by the most technologically advanced theatres as well as the screen.³⁰² The play is therefore not the halfway house between stage and film that Manvell describes, but, similar to Barrie’s multimedia representations of *Peter Pan* (play, novel, screenplay), a palimpsest lending itself to representation on both stage and screen, with minor technical alterations, thus subverting prior versions of medium specificity that insisted on separating the two forms.

What Barrie, Wells, and Shaw reveal is that adaptation, itself a hybrid, required hybrid writing, rather than finding analogies for one medium in another to avoid transgressing medium specificity, as so many screenwriting handbooks and film adaptation theorists had advised, starting with Boris M. Eikhenbaum in 1926: “To translate a literary work into the language of film means to find in film language analogues for the stylistic principles of that literary work” (122). Rather than using

³⁰² Shaw’s earlier sentiment that film could be greater than theatre is also inadvertently echoed in his prefatory note, which laments that most theatres were inadequately equipped to stage the new version. However, Nicoll points out that “[b]elief in the future growth of an artistic, penetrating and emotionally arresting cinema is not antagonistic to an equally firm belief in the future development of the theatre” (23), which appears to be the stance that Shaw himself took after the successful transferral of his work to the screen.

analogies to leap over the boundary lines drawn by medium specificity, these authors wrote experimentally and daringly in the no-man's land between them, sometimes succeeding, sometimes failing, but with great innovation, enterprise, and verve. Their hybrid writing points to gaps in theories of adaptation spanning the twentieth century. For example, Geoffrey Wagner's widely followed argument in 1975 that literary film adaptations which are least like literature and most like film are aesthetically the best adaptations pays little attention to the space between or to the hybridity of such adaptations. Studying literary writers who have engaged adventurously in such hybrid writing, in this period, as well as other periods, helps to fill this and other critical and theoretical gaps.

Conclusion

This thesis has demonstrated that British literary writers between 1823 and 1938 were sometimes reactionary, sometimes inventive, and always resourceful when writing about and writing adaptations of their work across media. This has been evidenced through studying their writing across a range of genres (letters, diaries, fiction, drama, playbills, screenplays, journalism, criticism, lawsuits, and charters of writers' collectives, as well as their spoken words in film and hybrid writing across media), in which they manifested a range of responses, from furious condemnation of adaptations, through bitter rivalries with adapters, to collaborations and agreements with adapters, to attempts to adapt their writing in other media, with varying degrees of success.

It has been established that the legal, aesthetic and cultural hierarchies of writing and adapting between literature and early film were clearly shaped by those influencing stage adaptations of nineteenth-century fiction. British writers, during this time, were widely dependent on their government to create the framework for the protection of literary works through legal reforms and sanctions. Although improved copyright laws benefitted writers more widely in wider social and cultural contexts as the profession of writers became more fully established and accredited as the century progressed, the prior limitations of the law were also beneficial in that they forced writers to interact as a profession and be proactive in their endeavours regarding both lawful and unlawful adaptation practices of their work. This enabled an openness toward new ways of mediating their work to the public and this willingness to adapt continued with film in the twentieth century.

Despite uncertainties regarding the future dynamics between film, theatre and novel, the importance of film as a medium was widely, and presciently, recognised by many of the literary writers discussed in this thesis. Rather than trying to superimpose literary forms and theories on the emerging medium, many of these literary writers allowed film's technologies and narrative modes to vivify and develop their writing, while others worked to develop modes of writing to work in the space between two media. Adaptation played a central role in this experimental writing. Writing across media was further aided by the fact that, from 1911, writers were able to assert more legal, social, and cultural control over adaptations of their written work.

Even so, legal and intellectual ownership, authorial involvement in adaptations of their work, and questions of whether, as well as how, to adapt were not solely down to the agency of literary writers. Although literary writers themselves often created problems for adaptations of their work, industry conventions and media developments also affected adaptation. The ambivalence of the film industry toward literary writers, simultaneously seeking literary involvement to establish film's claim to high art by association, and yet also rejecting literary involvement to conform to medium specificity theories of art, meant that many literary writers were frustrated, opposed, and restricted in writing for the film industry.

Even when literary authors such as J.M. Barrie and H.G. Wells undertook astute, creative, hybrid approaches to writing across media, the film industry dismissed them, while aesthetic critics worked assiduously to retain media divides. One wonders how film might have developed had aesthetic hybridity been accepted and valued as it is today. Roger Manvell argues with regard to G.B. Shaw, that he might have been "a notable screenwriter had the cinema achieved its voice twenty years earlier, when

Shaw was still urgently seeking production and the widest possible outlet for the witty expression of his ideas” (74). Although it is easy to conjecture that writers such as Shaw, Barrie, and Wells might have been hailed as pioneers in film writing instead of set aside as being too literary for it, the conclusions to be drawn from their writing extend beyond the might-have-been of speculation. Their writing across media shaped and evolved them and their writing, as well as pushing and opposing boundaries set between prose fiction, theatre, and film by academic theories, industry conventions, and political, economic, social and cultural contexts.

During the 1930s and 40s, more prolific relationships emerged between literary writers and filmmakers, shaped predominantly through adaptations of twentieth-century writing. Keith Williams argues that “[c]inematic intertextuality was a hot political as well as aesthetic issue in the thirties,” with writers such as Graham Greene emulating and investigating film form by exploring the “possible intertextuality between the two mediums” of prose fiction and film (*British Writers* 129; 136-9). Unlike Shaw, Barrie, and Wells, Greene was “born a child of the film age,” with Basil Wright claiming that his “built-in filmic style” was not developed by chance, but that his experience as a film critic honed and intensified his approach to writing, which even became “more elaborate than film, at its present stage, [could] cope with” (94). The difference between Greene and the writers discussed in this thesis is that they were shaped by nineteenth-century narrative forms, cultural contexts, and theories as well as the formation of early film. A study of Greene and his contemporaries who wrote across media awaits a sequel to this thesis. Both this future study and the investigations of this thesis, contextualising writers and their adaptive writing in particular social, historical, and media contexts offers the kind of diachronic history

called for by Gregory Semenza in 2018, thereby informing contemporary adaptation practices and existing debates within Adaptation Studies today.

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