The Nontraditional Dickens: Exploring New Methods of Adapting Dickens's Novels to the Contemporary Stage and Screen

A thesis

submitted by

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Abstract

Charles Dickens is renowned as one of the greatest writers of the Victorian era, and his novels have been adapted time and time again on the stage and screen. Most of these productions have been presented as straightforwardly as possible, with the intent to preserve the literary "accuracy" of the text in regard to plot, characters, tone, and setting. In this thesis, I examine three "nontraditional adaptations," works that deviate in some way from the manner in which Dickens's novels have traditionally been adapted. Although these three adaptations use varied methods to contemporize their works for stage and screen, they are united in the attempt to revitalize the familiar narratives so that they may appeal to a modern audience. By analyzing the themes, presentational styles, and theatrical and filmic conventions of these nontraditional adaptations, I hope to challenge the assumption that a "good" or "important" adaptation must be a traditional one.

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Finally, I dedicate this thesis to my boyfriend, Tim Dowling, who has been a paragon of unconditional love and patience from the very beginning. I feel blessed each and every day to have such a selfless and supportive partner.

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Introduction

For the past century and a half, Charles Dickens's works have been among the most popular, canonical, and frequently adapted of any other English novelist. His stories have long been considered classics of English literature, prized for their lush, descriptive prose (or "prolixity," depending on whom one asks), powerful social commentary, poignant characters, and humorous exchanges. Love him or hate him, his novels are important pieces of Victorian cultural history, and they do not appear to be going anywhere soon: his books have never gone out of print, and mainstays such as *A Tale of Two Cities* and *David Copperfield* continue to be taught in high schools and universities all over the globe.[1] There are persistent efforts to market Dickens and his works so that they are relevant and appealing to the ever-changing audience: the Dickens House Museum and Dickens Walking Tours are popular London tourist attractions, and true fanatics can visit "Dickens World," a Dickens-themed amusement park in Chatham, Kent, United Kingdom, which contains a *Great Expectations* log flume, a haunted house, live interactive "characters," and a movie theatre.[2] Of course, a large contributor to the cult(ure) of Charles Dickens is the sheer quantity of theatrical, televised, and cinematic adaptations his novels have inspired. I suspect that a fair number of people who have never opened a Dickens book are probably still familiar with several of his characters and narratives. Why? Because his works have been so thoroughly adapted and referenced, they no longer need to be read in order to be known or understood: they have been neatly folded into Anglo/American culture.

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[1] Simon Swift, "What the Dickens?" *The Guardian*, April 18, 2007, accessed November 4, 2009, http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2007/apr/18/classics.travelnews.

[2] Dickens World, "Dickens World – UK Attraction based in Kent, Chatham – Celebrating the World of Charles Dickens," accessed November 4, 2009, http://www.dickensworld.co.uk.

During his lifetime, Dickens's novels managed to be both critically successful and "of the people," endearing them to people of many classes and nationalities. These stories have retained their popularity even 140 years after his death, exemplifying the kind of longevity most authors can only dream of. In his 1997 study of British national identity in film, Jeffrey Richards evaluates Dickens's broad appeal:

> Dickens was a comic writer of genius, embodying the national sense of humor. He created a gallery of unforgettable characters who testify to that quirky and indelible individuality. He celebrated home and family in a way that appealed to broad public sentiment. His was a pipe and slippers, Sunday roast beef, family Christmas party type of domesticity, undeniably patriarchal but irresistibly warm, comforting and secure. He was deeply sentimental but he wrote from the heart and for an audience which responded…He was animated by a deep hatred of cruelty and injustice and in consequence attacked the legal system, the education system and the workhouse system as well as snobbery, selfishness and greed. But he sought not so much major structural change or the radical overhaul of society as the infusion of fairness, humanity and compassion.[3]

Dickens's novels are easily adapted to stage and screen because of their exciting and often melodramatic content, linear plot structure, and multitude of complex and humorous characters. Literary theorist and adaptation studies scholar Linda Hutcheon writes that the novels' "strongly pictorial descriptions and potential for scenes of spectacle also make them readily adaptable or at least 'adaptogenic.'"[4] Dickens's contemporaries certainly recognized the theatrical promise of his novels: by 1850, at least 240 dramatizations had been staged,[5] turning Dickensian adaptations into "an established industry," as audiences clamored to see their favorite characters brought to life onstage.[6] Today, the most visible Dickensian adaptations are found on film and television, usually in the form of feature films and television serials. These adaptations do not generally attempt to attract the "popular" audience of Dickens's era, but rather cater to an older, sophisticated audience by stressing the adaptation's connection to its literary source.

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[3] Jeffrey Richards, *Films and British National Identity: From Dickens to Dad's Army* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 327.

[4] Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 15.

[5] H. Philip Bolton, *Dickens Dramatized* (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1987), 3.

[6] Bolton 234.

In her book, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, Julie Sanders adopts Deborah Cartmell's three categories of adaptation: transposition, commentary, and analogue.[7] Transposition, in a broad sense, can refer to any text that has been adapted from one medium to another, but other levels of transposition occur when the adaptor relocates the narrative to a new cultural, temporal, and/or geographical context. Commentaries are adaptations that "comment on the politics of the source text, or those of the new *mise-en-scène*, or both, usually by means of alteration or addition," in an attempt to connect the text being adapted with the contemporary culture for which it is being adapted.[8] Finally, analogue adaptations refer to works that follow elements of their original texts but contain few explicit "links" to them (via title, character names, etc.), allowing the adaptations to be understood and enjoyed without any knowledge of their source.[9] While these terms may be a bit problematic, as an adaptation may fall under more than one of those categories, they prove useful in defining a few major ways in which texts are translated into different media.

In this thesis, I examine and analyze three adaptations of three different Dickens novels: Rupert Holmes's 1985 Broadway musical, *Drood*, Alfonso Cuarón's 1998 Hollywood film, *Great Expectations*, and Christopher Durang's 2002 holiday comedy, *Mrs. Bob Cratchit's Wild Christmas Binge*. These three adaptations are indeed concerned, at their most basic level, with interpreting and transcoding Dickens's stories; that is, none of them are spinoffs, sequels, or fanfiction, which tend to contain more plotlines that are original to the adaptor. Yet, because they distance themselves from their source texts in some way, they can be considered nontraditional adaptations—"Dickens with a twist," as it were. Although none of them could be classified as "analogue" as they maintain explicit connections with the novels, they each transpose the action to new temporal and geographical settings, and comment on the plot or narrative style in some way. I use the term "nontraditional adaptations" to refer to works that deviate in some way from the manner in which Dickens's novels have been traditionally adapted: that is, as straightforwardly as possible, with the intent to preserve the literary "accuracy" of the text as well as the historical realism in which the novel is set. Traditional adaptations attempt to retain the characters, plot events, tone, and genre of the original text.

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[7] Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 20.

[8] Sanders 21.

[9] Sanders lists Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979) and Amy Heckerling's *Clueless* (1995) as two examples of filmic analogue adaptations (based on Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Jane Austen's *Emma*, respectively).

Adapting Dickens the "traditional" way is no easy task: his novels are notoriously lengthy (the erroneous belief that he was paid by the word continues to be propagated for this very reason), often containing dozens of characters and intricate subplots. It is simply not possible to condense every detail of a Dickens novel into a play or film that runs three hours or less. This is why the television serial miniseries is such a popular medium for adaptations of literary works: by spreading the plot into multiple installments of two or three hours each, the adaptor is able to integrate as much of the novel as possible, providing an experience that allows the viewer to believe that what he or she is watching is "closer" to the book. Although the intent to capture as many plot and character details is a difficult and admirable one, this has been the primary mode of adapting Dickens thus far to the stage and screen. My project primarily focuses on adaptations that do something different, that dare to tweak and rework the texts in significant ways, effectively turning Dickens on his head. *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, *Great Expectations*, and *Mrs. Bob Cratchit's Wild Christmas Binge* are three such adaptations.

Through altered genre and medium, along with the integration of music, contemporary settings and attitudes, parodic elements, and pop culture references, these works take three Dickens novels and "update" them for contemporary audiences. While Rupert Holmes, Alfonso Cuarón, and Christopher Durang use varied methods to contemporize their works for stage and screen, they are united in the attempt to revitalize the familiar narratives so that they may appeal to their specific audience. By examining these three nontraditional adaptations, we may glean insights on the ways that the values and mores specific to Victorian England translate to late-twentieth- and early-twenty-first-century American culture—and ultimately, learn more about our own values and mores.

I begin each chapter by providing some historical background detailing how the novel was publicly received during its original release, as well as a brief description of the way it is received/perceived today, which will involve a discussion of other major twentieth- and twenty-first-century adaptations of that novel. It is important to situate an adaptation within a framework of past adaptations. Marvin Carlson argues that "the dramatic text is distinguished in part by the extent and specificity of its relationship to previous texts, literary and nonliterary," and that every work is "haunted" by its relationship to the narratives that came before it.[10] This is especially true of an adaptation's connection to previous incarnations of the original text: its reception is affected in many ways by the way other adaptations have been structured and received. A well-known work with a wide and varied history of adaptations is more likely to be adapted in a less-traditional fashion than an obscure work with few previous adaptations. Often, the more familiar a text is to its audience, the more freedom an adaptor may feel in changing it or presenting it in a less traditional way.

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[10] Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 17.

Within the chapters, I identify specific plot, character, and stylistic changes that have been made in adapting the novel to its theatrical/film production. In order to successfully analyze an adapted work, it is vitally important to recognize the elements that have been retained, altered, and eliminated from the source text. I want to be clear in stating that this is *not* an effort to privilege the written text over the performed adaptation, as much scholarship on novel-to-stage/screen adaptations has been accused of doing. The study of adaptation is meant to examine the adjustments and alterations that occur during the process of adapting a work, to question them, celebrate them, or challenge them—but *not* to castigate them for existing in the first place. For this reason, my project selectively focuses on the politics and complications that arise from the process of adaptation, rather than attempting to determine a certain level of "fidelity" between an adaptation and its source. The intent of this thesis is not to evaluate the works based on some imaginary scale of "closeness" to the text, which, as Robert Stam argues, falsely supposes some essential "kernel of meaning" that can be transferred to the adaptation.[11] Struggling to remain slavishly faithful to the source text in order to gather the "-ness" of the original story is an impossible dream. In this age of reader-response criticism, we suppose the existence of infinite number of possible readings of a work, thus making "fidelity" to one meaning the moralistic equivalent of "cheating" on all the others. While I find it necessary to examine an adaptation alongside its source, I also believe scholars must not devalue an adapted work with the idea that it is a faded simulacrum of the original.

After identifying the alterations that have been made, it is important to question the effect they have on the work as a whole. Are these changes commentaries on some aspect of the work? Are they in place to "update" the novel in some way? Has the novel's genre been affected?

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[11] Robert Stam, "Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation," in *Film Adaptation*, ed. James Naremore (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 57.

Hutcheon writes that works that have been adapted across cultures "often mean changes in racial and gender politics";[12] in my analysis, I examine the social implications of such changes. It is also of note that the three adaptations I will be looking at have been created with an American audience in mind, and an important part of my analysis will be discussing what happens to the "Englishness" of the novels, and how this sense of national identity has been commodified, transposed, or parodied. Each of the adaptations explored in this thesis relies on a different mode of presentation to communicate the story, and each mode plays an important role in reshaping the narrative.

Rupert Holmes's *Drood*, explored in my first chapter, is marketed as a large-cast Broadway musical, complete with passionate solos, harmonic duets, and rousing chorus numbers. In this way, the show is not unlike other Broadway musicals, thereby attracting a portion of its audience merely by virtue of its being part of a familiar and well-loved genre. However, Dickens's story is presented as a play-within-a-play performed by the players of an 1873 London music hall; the musical is less concerned with ideas of fidelity to Dickens's final, unfinished novel than it is with reconstructing music hall culture. In this chapter, I explore how Holmes combines the conventions of three distinct genres (musical melodrama, the Victorian music hall, and murder mystery theatre) to repackage one of Dickens's more obscure works into a popular and critically-acclaimed Broadway musical.

My second chapter analyzes Alfonso Cuarón's 1998 Hollywood feature film, *Great Expectations*, which transports Dickens's story from nineteenth-century England to 1990s United States. In order to properly contextualize the narrative within its new culture and time period, certain plot points and characters have been tweaked, greatly altered, or omitted altogether.

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[12] Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 147.

While many of these changes offer an interesting perspective on the original text, the filmmakers' conceptions of the female characters are surprisingly one-dimensional, focusing primarily on their sexualities. Cuarón's *Great Expectations* contains erotic scenes not present in the novel as a method of "updating" the characters, attracting an audience, and distancing the film from the traditional (i.e., sexless) Dickensian adaptations. Using feminist theory, I examine the impact of this Hollywood "sexing up" on the adapted narrative and critique the filming techniques that depict the female characters as passive sex objects.

Christopher Durang's *Mrs. Bob Cratchit's Wild Christmas Binge* is primarily based on *A Christmas Carol*, one of Dickens's most well-known works, and his most often adapted. As the title suggests, this play is a parody of the familiar holiday story, centered on Bob Cratchit's wife. Part of the humor lies in Mrs. Cratchit's modern sensibility (expressed through sneering cynicism and negativity) contrasted against the wide-eyed cheerfulness of her family, whose speech and mindset place them firmly in the mid-nineteenth century. The script is rife with literary techniques, character types, and topical references that betray the play's 2002 authorship date. In my third chapter, I identify and analyze the conventions that shape Durang's adaptation from a recognized holiday classic to an ironic postmodern parody.

My interest in adaptations does not begin and end with the study of "nontraditional" adaptations; many interesting and insightful choices have been made by adaptors who present a literary work in a straightforward, "traditional" way. However, nontraditional adaptations tend to be more overlooked in an academic context than their traditional brethren. The three adaptations examined in this thesis have not received much attention in the way of criticism, perhaps because nontraditional works can be dismissed as "novelty" entertainment—amusing diversions, but ultimately unworthy of serious study. By analyzing the themes, presentational styles, and theatrical and filmic conventions of these nontraditional adaptations, I hope to challenge the assumption that a “good” or “important” adaptation must be a traditional one.

Chapter One

The Un-"Serious" Dickens: Adapting the Music Hall in Rupert Holmes's *Drood*

In the Acknowledgements preceding the published script of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, writer, composer, lyricist, and orchestrator Rupert Holmes modestly entreats the reader not to judge his musical all too harshly. "I hope it's clear to all by now that what follows was never intended to be a serious Dickensian adaptation," he writes. "Rather, it was always conceived as a springboard for a series of theatrical moments and events, using a literary curiosity as trampoline."[13] Produced by Joseph Papp, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (or *Drood*, as it later came to be known[14]) opened as a New York Shakespeare Festival production in August of 1985 and moved to Broadway's Imperial Theatre in early December, where it ran for six hundred and eight performances.[15] The show was well-met by audiences and critics alike, and in 1986, it took home Tony Awards for Best Musical, Best Book and Best Original Score (Rupert Holmes), Best Performance by a Leading Actor in a Musical (George Rose), and Best Direction of a Musical (Wilford Leach), as well as Drama Desk Awards in those categories and others.

It was Holmes's refusal to be lumped in with the "serious" adaptations that captured my attention in my search for non-traditional works inspired by Charles Dickens. One may assume that "serious Dickensian adaptation[s]," as Holmes calls them, would be characterized by a supposed "fidelity" to the original source, with a sense of a responsibility to adhere as closely as possible to the novel's plot, characters, setting, and tone. Conversely, an "unserious" adaptation would lack the burden of accurately representing every aspect of the novel; it would have the freedom to take certain creative licenses. Classifying *Drood* in the latter group works in Holmes's advantage because it deflects potential complaints from any Dickens fanatics who might feel that the musical takes too many liberties with the story. By allowing himself to freely adapt Dickens's story using a framework of his own invention, Holmes created a unique theatrical experience that manages to play with Dickens rather than deify him. In this way, *Drood* is a prime example of an adaptation that comments on its source text.

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[13] Rupert Holmes, "Acknowledgements," in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood: A Musical* (New York: The Holmes Line of Records, Inc., 1986), v-vi.

[14] To avoid confusion, I will hereby refer to the novel as "*The Mystery of Edwin Drood*" and to the musical simply as "*Drood.*"

[15] Iris Dorbian, *Great Producers: Visionaries of the American Theater* (New York: Allworth Press, 2008), 62.

Of course, every work of adaptation comments on its source by virtue of what the adaptor chooses to include and omit—the process of adaptation requires an evaluation of which narrative aspects will be transposed to the new medium. In her book, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, Julie Sanders designates certain adaptations as "commentaries," works that offer "a revised point of view from the 'original', adding hypothetical motivation, or voicing the silenced and marginalized."[16] Holmes's musical may be considered a "commentary" because it interprets Dickens's novel through a play-within-a-play format, intertwining the story of the mystery with a recreation of the nineteenth-century English music hall. A distancing effect is thereby achieved: instead of watching the events of the novel unfold, as in most traditional adaptations, the audience observes first and foremost a troupe of English actors staging their own musical adaptation of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*—in other words, real-life actors playing fictional actors performing a Dickens text. This conceit allows the playwright to affectionately skewer the novel's more melodramatic moments, structural quirks, and problematic depictions of South Asians (as well as the troubled history of representing non-Whites on the Victorian stage). *Drood*'s appropriation of music hall conventions sets the adaptation apart from any previous attempts at dramatizing the novel, and offers an opportunity both to revel in and critique Dickens's final work.

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[16] Sanders 19.

For a plot as byzantine as *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, Holmes does an impressive job of retaining the story's main events and characters without ever becoming confusing or relying on exposition to move the show along. Dickens's novel concerns itself with the events leading up to and following the disappearance of Edwin Drood, a cocky but likable young man with dreams of marrying his childhood sweetheart, Rosa Bud, and relocating to Egypt on an engineering expedition. Edwin returns to Cloisterham, his modest hometown, to call upon Rosa and visit his uncle, John Jasper, with whom he is very close. Jasper greets his nephew warmly, but he carries a dark secret in his heart: he is in love with Edwin's fiancée, and his increased opium dependence fosters disturbing visions of murdering Edwin so that he may have Rosa all to himself. Jasper's secret, combined with his newfound interest in the Cloisterham Cathedral crypt leads the reader to doubt the choirmaster's supposed affection for his nephew. Edwin, however, is blithely oblivious to his uncle's darker side. After a Christmas Eve dinner at Jasper's house, Edwin takes an evening stroll on the riverbank with Neville Landless, a hot-tempered young man who recently emigrated from Ceylon with his twin sister, Helena. Edwin is found to be missing the next morning; after several months without many leads, the case is dropped and he is presumed dead. One day, a stranger named Dick Datchery arrives in Cloisterham and quietly observes the activities of the townspeople, watching Jasper with an especially careful eye. "Princess Puffer," the woman who runs the opium den Jasper frequents, is also highly suspicious of him and follows him back to Cloisterham as he leaves her den.[17]

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[17] Nothing is so difficult as concisely summarizing a half-finished mystery. For a more detailed plot synopsis, please refer to Appendix A.

And it is here, at the close of the novel's sixth installment, that Dickens suffered the stroke that ended his life and dissolved any hopes of a definitive solution to the mystery.[18] The general consensus among Dickens scholars is that John Jasper is the intended culprit. In addition to the numerous hints in the text that point to his guilt, Dickens sent a letter to his biographer, John Forster, confirming that the choirmaster had indeed committed the crime. Forster reports the contents of the letter in *The Life of Charles Dickens*:

> The new story…was to be that of the murder of a nephew by his uncle; the originality of which was to consist in the review of the murderer's career by himself at the close, when its temptations were to be dwelt upon as if, not he the culprit, but some other man, were the tempted.[19]

The same letter informed Forster that in the end, Rosa would marry Mr. Tartar (a tertiary character who does not appear in the musical), Helena would marry Reverend Crisparkle, and either Crisparkle or Neville would be killed in apprehending Jasper.[20]

When the first installment of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* was released in April of 1870, it was met with instant success, selling approximately fifty thousand copies. Critics praised the humorous characters, and British weekly magazine *The Spectator* crowed that Dickens had finally returned "to the standard of his first few works."[21] Today, however, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* is considered one of Dickens's minor works, which, along with its unfinished narrative, precludes it from being widely taught in high school English classes. Because a half-finished novel will naturally lack the complexity and depth of a finished one, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* is understandably passed over in favor of Dickens's more popular works that will better suit the curriculum. I suspect that the novel's absence in the educational sector plays a role in the dearth of contemporary adaptations; many would-be adaptors overlook it because they simply have not been exposed to it. And, by that same token, one could blame some of the disinterest in the novel on the fact that it has inspired so few stage and film adaptations—the relationship between adaptations and their source texts is indeed a circular one. When compared to the sheer amount of theatrical and film adaptations of Dickens's other works, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* has all but been ignored. This fact would have likely upset Dickens himself, as he had planned to collaborate on a stage adaptation of the novel with Irish playwright Dion Boucicault, famous for his stage melodramas (most notably for the antebellum race play, *The Octoroon*). The proposed production had even been preliminarily cast, with Henry Irving to star as Jasper and Isabel Bateman to play Rosa.[22] Naturally, the author's death dashed any hopes this particular production had of making it to the stage, but as it so happened, several other *Drood* adaptations quickly popped up to take its place.

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[18] The novel was intended to be written and released in twelve installments, indicating that it was roughly half-finished when Dickens died.

[19] John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens, Volume II* (New York: The Baker and Taylor Company, 1911), 407.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Peter Ackroyd, *Dickens* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson Limited, 1990), 1068.

In his 1987 book cataloguing the theatrical adaptations of Dickens's novels, H. Philip Bolton counts at least twenty-seven full-length stage plays, a third of them written within the first decade after the author's death, including an un-produced play co-written by his son, Charles Dickens, Jr. In addition, Bolton lists a one-act play, three performances of assorted scenes, at least five radio dramas, four mock trials, and one teleplay.[23] Unfortunately, the scripts to many of these plays are lost or inaccessible, and much of our knowledge of their existence is owed to playbills and written accounts of the performances. To date, there have only been four feature film adaptations of the novel: two silent films in 1909 and 1914, one in 1935 directed by Stuart Walker and starring Claude Rains, and one in 1993 directed by Timothy Forder. Additionally, a

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[22] Bolton 442.

[23] Bolton 443-449.

BBC miniseries was released in 1960 consisting of eight thirty-minute episodes. The two silent films are not available to the general public, making it difficult to ascertain how the screenwriters dealt with the ending,[24] but the remaining film adaptations chose to cast John Jasper in the role of the murderer. The 1935 adaptation in particular plays not so much as a whodunit, but as a horror-thriller with a vested interest in *how* Jasper killed and disposed of the titular character.[25] Interestingly, some of the stage adaptations have been re-titled in ways that focus on Jasper and his guilt: *Jasper*, *John Jasper's Profession*, and *John Jasper's Secret* are three such works that choose to highlight the uncle's crime rather than the nephew's disappearance. By retaining the title, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, Holmes leaves the conclusion a secret, centering the action on the mystery itself. And, as I will discuss later in this chapter, naming the culprit in the title would be antithetical to the unique concept of his adaptation.

Unlike traditional adaptations, the first priority of Holmes's musical is not to tell Dickens's story, but to recreate the lively environment of the English music hall. When audience members enter the present-day theatre, they are "transported" to London's premier variety house, the Music Hall Royale. The year is 1873, a mere three years after Dickens's death, and a company of spirited Victorian actors endeavors to stage the premiere performance of Dickens's ill-fated mystery. As the audience trickles in, the actors mill about the house, in character: one stumbling drunkenly across the stage, another boisterously bellowing to someone in the balcony, yet another flirting coquettishly in a tourist's lap. This play-within-a-play format functions to keep the tone light while presenting a narrative that has been criticized as bleak and depressing. Holmes admits that his first attempts at musicalizing the work were "too unremittingly dark,"[26] so appropriating the cheerful song-and-dance routines and frivolous banter associated with music hall performances helped the show to stay more upbeat, a stylistic choice that added appeal for audiences looking for a lighthearted night at the theatre. Holmes fully intended to create a piece of entertainment designed to "supply an audience with enough fun to make them momentarily forget they had a dentist's appointment tomorrow."[27]

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[24] Philip V. Allingham, "The Cinematic Adaptations of The Mystery of Edwin Drood: 1909, 1914, 1935, and 1993; or, Dickens Gone Hollywood," The Victorian Web, accessed February 19, 2010, http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/dickens/drood/cinema.html.

[25] Andre Sennwald, "Movie Review: Mystery of Edwin Drood (1935)," *New York Times*, March 21, 1935, accessed February 19, 2010, http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9B04EEDF1E3FE53ABC4951DFB566838E629EDE.

The music hall framework simultaneously serves the adaptation by giving the viewers a distance from which to analyze the novel's events with a critical eye. Keeping the audience always one step removed from the action of the *Drood* story allows them to be conscious of Dickens's plot devices and weaker or outdatedly offensive characterizations. The musical particularly pokes fun at the melodrama of the novel through occasional theatrical "winks" at the audience: lines or actions that are particularly heavy with meaning are punctuated by ominous chords, stings, orchestral trills and "drum comments." In his review of the original production, Frank Rich refers to these moments as "quotation marks" around the narrative, in which the show "mock[s] its own mockery," nudging the audience in the ribs as if to acknowledge that they, too, are in on the joke.[28] Interestingly, *Drood* 's first draft was plagued by Holmes's reverence to the novel, and as a result, the show lasted a clunky three hours and forty minutes.[29]

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[26] Rupert Holmes, "The History of *The Mystery*," The Semi-Official Rupert Holmes Website, http://www.ruperthol mes.com/theatre/essdrood.html.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Frank Rich, "Stage: 'Edwin Drood,' a Musical by Holmes," *New York Times*, December 3, 1985, accessed May 3, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/1985/12/03/theater/stage-edwin-drood-a-musical-by-holmes.html.
[29] Samuel G. Freedman, "Evolution of 'Drood' as Musical," *New York Times*, August 28, 1985, accessed April 17, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/1985/08/28/theater/evolution-of-drood-as-musical.html.

Realizing that true escapism can only endure for so long before becoming tiresome, Holmes consequently trimmed away songs, scenes, and expository dialogue that hindered the pacing. When adapting a written work to stage or screen, the adaptor will inevitably have to make cuts such as these in order to tighten the script. Complications arise, however, when the adaptation's target audience is especially familiar with the source text, and there is a concern that its success is dependent on how closely it "follows" the original. (This particularly affected the writing and casting of David O. Selznick's *Gone with the Wind*, the *Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter* film series, and other adaptations that were preceded by immensely popular books.) One of the benefits of adapting a lesser-known work like *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* is the lack of pressure to include every character and plot event. Because the novel has not been widely read or adapted during the twentieth-century, the majority of *Drood*'s audience will be unaware of the alterations made in writing the musical. Instead of struggling to include minute details from the novel, Holmes refocused his attentions on the performers and conventions of his fictional Music Hall Royale.

While the audience's general ignorance of the source text allows the adaptor to reimagine the work without worry of offending a group of die-hard fans, it also presents a disadvantage: lacking knowledge of the source denies the audience an important layer of interpretation. In her book, *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon explores the "intertextual pleasure" in being able to compare an adaptation to its original:

> If we know the adapted work, there will be a constant oscillation between it and the new adaptation we are experiencing; if we do not, we will not experience the work *as an adaptation*.[30]

She continues,

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[30] Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, xv.

> Part of this ongoing dialogue with the past, for that is what adaptation means for audiences, creates the doubled pleasure of the palimpsest: more than one text is experienced—and knowingly so.[31]

Because most audience members probably will not be familiar with Dickens's *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, this palimpsestic understanding will not occur; therefore, they will not experience Holmes's musical *as an adaptation*. However, *Drood*'s play-within-a-play structure works to emphasize the "adaptation-ness" of the show, even if the audience cannot enjoy the intertextual experience Hutcheon describes. The performers acknowledge from the very beginning that what they are about to present is a stage adaptation, supposedly being put on "for the first time ever."[32] Because the story's action is interspersed with the music hall framing device, the audience is constantly reminded that *Drood* is a performed interpretation of the Dickens text. Of course, even when watching the most traditional adaptations, audiences are usually aware that the author's work has not been magically transposed to a new medium without edits, but it is rare to find an adaptation that openly states that it has been adapted from something else. For this reason, *Drood* might be called a "self-aware adaptation." There is no pretense that it is somehow an authoritative representation of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (a tone occasionally adopted by the so-called "serious" adaptations). This feature distinguishes Holmes's musical from many of the Dickens plays and films that came before it, and it is one of the reasons *Drood* is included in this thesis exploring nontraditional adaptations.

Drood is as much a contemporary interpretation of Victorian music hall culture as it is an adaptation of Dickens's novel. Years before deciding to adapt Dickens's mystery, Holmes visited a London theatre club where a company of actors performed in the style of a nineteenth-century music hall, complete with a chairman, a male impersonator, and an audience of regulars who could be relied upon to join the performers in singing the final chorus of each song over pints brimming with ale.[33] The experience apparently stuck with Holmes, who integrated several of these performative qualities into *Drood*'s Music Hall Royale. The viewers are never to forget that they are watching Dickens through the music hall structure, an effect that is created by the constant interruptions of the narrative by the music hall "actors." As each character makes their first entrance, for example, the musical's Chairman introduces each of them by their actor-character name: Edwin Drood is played by "Alice Nutting," John Jasper is played by "Clive Paget," and so on, reinforcing the play-within-a-play concept. These actor-characters are intended to evoke specific theatrical types common to English performances of the nineteenth century. The Chairman, Mr. William Cartwright, may have been influenced by such popular nineteenth-century music hall proprietors as William Holland and G. H. MacDermott—men whose stage presence equaled their business acumen.[34]

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[31] Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 116.

[32] Rupert Holmes, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood: A Musica.* (New York: The Holmes Line of Records, Inc., 1986) 7.

Historically, chairmen were prominent music hall figures who announced and introduced the acts, much like modern emcees. They were often former actors or singers, which undoubtedly helped them create an amiable rapport with the audience and "work the crowd" when necessary. More importantly, however, chairmen were in place to calm the audience down when they got especially rambunctious (which was often).[35] It was not uncommon for music hall audiences to cause a commotion loud enough to drown out the performances; if the acts were not to their liking, rotting vegetables, fruit, shoes, and other detritus would be routinely thrown at the singers.[36] (Dickens himself was repulsed by the brutish behavior of English theatre audiences.)[37] Of course, recreating this aspect of music hall culture would be distracting and unsanitary, not to mention dangerous for the actors. Aware that loud, disgruntled audience members are a necessary component of the music hall experience, Holmes created several "audience member" characters who watch the show in period dress from a private box above the stage. During the first act, one such character interrupts the action by yelling a favorite song request, and the Chairman responds by telling her to shut up.[38] The regular audience members are likewise not immune to the Chairman's teasing, and there are many moments when the he and other actors are able to ad-lib back and forth with them, imbuing the show with the sense of spontaneity not often seen on the Broadway stage. In an article for *The New York Times*, Holmes states that he included these moments to give the audience "a heightened sense of what theater is all about—that interaction" between the performers and the audience.[39] Individual people are often picked out due to their clothes, facial expressions, and proximity to the stage. At one performance during the show's Broadway run, the Chairman (played by George Rose) taunted a man in front, insinuating that he wished to sleep with one of the chorus girls. "Yes, his tongue is hanging out, and—oh no, he's wearing a pink tie. I *do* beg your pardon, sir," Rose quipped, to the audience's delight.[40] Through these techniques, *Drood* not only disrupts the revered presentation of Dickens observed in traditional adaptations, but it also challenges traditional Broadway theatrical conventions. The audience interactions—both real and scripted—create a lively, distinctly *un*serious environment that evokes the engaging (albeit more sanitized) back-and-forth patter of the music hall.

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[33] Holmes, "The History of *The Mystery*."

[34] Incidentally, MacDermott penned his own theatrical adaptation of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. It was presented at the Britannia Theatre in 1872 with MacDermott in the part of Bazzard/Datchery, and it was well received by the press.

[35] Richard Anthony Baker, *British Music-Hall: An Illustrated History* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing Limited, 2005), 238.

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[36] Baker 70.
[37] Bolton 19.
[38] Holmes, *Drood*, 26.
[39] Leslie Bennetts, "In 'Drood,' the Cast Gives Clues and the Audiences Give Cues," *New York Times*, January 5, 1986, accessed May 4, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/1986/01/05/arts/in-drood-the-cast-gives-clues-and-the-audiences-give-cues.html.
[40] Wilford Leach, dir., *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, perf. George Rose, Betty Buckley, Howard McGillin, Patti Cohenour, and Cleo Laine (New York Public Library's Theatre on Film and Tape Archive, 1986).

Cleo Laine, as the seedy, time-ravaged Princess Puffer, also found ample opportunities to chat with the audience during her comic ballad, "The Wages of Sin," flirting with (and often embarrassing) any man who caught her eye.[41] Again, the audience appeared to relish every saucy remark. Laine's archly sardonic repartee originates from a long line of Cockney characters played by music hall comediennes such as Marie Lloyd, Jenny Hill, Kate Carney, and Bessie Bellwood. Bellwood in particular was known for her working-class roles; songwriter Richard Morton wrote this account of her playful badinage with the audience during a performance:

> Onto the stage she would bounce to a roar of welcome. "All right"—to an admirer in a private box, "don't open your mouth so wide. You'll cut your throat with your collar." The result was a louder guffaw than before. "That's wider. Now I can see what you had for dinner." Sometimes she was smart; sometimes just a little bit vulgar. But always, she enjoyed a licence that would be permitted to no performer today.[42]

Yet, a hundred years later, Laine enjoyed the same license with audiences and critics alike: in his review of the production, Frank Rich wrote that her "good-naturedly bawdy characterization" was "one of the production's most consistent assets."[43] Upon entering, she gestures to the audience to give her more applause; later, she encourages them to join her in singing the last line of her song, reprimanding them if she feels their vocalizations lack the proper amount of enthusiasm. The character's affectionate chiding persuades even the most stubbornly shy of Broadway audiences to participate in this music hall tradition. Holmes's apparent goal—to create a "cozy, chummy relationship between audience and artistes"—is furthered by interactions such as these.[44]

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[41] Ibid.

[42] Baker 172.

[43] Rich, "Stage: 'Edwin Drood,' a Musical by Holmes."

Holmes hearkens back to another time-honored theatrical convention by adapting Dickens's title character from a brash twenty-year-old man to a twenty-year-old man played by a thirty-eight-year-old woman. The practice of casting women in roles for young men has roots in the English pantomime, a form of popular musical entertainment dating back to the eighteenth century, ubiquitous in Victorian England.[45] Although women in breeches roles were plentiful during the Restoration, they did not appear as heroes of the pantomime until 1815.[46] Principal Boys, as these characters were known, were plucky young lads whose masculine bravado did little to hide the shapely female forms beneath the jackets and trousers. Nor were they intended to, for these actresses were generally known for their pneumatic silhouettes; *Sunday Times* drama critic once referred to the Victorian Principal Boys as a "big-bosomed, broad-buttocked, butcher-thighed race."[47] Their enticing blend of femininity and masculinity fascinated the English public for over a century.

As a boy growing up in Northwich, England, Holmes's earliest memories of the theatre are of the annual Christmas pantomime, where wide-eyed children watched "an attractive woman dressed in tights playing Dick Whittington or Aladdin in a boisterous manner."[48] Writing his musical decades later, Holmes saw parallels between the character of Edwin Drood and the Principal Boys of the Victorian theatre, and realized that making Edwin a breeches role would solve the problem of the scarcity of leading female characters. A Principal Boy in the cast added an air of novelty to *Drood*—it had been over thirty years since Mary Martin starred in *Peter Pan*, and Broadway musical audiences had not seen a woman in a male leading role since that time. And, as the film release of *Victor Victoria* had proven three years earlier, a story featuring a male impersonator could be a critical and financial success. Perhaps most importantly, a female Edwin offered yet another flavor of "Englishness" to the show, for this style of male impersonation is a distinctly British phenomenon—in no other country have breeches roles been as successful as in Britain.[49] Cross-dressing women were likewise no strangers to the music hall stage. Bessie Bonehill, Vesta Tilley, Ella Shields, and Hetty King are a just a few actresses who made their living acting and singing the parts of cheeky boys, courageous soldiers, sophisticated swells (or "toffs"), and love-struck suitors. Holmes's cocky-but-endearing Edwin Drood fits well with these theatrical types, and it is clear that Alice Nutting (the Music Hall Royale actress playing Edwin) is intended to be their contemporary. Upon introducing her, the Chairman remarks, "Devotees of male impersonation are more used to seeing Miss Nutting in top hat and tails, when she does her inimitable rendition of [fictional music hall standard] 'Aren't I Half a Toff?'"[50]

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[44] Holmes, "The History of *The Mystery*."

[45] Incidentally, in the *Mystery of Edwin Drood*, Dickens mentions that a Cloisterham theatre is hosting "a new grand comic Christmas pantomime" (Dickens 136).

[46] Laurence Senelick, *The Changing Room: Sex, Drag and Theatre* (London: Routledge, 2000), 262.

[47] Shirley Ardener, "Male Dames and Female Boys: Cross-Dressing in the English Pantomime," in *Changing Sex and Bending Gender*, ed. Alison Shaw and Shirley Ardener (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2005), 131.

[48] Holmes, "The History of *The Mystery*."

The two characters who invite the most obvious critique from contemporary audiences are Neville and Helena Landless, the orphaned twins from Ceylon. In the novel, Dickens describes them as "unusually handsome…both very dark, and very rich in colour…something untamed about them both; a certain air upon them of hunter and huntress; yet withal a certain air of being the objects of the chase, rather the followers."[51] Much is made of their "Un-English complexion," a result of the "Mixture of Oriental blood" flowing through their veins, as the author wrote in his notes, although this is never explicitly stated in the novel.[52] Regardless, their dark skin, accented English, and fiery tempers fill many Cloisterham residents with unease, eventually leading to Neville's false arrest for Edwin's murder. Holmes weaves these xenophobic and racist sentiments into his musical, usually voiced by Edwin and Jasper, who are threatened by Neville's attraction to Rosa. The choirmaster suggests that there is "something of the tiger" in Neville's blood,[53] and fumes that "beneath Neville's tainted English accent and adopted English manners, there is a heathen Landless, a tribesman Landless, a half-blooded, half-bred half-caste who would kill as easily as he would comb his sleek hair!"[54] Edwin snidely refers to Neville's mixed lineage during the Act I number, "No Good Can Come from Bad": "Your history / Would indicate the past / Of some half-caste / Runs through your veins / Your crudeness thus explains."[55] The English characters also display a shocking ignorance about Ceylon and other non-Western countries: while discussing Edwin's planned business venture abroad, this exchange occurs:

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[49] Baker 184.
[50] Holmes, *Drood*, 10.

> CRISPARKLE: Our young Ned is soon to depart himself for your section of the globe, Neville.
> NEVILLE: Ceylon, Mr. Drood?
> DROOD: No, but much the same. Egypt.[56]

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[51] Charles Dickens, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (Champaign, IL: Book Jungle, 2009), 53.
[52] Hyungji Park, "'Going to Wake up Egypt': Exhibiting Empire in 'Edwin Drood'," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 30.2 (2002): 532.
[53] Holmes, *Drood*, 36. This statement echoes a comment Neville makes about himself in the novel, when he explains that he had been raised among "abject and servile dependents, of an inferior race," and may have contracted "a drop of what is tigerish in their blood." (Dickens 58)
[54] Holmes, *Drood*, 37.
[55] Holmes, *Drood*, 51.
[56] Holmes, *Drood*, 32.

In reality, of course, Egypt and Ceylon (modern-day Sri Lanka) are some several thousand miles apart, and ethnically, culturally, and geographically not at all "much the same." In this scene, Holmes satirizes the imperialistic views shared by many Victorians: that the countries outside of Europe were easily conflated or interchangeable with one another, and all were painted with the same broad, hazy strokes of Exoticism. For many Britons, the colonized countries and the people that inhabited them were significant only for how they could benefit the Empire.

Holmes goes even further to highlight the Landlesses' Otherness by exaggerating their "Eastern" qualities, creating over-the-top characters parodying colonial representations of South Asians. Their speech is flavored with "an unplaceable Eastern accent ripe with curry and chutney," contrasting with the Received Pronunciation and Cockney accents used by the other characters. After one of Helena's lines, a sitar sting is cued and a "Taj Mahal fanfare" accompanies the actress's first bow.[57] Both Landlesses—but particularly Helena—are played to outlandish, even cartoony effect, slyly commenting on the patently insensitive and dehumanizing portrayals of non-Whites on the Victorian stage. "Janet Conover" and "Victor Grinstead," the Music Hall Royale actors playing the Eurasian siblings, are obviously White and in brownface, utilizing makeup and costumes to communicate their foreignness. The real-life actors in the original Broadway production were deeply bronzed (Jana Schneider, playing Helena, even wore a red bindi painted on her forehead) and attired in brightly-colored clothing, creating a visual distinction between them and the gloomy, dark neutrals worn by the rest of the cast.

In his review, Frank Rich comments that Schneider, as Helena, "memorably impersonates a Ceylonese tigress with fluttering eyelids, [and] a lascivious tongue…She often sounds like a female impersonation of Yul Brynner."[58] Having viewed a video recording of Schneider's performance, I must note that Rich's assessment is an apt one, particularly in comparing her to Yul Brynner—a White actor best known for his portrayal of Asian or Middle Eastern characters. Schneider's Helena is even more exaggerated than Brynner's King of Siam, most likely to create a parodic effect. She is sensual yet unnerving, sometimes hissing or growling like a possessed jungle cat; at one point she takes a large bite out of a sheet of paper for no apparent reason. Her fingernails are long and painted blood red to match her crimson lips. She is beautiful, but bestial and dangerous—qualities evocative of the infamous "Dragon Lady" stereotype of East Asian women. At the same time, she is also played as submissive, frequently stooping and bowing after her lines and clapping her hands together as if in prayer. None of these characterizations can be found within Dickens's novel or Holmes's script, so one may assume that they were a product of the actress's and director's conception of the character. In any other context, this portrayal of a South Asian person would be glaringly outdated and offensive; but in *Drood*, amidst the campy music hall types and broad, mock-melodramatic acting, Helena and Neville appear to be yet another over-the-top nineteenth-century convention. Hyungji Park hypothesizes that "a late twentieth-century American sensibility allows Holmes to exaggerate Neville's racial stereotyping…Holmes's script draws attention to the artificiality of Dickens's characters."[59] The artificiality is heightened when we remember that these characters are being "performed" by the company of the Victorian-era Music Hall Royale, who occasionally comment on the Dickens characters themselves. In one instance, the music hall actress jokes about her ethnically ambiguous portrayal of Helena:

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[57] Holmes, *Drood*, 18-19.

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[58] Rich, "Stage: 'Edwin Drood,' a Musical by Holmes."
[59] Park 531-532.

> HELENA: I only wish I could express my gratitude without this strange, somewhat geographically untraceable accent![60]

By presenting the Landless twins as over-the-top caricatures of generic "Eastern-ness," Holmes calls on the audience to critique the role that racial stereotypes played in both Dickens's story and in traditional English theatre. Although their "exotic" qualities are actually less overt in the novel, Dickens still employs the "Oriental" stereotypes to further his mystery. As "Noble Savages," Neville and Helena are brave, loyal, and principled; as "Easterners," they are hotheaded, calculating, and mysterious. Dickens exploits both of these tropes to keep his readers guessing as to whether the twins played a part in Edwin Drood's disappearance.

Indeed, the question of guilt is endemic to any discussion about adaptations of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. No matter how many scholars and Dickens enthusiasts insist upon Jasper's culpability, it is still not much more than an educated guess; Dickens may well have changed his mind sometime after writing his letter to Forster. Equally mysterious is the unanswered question of Dick Datchery's identity; he is generally believed to be another character in disguise, a conclusion Dickens hints at when describing Datchery's "unusually large" head topped with a shock of "unusually thick and ample" white hair.[61] Many of the novel's characters have been suspected of playing the aged detective; one theory even proposes that Edwin Drood himself plays the old man. In the musical, the Music Hall Royale actress "Alice Nutting" (who plays Drood in Act One) performs the role of Datchery. In fact, there are two groups of "Droodians": those who believe that Edwin was murdered (the majority), and those who believe that he managed to escape.[62] In short, the novel's unwritten ending leaves a multitude of ambiguities, requiring potential adaptors to fill in the blanks themselves. It was this formidable challenge—answering the questions, tying up the loose ends—that stalled Holmes during the early stages of writing his musical adaptation. In an essay he wrote for the 2001 Shaw Festival performance of his show, Holmes explains the dilemma he had in creating an ending:

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[60] Holmes, *Drood*, 66.

[61] Dickens, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, 180.

[62] Wendy S. Jacobson, *The Companion to The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986), 3.

> How could I dare step into Dickens's shoes and attempt to pick up his fallen pen? ... How could I resolve Dickens's tale without implying that I alone knew the ending the great man had envisioned? And how could I do all this in a manner totally unique to theatre?[63]

Ironically, the solution Holmes reached was one that relieved him from the daunting task of finishing Dickens's mystery. The ending would be chosen by the audience: a vote would be taken during each performance to determine who killed Edwin Drood, the identity of Dick Datchery, and which two characters would unite as lovers. By allowing the audience to decide the outcome of the story, Holmes gives them a feeling of control, a palpable sense of ownership over the performance. And, consequently, if the viewers disagree with the outcome, he claims no responsibility. "If they don't like it, they chose it," Holmes shrugs in a 1985 interview.[64] The result is a musical that has been, in a way, *personalized* for each audience, based on their own collective reactions and attitudes. Aware that this quality would be a popular selling point for theatregoers weary of the traditionally passive theatre experience, Holmes billed Drood as "The Solve-It-Yourself Broadway Musical." In voting, the viewer is asked to take a more active role in the performance, and in some sense, to join Holmes in the act of adapting the story. The experience of shared authorship the musical offers is obviously one that cannot be had in any other medium—film and television lack the malleability of the stage; both present a finished product that cannot be altered at the audience's whim.

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[63] Holmes, "The History of *The Mystery*."

[64] Freedman, "Evolution of 'Drood' as Musical."

Adaptation theorist Linda Hutcheon defines three “modes of engagement” that are commonly used to express a narrative: the “telling” mode, in which the audience reads a printed narrative and is required to imagine the visual and aural details of the story; the “showing” mode, which presents a performed story for an audience; and the “participatory” mode, in which the audience physically interacts with the adapted narrative.[65] *Drood* is rather unique in that it operates through two modes of storytelling, allowing the audience both to observe and participate in the presentation of the story. Holmes delighted in the sense of liveness created through the musical’s interactive voting process and multiple conclusions:

> A live audience delights in anything that happens on stage spontaneously and only in the specific performance they're witnessing: an ad lib, an unscheduled song, a guest artist who drops in without warning, a genuinely unexpected unrehearsed encore.[66]

Wilford Leach, who directed the original production, agreed that an environment of unstructured play was vital to the *Drood*’s success. In a *New York Times* article about the show’s move from Shakespeare in the Park to a Broadway theatre, Leach opined, “Our best quality when we were in the park, when we worked best, was when we were improvisatory…Seriousness and complacency don’t belong.”[67] Here, “seriousness” is defined by a rigid adherence to the script, devoid of spontaneous moments of play to keep the production from feeling stale and repetitive.

However, *Drood*’s multiple endings *do* require a great deal of stability, as the difficulty of improvising a new song and dance number every night would be insurmountable. The conclusion of the show mainly consists of three carefully scripted sections: Datchery’s reveal, the murderer’s confession, and the lovers’ duet. There are five possible Datcherys (Helena,

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[65] Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 22-23.
[66] Holmes, “The History of *The Mystery*.”
[67] Esther B. Fein, “Refiting [sic] ‘Edwin Drood’ for Its Broadway Run,” *New York Times*, November 29, 1985, accessed May 6, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/1985/11/29/theater/refiting-edwin-drood-for-its-brodway-run.html.

Bazzard, Neville, Crisparkle, and Rosa), six possible murderers (Princess Puffer, Rosa, Neville, Helena, Bazzard, and Crisparkle), and twenty-one possible romantic pairings.[68] Clearly, there are multitudinous combinations of Datcherys, murderers, and lovers, providing for a potentially different ending every night. This unique quality makes the show an appealing choice for repeated viewings, as it would be likely to offer a new experience the second time.

Although the audience has the option of voting for John Jasper as the murderer, Holmes did not mean for him to be chosen, and wrote the endings accordingly. This assertion of Jasper's innocence is another major characteristic that sets *Drood* apart from all previous adaptations of the novel (and perhaps another reason why Holmes denies its "seriousness" as a Dickensian adaptation). Just before the voting process begins, the Chairman announces the murder suspects, including Jasper, but discourages the audience from choosing him on the grounds that he is the most obvious suspect:

> CHAIRMAN: I ask you: could this be all there is to the Mystery of Edwin Drood? That John Jasper, the obvious villain of the piece, did indeed kill his nephew in a hopeless attempt to win the love of the fair Miss Rosa Bud. Ladies and gentlemen: where then the mystery? … So how stand you? For the obvious answer—or for a more perplexing solution?[69]

Though certain members of the audience might ignore the Chairman's advice and vote for Jasper anyway, these votes will essentially be thrown away, as Holmes did not write an ending for Jasper as the murderer. However, the character does get a chance to voice his hatred and resentment of his deceased nephew; after the chosen Datchery "reveals" himself to be one of the primary characters, he or she sings a song accusing Jasper of committing the murder. Half-crazed, the choirmaster launches into "Jasper's Confession," wherein he admits to drugging

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[68] The voting restricts the lovers to a male-female couple. And while, as brother and sister, Helena and Neville Landless are not a viable romantic pairing, Holmes indeed wrote an ending in which Helena is "incestuously drawn" to her twin, should the audience vote for their union.

[69] Holmes, *Drood*, 93.

Edwin and Neville with laudanum wine during his Christmas Eve feast, and strangling his nephew down by the river. Durdles, the stonemason, interjects to announce that while he witnessed Jasper stumble out to the riverbank and dispose of Edwin's body in a churchyard tomb, he did *not* actually carry out the deed himself: Jasper's hazy recollection of killing his nephew was merely a hallucination. It is at this point that Durdles exposes the identity of the "true" murderer, the recipient of the most votes from the audience.

Holmes's reluctance to adhere to the popular theory that Jasper murdered his nephew might trouble the Droodians who are certain of his guilt, but others may be pleased to see alternative solutions explored, particularly because other adaptors have heretofore ignored the possibility of another character as Edwin's murderer. By casting the shadow of suspicion upon them, Holmes adds another facet to characters who were previously seen as flat and insipid, and were often overlooked due to their assumed innocence. The sweet, almost childlike Rosa Bud is driven to madness by Jasper's suffocating affection. Helena Landless despises Jasper for manipulating Rosa and instigating the feud between Edwin and her brother. Princess Puffer reveals herself to be Rosa's former governess, fallen on hard times; the moment Jasper wandered into her opium den and cried Rosa's name in a drug-induced stupor, the old woman knew she had to do everything possible to protect her long-lost charge from his malice. In each of their solutions, the women murder Edwin by the darkened riverbank, but do so under the mistaken impression that they are killing Jasper. Crisparkle, gentle and benign in the novel, is transformed into "a fanatic, easily capable of evil," who murdered Rosa's mother years ago when he "detected clear signs of Satan within her."[70] The unbalanced reverend apparently sees the same qualities in Jasper, and likewise murders the unfortunate Edwin under the impression that he is his possessed uncle.

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[70] Holmes, *Drood*, 117-119. The back-story regarding Crisparkle and Rosa's mother is entirely Holmes's invention, as Dickens never suggests that the two knew each other when she was alive.

In the novel as in the musical, none of the aforementioned characters have a strong motive to kill Edwin, but their killing Jasper is not outside the realm of plausibility. In fact, the theory that Jasper is the murderer's intended victim is easily dismissed when Jasper himself is presumed to be the killer, but it is an interesting twist for Holmes to add to the story. While Dickens does not allow the reader to observe Jasper's Christmas Eve dinner, Holmes takes advantage of the opportunity to raise the audience's suspicions before Edwin's disappearance by dramatizing the dinner with a scene and a song (the ominous "No Good Can Come from Bad"). The scene highlights the animosity between Edwin and Neville[71] and alerts the audience to Jasper's ill intentions; when the sinister choirmaster spikes their wine with laudanum, a potent narcotic, he makes himself appear a prime suspect. In this adaptation, however, Jasper is nothing but a convincing red herring. He trades coats with Edwin before the boy's disappearance (a device not found in the novel), setting the groundwork for Rosa, Helena, Puffer, and Crisparkle to mistake Edwin for Jasper in their respective endings. When four out of the seven suspects intended to kill Jasper and not the missing title character, the mystery is restructured completely.

The remaining three suspects are given motives to kill the title character. In both the novel and the musical, Jasper and Neville are the most obvious candidates for murderer: both men are in love with Edwin's fiancée, Rosa, so both believe they would stand to benefit from getting rid of Edwin. The final suspect, a humble clerk by the name of Bazzard, is perhaps the most unexpected of all Drood's murder suspects. A shy, unimposing little man, Bazzard is a frustrated playwright who takes a strange pride in the fact that his single play has never been produced.[72] While Bazzard garners little attention in Droodian criticism, Holmes thrusts this formerly ancillary character into the limelight by including him in the list of possible Datcherys and murder suspects. There is little evidence in the novel to support the theory that the unassuming clerk plays any part in Edwin's disappearance or the subsequent investigation, but Holmes justifies his choice by imbuing Bazzard with a lust for attention so great, he would commit murder merely for the sake of notoriety. The musical's Chairman reasons that Bazzard must have something to do with the mystery's conclusion, for "why otherwise does he appear in our story at all?"[73]

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[71] Dickens includes several scenes in the novel that center upon the conflict between the two young men, but Christmas Eve dinner is recounted to be rather uneventful in this regard: Jasper states that "there was no quarrel or difference" between Edwin and Neville that night, and that "all went smoothly and quietly when they were last together." (Dickens 159)

Of course, those familiar with Dickens's novels would argue that the author is well known for creating numerous characters with minor (but memorable) roles in the narrative; if each and every one played a significant part in the events of the plot, his works would be frustratingly complicated, indeed. Within the confines of Holmes's adaptation, however, the Chairman has a point: characters have been included as sparingly as possible without disrupting the basic premise of the novel, and most subplots and tertiary characters have been eliminated completely in order to prevent from overwhelming the audience. Bazzard is unnecessary to Dickens's mystery, and I suspect Holmes only adapted him into the script because he was in need of another potential Datchery or murderer. As a result, his presence in the show is noticeably extraneous, a quality that isolates him from the rest of the characters. Therefore, paradoxically, Bazzard is a likely suspect solely because he has no apparent motive for being a likely suspect.

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[72] Wendy S. Jacobson notes that the character of Bazzard is meant to be a personal attack on English poet and critic R. H. Horne, with whom Dickens had had a falling out the previous year.

[73] Holmes, *Drood*, 90.

After the detective's true identity has been revealed, the appointed murderer has been taken offstage into "custody," and the lovers have been chosen, the Chairman laments that Edwin Drood could not offer one last word from beyond the grave. As if conjured by magic, Drood appears and triumphantly announces that he managed to free himself from his enemy's clutches after all. This revelation is somewhat inconsistent with the killer's confession only minutes earlier, as all potential killers are certain that they were successful in murdering Drood. The details of his escape are glossed over, but they are irrelevant anyway: his miraculous return is intended to allow the actress playing Drood to belt out one final solo. To my knowledge, no other major twentieth-century adaptation of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* has an ending in which Drood lives, which is probably due in part to the fact that most literary critics believe that Dickens meant for him to die. However, the previous stage, screen, and radio adaptations have primarily been mystery melodramas, with a concentrated effort to preserve the tone of the novel. *Drood* is a mystery melodrama within a musical comedy, and Drood's survival ends the show on a positive note. The change in genre allowed Holmes to make choices that may have been ignored by earlier adaptations, exploring new possibilities within Dickens's unfinished narrative. And, not forgetting that *Drood* is a Broadway musical after all, Holmes understood that audiences have come to expect an "eleven o'clock number" from the star. Keeping Drood alive may not make sense within the events of the plot, but it certainly makes for a rousing musical finale.

Holmes's willingness to manipulate form and genre to suit his adaptation bespeaks a creative sensibility rarely found in traditional Dickensian theatre and film. Even though *Drood* takes more than a few sarcastic jabs at Dickens's tendency toward the melodramatic, it still communicates a sense of earnestness and excitement about the novel. The show is an excellently structured commentary on its source, embracing it without kowtowing to it, criticizing it without indicting it. If nothing else, *Drood* proved to audiences that adaptations of Dickens (or any revered canonical author, for that matter) need not be dry, word-for-word retellings of the novel in order to be successful or critically acclaimed. *Drood* received accolades for its innovative combination of music hall influences and campy murder-mystery melodrama, yet these qualities have also prevented it from being taken seriously by Dickens scholars as an adaptation of worth. Nontraditional adaptations like *Drood* are too often dismissed from academic contexts, even within the realm of theatre and adaptation studies. Twenty-five years have passed since the show opened on Broadway, and yet I have been unable to locate more than three academic articles that analyze it in detail. Even Holmes's insistence that *Drood* is not a "serious Dickensian adaptation"—a preemptive defense against critics who would argue that it strays too far from the novel—only reinforces the false dichotomy between "serious" and "unserious" adaptations based on a misguided notion of fidelity to the source.

Chapter Two

The Sexualized Dickens: Representing Women in Alfonso Cuarón's *Great Expectations*

The opening scene of Alfonso Cuarón's film adaptation of *Great Expectations* (1998) contains the main character's narrated line: "I'm not gonna tell the story the way that it happened. I'm gonna tell it the way I remember it." With this caveat firmly in place, the viewer is aware that this specific adaptation is concerned less with ideas of strict fidelity to the text and more with reinterpreting Dickens's story by adapting the characters and plot points cohesively to a pre-millennial American setting. In the tradition of Amy Heckerling's hit 1995 movie, *Clueless* (based on Jane Austen's *Emma*), this film takes a "classic" nineteenth-century English novel and re-packages it in slick late-nineties American styles and vernacular in order to appeal to the MTV generation.[74] The novel's action is relocated from rural English marsh country and London to a Sarasota fishing community and New York City, respectively. Of the three nontraditional adaptations examined in this thesis, *Great Expectations* is certainly the most visually divergent from its source text, as it is the only one that does not attempt to evoke Victorian London through its costumes or settings. Cuarón states in an interview, "I didn't obsess about being faithful. It was more important for me to find a way to use film images to portray the themes and atmosphere of the book."[75] In many ways, he and screenwriter Mitch Glazer accomplish this feat, paralleling the fundamental action of the novel just enough to maintain a visible connection with the original work.

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[74] Appropriately enough, in 2003, MTV released a television-movie updating Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*.

[75] Pamela Katz, "Directing Dickens: Alfonso Cuarón's 1998 *Great Expectations*," in *Dickens on Screen*, ed. John Glavin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 96.

However, Glazer and Cuarón take the most noticeable license with the story's female characters: the three most prominent women in the novel—Pip's sister, Mrs. Joe; the embittered spinster, Miss Havisham; and Estella, the object of Pip's affection—are reimagined by placing their aggressive sexualities at the forefront of their characters. Dickens's novels are not, of course, known for their sexual content, so imbuing the characters with sexual motivations is one major way the filmmakers chose to update *Great Expectations* for a late-twentieth-century audience. However, the female characters are sexualized in ways the male characters are not: Cuarón uses filmmaking techniques that reinforce the authority of the male gaze by fetishizing the female body as an object to be displayed and desired, while decrying the natural sexual desires of the older woman. Throughout this chapter, I will use Dickens's character descriptions to compare and contrast the "contemporary" women of the film with the Victorian characters from which they were adapted, applying feminist film theory to deconstruct their representations in Cuarón's film. In analyzing these sexually-charged women and the cinematic codes used to film them, I question why the process of updating them involved emphasizing the sexual context of their characters. Why did the filmmakers feel they had to "sex up" the women of *Great Expectations*?

Dickens's novel centers on Pip, an uneducated, orphaned country boy raised by his tyrannical older sister and her kindly husband, Joe. As a child, Pip accepts an invitation to play at the house of the eccentric local dowager, Miss Havisham, where he meets and falls in love with her adopted girl, Estella. Miss Havisham harbors a deep resentment for the male sex after being jilted at the altar decades before, and has been instilling this misandry in Estella, urging her to "break their hearts." Pip is eventually discharged from his service as Estella's playmate, and apprentices Joe for several years as a blacksmith. One day, Pip discovers that he has received a large inheritance from an anonymous benefactor with which to become a fine gentleman in London. He assumes that this patron is Miss Havisham, and reunites with lovely yet haughty Estella, believing Havisham intends them to wed. Pip's newfound wealth turns him into an aimless snob eager to forget his humble beginnings—until his anonymous benefactor is revealed to be Magwitch, an ex-convict whose life he saved as a boy. Pip is ashamed at first to be indebted to such a lowly man, but then agrees to help him flee the country, as he is still a wanted man. The escape attempt fails, and Magwitch dies, after Pip learns that Estella is the convict's long-lost daughter. After working abroad for eleven years, he returns to England and encounters a softer, wiser Estella. They agree to be friends, and as the novel closes, Pip foresees "no shadow of another parting from her."

The novel, serialized in Dickens's periodical, *All the Year Round*, concluded in August of 1861. It won accolades from Dickens's critics, many of whom had previously discounted the author as being past his prime in his middle age.[76] Despite its popularity, *Great Expectations* received less attention from playwrights than many of Dickens's earlier works; H. Philip Bolton attributes this dearth of nineteenth-century adaptations to the author's increasingly "novelistic" style.[77] The story found more adaptive success during the twentieth century, with six feature films (two of them silent), several television movies and miniseries, and countless radio dramas and stage plays. David Lean's 1946 *Great Expectations* is regarded to be the most important of the film adaptations, nominated for five Academy Awards, including Best Picture. Until Cuarón's film, the bulk of the adaptations present the narrative in a traditional way—period setting and costuming, straightforward adaptation of the story's characters and events, etc. *Great Expectations* (1998) is a "transcultural adaptation," meaning that the location and/or time period of the adapted text have been altered so that a significant shift in culture occurs. Every transculturation is accompanied with changes in cultural context; sociopolitical issues vary from society to society, and it is the adaptor's job to recontextualize these issues within the "new" culture so that the story remains both plausible and coherent.

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[76] Ackroyd 903.

[77] Bolton 416. Bolton also mentions a published stage adaptation from 1861 that has been (inconclusively) attributed to Dickens himself. Regardless of its source, the play established dramatic copyright, preventing other *Great Expectations* adaptations from being produced in England during Dickens's lifetime.

In exploring Hollywood-produced transcultural adaptations, Linda Hutcheon observes that an "Americanization" of the adapted work almost always takes place in order to properly satisfy the demands of the contemporary American film audience.[78] Sometimes this can be a change deeply affecting one character, such as altering their race or nationality (for example, a White American character in a foreign country or culture has proven to be a relatable "point of entry" for American audiences);[79] in this case, the entire *Great Expectations* narrative has been temporally updated and Americanized. As a result, many of the characters are given new names: Phillip "Pip" Pirrup becomes Finnegan "Finn" Bell (played by Ethan Hawke); the eccentric old Miss Havisham becomes Ms. Nora Driggers Dinsmoor (Anne Bancroft); Magwitch, Pip's convict benefactor, becomes Arthur Lustig in the film (Robert De Niro). The catalyst for the main character's rise in society is also necessarily updated: Finn does not leave his country home in order to become a gentleman, as Pip does (since "gentleman" is a concept that does not entirely exist in millennial America); instead, he receives an anonymous grant to display his artwork in a New York gallery show, complete with a stipend and a large apartment. By reconceptualizing Dickens's main character as an artist, the filmmakers tap into contemporary ideas of the artist as sensitive, introspective, and romantic, all characteristics that can be attributed to Pip. Art is Finn's passion, and it provides him with the proper motivation to leave his Sarasota home for the big city. New York City's wealthy cultural elite are as close an analog as possible to the educated upper classes of Victorian London, and each seem equally inaccessible to the poor, working-class protagonist. Although London is one of Dickens's most tried-and-true settings, to the point that it almost "functions as a virtual character" throughout his novels,[80] New York City works as a late twentieth-century American equivalent. Joe, Finn's brother-in-law-*cum*-surrogate parent (Chris Cooper), is no longer a blacksmith, but a commercial fisherman and lawn worker, and he retains the pleasant, simple, "salt of the earth" qualities that make the character in the novel so likeable. These characters and events, properly contextualized in their new time period, make a tidy transition from the novel to Cuarón's screen adaptation. The women of *Great Expectations*, however, are more problematic.

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[78] Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 146.

[79] Vivian Bickford-Smith, "Picturing Apartheid: with a Particular Focus on 'Hollywood' Histories of the 1970s," in *Black and White in Colour: African History on Screen*, ed. Vivian Bickford-Smith and Richard Mendelsohn (Oxford: James Currey Ltd, 2007), 257.

In the film, as in the novel, the first woman with whom we come into contact is the sister character. In the novel, she is referred to only as "Mrs. Joe," and her stinging insults and rough beatings help forge Pip's close relationship with his gentle brother-in-law, Joe. She is clearly the dominant member of the household, intimidating Pip and Joe at every available moment. Such a reversal of domestic power structures would have been shocking to the Victorian reader. This absence of traditional femininity is only further reinforced by her physical appearance. Dickens describes her as "tall and bony," "not a good-looking woman," who daily wears a coarse apron with "a square impregnable bib in front, that was stuck full of pins and needles."[81] Not only is Mrs. Joe sexually undesirable, but her makeshift chastity belt (ironically fashioned out of a piece of clothing typically signifying womanhood and domesticity), adorned with sharp weaponry, is sure to deter even the most enthusiastic of suitors. Here, Dickens plays on male castration anxiety over sixty years before Freud would coin the term. Subsequently, she and Joe do not have children; although he harbors a healthy level of fear and respect toward her, it is evident that their union is passionless.

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[80] Sanders 128.

[81] Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1992), 6.

As unsexed as Mrs. Joe is, Cuarón and Glazer have taken her film counterpart, Maggie (played by Kim Dickens) the opposite route. Less than ten minutes into the film, young Finn passes an anonymous man as he makes his way into the house. As he passes Maggie's bedroom, he sees that she is naked, sitting on the edge of her bed with her back to the camera, enjoying a post-coital cigarette. She sighs in exasperation at his disapproving stare. Her few remaining scenes are colored with this image. Later on, when Finn brings food and supplies to the escaped convict, Arthur Lustig, Maggie's sexuality is referenced again when the boy accidentally includes her birth control with a bottle of pain medication.

In adapting and updating the sister character for film, Glazer and Cuarón transformed her from a harshly de-sexualized "evil stepmother" type to a vaguely disinterested, hypersexual young woman. Dickens hints that Mrs. Joe and her husband rarely (if ever) made love during their marriage; Maggie refuses to limit herself to a monogamous sexual relationship. Mrs. Joe's power springs from the idea that she is impenetrable, and therefore lacks womanly "softness," while Maggie's originates from her assertive sexuality and persuasive power over her lovers. Unlike the overt cruelty of Mrs. Joe's endless scoldings and beatings, Maggie's cruelty manifests itself through her self-absorbed sexual exploits and eventual abandonment of her younger brother and boyfriend. While I actually find this characterization to be more multi-faceted than Dickens's rather cartoonish Mrs. Joe, I am wary of the film's treatment of Maggie's sexuality. The viewer is meant to reprove of her cheating, but showing her naked form during her first onscreen appearance can only be intended to excite us. Needless to say, the actress playing Maggie does not share Mrs. Joe's physical unattractiveness, which would certainly hinder audience enjoyment as they watched her traipsing around onscreen in camisoles and cutoffs.

Next, Cuarón introduces the audience to Ms. Dinsmoor, Estella's aunt and guardian in the film and the counterpart to Dickens's Miss Havisham—arguably one of the most recognizable characters in Western literature. The reader encounters Miss Havisham even before Pip is escorted into her parlor room, for her loneliness fills each musty room in her desolate manor, Satis House. Upon first entrance to the garden, Pip marvels that "the cold wind seemed to blow colder there, than outside the gate; and it made a shrill noise in howling in and out…like the noise of wind in the rigging of a ship at sea."[82] The house has fallen into emptiness and disuse, festooned with cobwebs, a place where "daylight was completely excluded," with "an airless smell that was oppressive."[83] All natural life has been banished from Miss Havisham's sight. How fascinating, then, that Glazer chose to re-situate Dickens's most infamous house in the sunny climes of Sarasota, Florida. The approach he and Cuarón employ to visually convey Ms. Dinsmoor's loneliness differs markedly from the novel, and, like other aspects of the film, it is fraught with sexual undertones.

Young Finn's first glimpse of Dinsmoor's residence is, like Pip's, viewed through the exterior gate. As the camera pans up to the top of the gateway arch, we see gilded lettering: "Paradiso Perduto"—Paradise Lost. And, like Milton's epic poem of the same title, the untamed grounds of the manor evoke images of a pre-societal land, a Garden of Eden that is both awe-inspiring and frightening in its wildness. "Jesus," Joe remarks to Finn. "It's the land time forgot." As the two cautiously make their way into the garden, we are given a closer look at the vegetation that surrounds the house, overpowering it. Spanish moss has all but devoured the set of lawn furniture and statuettes that line what used to be the walkway up to the house. Insects hum and birds chirp among the tall palms and evergreens, but the effect is menacing, rather than peaceful. Joe warns Finn not to wander off exploring the garden: “God knows what’s in these weeds.”

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[82] Dickens, *Great Expectations*, 51.
[83] Dickens, *Great Expectations*, 78.

Upon finally stepping into the house itself, we observe that it, too, is beset with the same verdant plants that enveloped the exterior: vines crawl up and down the walls, twiggy branches obscure framed paintings and wainscoting, and the gorgeous Spanish-tiled floor is littered with dead leaves. Finn’s voiceover narrates that Dinsmoor’s manor “smelled of dead flowers and cat piss.” For all its wealth and elegance, Paradiso Perduto is no match for the raw power of nature. Nature, which is typically personified as female or feminine (“Mother Nature,” “Mother Earth,” etc.) is represented with a hefty amount of ambivalence within Cuarón’s film. On the one hand, there is something truly sublime about the visual of a lush, jungle-like garden invading an old manor, welding itself with the man-made object. On the other, there is something eerily chilling about its power, and the sight of so many wild plants indoors strikes the viewer as unnatural (or perhaps *too* natural?). This “feminine” force is celebrated when it manifests itself in a beautiful flowerbed or a well-trimmed row of hedges, controlled and cultivated by some outer masculine power, but when it is allowed to thrive on its own, it is something to be feared. In this way, the overgrown plants that surround and inhabit Dinsmoor’s mansion can be read as a metaphor for her sexuality: after nearly three decades of isolation, without the care and guidance of a male lover, her desires have grown as rampant and uninhibited as the vines lining her walls. Without a husband to keep her in check, Dinsmoor’s sexual needs have grown from an attractively manicured lawn to a dark, overgrown thicket, threatening to overtake the masculine space of the mansion. Paradise Lost, indeed.

Dinsmoor's actions and eccentricities likewise stem from her unbridled sexual desires. Whether or not Miss Havisham has the same desires, we can only speculate. (Dickens remained mum on the subject.) However, years of celibacy and solitude have affected the two characters in strikingly different ways. In the iconic scene in the novel where Pip meets the old woman, Dickens describes her thusly:

> In an armchair, with an elbow resting on the table and her head leaning on that hand, sat the strangest lady I have ever seen, or shall ever see. She was dressed in rich materials—satins, and lace, and silks—all of white…But I saw that everything within my view which ought to be white, had been white long ago, and had lost its lustre, and was faded and yellow. I saw that the bride within the bridal dress had withered like the dress, and like the flowers, had no brightness left but the brightness of her sunken eyes. I saw that the dress had been put on the rounded figure of a young woman, and that the figure upon which it now hung loose, had shrunk to skin and bone.[84]

Dickens describes her many times throughout the novel as being "corpse-like," sickly and sallow, so traumatized from her abandonment at the altar that she is unable to let go of the trappings of her wedding day. During most of her scenes in the book, she is immobile, sitting atop her throne-like armchair while she oversees Pip's and Estella's interactions like some grand puppeteer. For all intents and purposes, Havisham's reserved, icy demeanor demonstrates her *lack* of sexual urges—after all, what use has a living corpse for physical fulfillments? Her prolonged virginity has not accumulated desire over the years, but rather deadened it and caused it to disappear completely. Not so for Ms. Nora Driggers Dinsmoor—her grand entrance in the film obliterates the viewer's preconceived understanding of the Miss Havisham character from the novel.

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[84] Dickens, *Great Expectations*, 52-53.

As the camera follows Finn uncertainly walking into Dinsmoor's room, we hear the opening strains of "Bésame Mucho" playing on an old phonograph. When the camera focuses in on the end table upon which the phonograph rests, we see that it is littered with album covers of many different recordings of the same song. "Bésame Mucho" ("Kiss Me a Lot") is a blatant plea for affection, and a fitting song to accompany Dinsmoor's first appearance in the film. Her first whispered words, "Chick-a-boom, chick-a-boom, chick-a-boom-boom-boom," are repeated several more times throughout the movie as an expression of triumph or excitement at Finn's increased affection for Estella. Our first glimpse of his hostess is from across the room, with her back toward the camera. She sways in rhythm to the music for a few bars as the camera pulls in closer, before spinning around dramatically and shimmying with an enthusiastic "Chick-a-*boom*!"

Upon first seeing Ms. Dinsmoor, we are aware that we are no longer in Dickens's territory. This "jilted, victimized, vengeful bride of decay"[85] is hardly recognizable in this incarnation, being updated for the twentieth-century audience. Rather than donning a tattered, yellowing wedding gown, she is clad in a bright green dress-and-pants combination—a bit faded, but certainly not decades old. She wears wigs throughout the film, and the saucy honey-colored bob on her head seems out of place on such an older woman. Most noticeable of all, the makeup she wears is garish, almost clown-like. Her eyeliner extends several inches past her eyelids in an exaggerated cat's eye, and her lips are colored a bright scarlet. At one point, the viewer watches as she studiously applies a false beauty mark on her face with black eye pencil. Her foundation makeup is clearly a shade or two lighter than her natural skin tone, giving the effect that she is wearing a pallid mask. When she advances toward Finn in her opening scene, the light illuminates her face, emphasizing each wrinkle inadequately covered by the thick pancake makeup. She less resembles Miss Havisham than an aging drag queen (and a poor one, at that). However, Dinsmoor's caricaturized girlishness arguably has roots in the novel: in her article on the 1946 David Lean film adaptation, Regina Barreca argues that even Martita Hunt's "traditional" Miss Havisham is "not so much an 'imposter' as a female impersonator."[86] Cuarón's Dinsmoor character just literally embodies this interpretation.

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[85] Robert M. Polhemus, "Screen Memories in Dickens and Woody Allen," in *Dickens on Screen*, ed. John Glavin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 75.

Through these costume and makeup choices, the filmmakers intended to make a point of the character's lost femininity. She is a *woman*, but not *feminine*; this implies that her natural beauty and femininity disappeared after years of isolation from men. As the proverbial "old maid," Dinsmoor is undesirable to the opposite sex, and her virginity has only added to her undesirability. Childless, single older women are not provided a space in contemporary Western society: they are past their "peak" of desirability, and have no men or children to take care of. In *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Luce Irigaray writes:

> In this new matrix of History, in which man begets man as his own likeness, wives, daughters and sisters have value only in that they serve as the possibility of, and potential benefit in, relations among men.[87]

Outside of this sexual economy, women have no purpose. According to Irigaray, the (attractive, pre-menopausal) virgin has limitless exchange value, while the prostitute has limitless use value. Dinsmoor, being neither, cannot be used as a "commodity"; however, she also cannot be called "private property," as wives and mothers are.[88] By assuming none of these roles, she has no space within the system, and can be perceived as a threat to the patriarchy. Her desperate attempts at beautification (exaggerating the features which are typically seen as “feminine” by donning wigs and painting her lips and eyes) are vain attempts to appear youthful and womanly, but they only highlight her age and loneliness. After a life without the true male affection to validate her womanhood, Dinsmoor is forced into crude imitation, “playing at” femininity. Even though this re-imagining of the character is a departure from the Miss Havisham of the novel, Dickens scholar Michael Slater finds evidence that the author himself had a repugnance for older women who attempt to present themselves as young and comely:

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[86] Regina Barreca, "David Lean's *Great Expectations*," in *Dickens on Screen*, ed. John Glavin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 40.

[87] Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 171.

[88] Irigaray 173-174.

> I can think of no middle-aged woman in Dickens…who is presented as attractive in a specifically physical sense. In general, they are presented as grotesquely unattractive and those…who presume to affect the charms of youth are ruthlessly caricatured…The source of extra venom, I would suggest, lies in a basic hostility towards women asserting themselves as sexual beings. The older they are the worse it is, Dickens would seem to feel. The kind of old woman he approves of is the kind that fulfills the role of charming household ornament.[89]

Dinsmoor’s sexual frustration has her acting in ways that are startling to young Finn, particularly in her entrance scene. Singing along to “Bésame Mucho” in her lusty contralto, she cha-chas across floor toward the trepidatious boy, her eyes wide with rhythmic fervor. Grabbing his hand, she drags him into a grotesque mock-ballroom tango, which climaxes in the woman roughly pulling Finn to her and tightly squeezing him, all the while singing the lyrics, “Hold me, my darling, and say that you’ll always be mine.” The dance ends when Dinsmoor snaps out of her Latin Jazz-induced trance and back into the present moment. With wide eyes and a soft, almost child-like voice, she asks:

> DINSMOOR: Who are you?
> YOUNG FINN: Finn, ma’am.
> DINSMOOR: What are you doing in my bedroom, Finn?

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[89] Michael Slater, *Dickens and Women* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1983): 362-363.

When Finn timidly tells her he does not know, she asks for his hand and gently places it upon her bosom. After closing her eyes and heaving an immense sigh, she continues:

> DINSMOOR: What is this?
> YOUNG FINN: Your…your boob.

With great melodramatic panache, she informs him that it is, in fact, her broken heart. This moment is one of the few that closely parallels the novel, albeit in a more overtly sexual manner: in Dickens's scene, Miss Havisham puts her *own* hands upon her breast, which the author delicately refers to as "her left side."[90] Dinsmoor's startlingly aggressive actions bring to fruition the "demonically powerful untapped well of feminine sexuality" aspect of Miss Havisham's character, about which only a few modern scholars have hypothesized.[91] As with her pursuit of external feminine beauty, Dinsmoor's unexplored sexual desires cause her to act out in unnatural ways. Because she has never experienced sex in a socially acceptable context (i.e., with a man), her needs have accumulated and expressed themselves through her dancing manias, rough physical interactions, and inappropriate near-flirtations with young Finn. The overarching message: women need heterosexual experiences in order to be sane and emotionally fulfilled.

Dinsmoor's young protégée, Estella (Gwyneth Paltrow), has been groomed to escape such a fate by exercising her coquettish charms and remaining coolly aloof to men's affections. As the primary love interest, she is the female character who receives the most attention in both the novel and the film. The casting of Gwyneth Paltrow as Estella had a great deal to do with the amount of focus placed on the character in Cuarón's film. In the middle of the production process, Paltrow's celebrity status exploded, a result of the critical success of Douglas

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[90] Dickens, *Great Expectations*, 53.
[91] Barreca 39.

McGrath's film adaptation of *Emma*, combined with increased public exposure modeling for a Calvin Klein ad campaign. The studio executives frantically demanded more scenes between Estella and Finn, which consequently altered the thrust of the narrative.[92] *Great Expectations*, as a novel, is a *bildungsroman* telling the story of a young man making his way in the world; Cuarón's film adaptation became re-framed as a traditional boy-meets-girl love story, complete with a cliché scene in which Finn and Estella share a passionate kiss in the rain. This shift demonstrates the industry's lack of comfort with films that cannot be easily compartmentalized into generic categories ("slapstick comedy," "domestic drama," "slasher flick," etc.). Reducing Dickens's complex novel to a Hollywood romance does a disservice to the adaptation, as it pushes the narrative's other elements to the wayside. In Roger Ebert's review of the film, he complains that the screenplay "too closely follows the romantic line…The moment this movie declares itself as being mostly about affairs of the heart, it limits its potential"; he also notes that the action involving Finn's convict benefactor "feels more like a bone thrown to Dickens than a necessity of the plot."[93] He has a point: Magwitch is a very important character in the novel, but Cuarón's Arthur Lustig is more of an afterthought than a genuine contribution to the plot. Overall, the film would feel more cohesive had the filmmakers either fully committed to the "love story" aspect or left the Finn-Estella romance as a subplot. As it is, the adaptation tries to have it both ways, and its focus suffers as a result.

Though it may be tempting to pin all of the film's generic shortcomings on the formulaic Hollywood film industry or Paltrow's celebrity, the public desire to read *Great Expectations* as a love story existed even before the novel was finished. In fact, Dickens had originally written a slightly bleaker ending to *Great Expectations*, in which Pip meets Estella to find her changed for the better, but married to a Shropshire doctor. After a brief conversation, they part, and Pip reflects that he is happy that Estella is able to love after years of indoctrination by Miss Havisham. After reading a draft of the original ending, the poet Edward Bulwer-Lytton persuaded Dickens to write a softer, more hopeful coda to the story.[94] This "official" published ending suggests that after more than a decade of personal growth, Pip and Estella can finally find love together. Cuarón follows Dickens's rewritten ending, with the two leads meeting each other by chance years later on the deserted grounds of Paradiso Perduto; as the film ends, the couple clasp hands and watch the sun set on the Gulf of Mexico. It is a picture-perfect scene worthy of a postcard, and almost enough to make the viewer forget that the film was ever about anything *but* Finn and Estella's romance. Almost.

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[92] Katz 99.

[93] Roger Ebert, "Great Expectations," *Chicago Sun-Times*, January 30, 1998, accessed April 2, 2009, http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/19980130/REVIEWS/801300306/1023

The studio, banking on Paltrow's newfound popularity to sell tickets, used the promotional posters to emphasize her sexy turn in the Dickensian "love story." In the first poster (see Appendix B, Image 1 on page 96), Paltrow is the primary focus, sprawled out seductively in the center of the poster, wearing nothing but a sultry expression. Dutiful homage is paid to the other actors, of course, but it is clear that she is meant to draw the observer's attention. And although Paltrow is photographed only once on this particular poster, the character of Estella is represented two additional times: as the subject of one of Finn's portraits (upper-right corner) and as a child, dancing with young Finn (lower-left corner). The film's tagline, "Let Desire Be Your Destiny" hints to the viewer that the movie will be about a juicy sexual relationship between the attractive young leads, but it does not divulge much else. One might assume that the average audience member would have, at the very least, the knowledge that *Great Expectations* is also the title of a Dickens novel; from there, he or she might be able to infer basic plot details based on their own interactions with the book. The poster's appearance and tagline, however, do not closely associate themselves with the original source. Another poster for the film is even more cryptic (see Appendix B, Image 2 on page 97), featuring only a portrait of Paltrow as Estella along with the title and a list of the actors' names. If nothing else, the marketing promises to offer audiences a few hours of Gwyneth Paltrow screen-worship.

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[94] Ackroyd 902.

The filmmakers certainly seemed to worship her, to the point of altering the story to give Estella a "softer" image. Audiences complained during early previews of the film that Estella was not sympathetic enough.[95] This is the same character who is described in the novel as being "very insulting"[96] and "hard and haughty and capricious to the last degree."[97] Even *she* confesses to Pip that she has "no heart…no softness there, no—sympathy—sentiment—nonsense."[98] With such protestations from Dickens's original character, one might hesitate to edit the screenplay to turn Estella into a just another misunderstood heroine with a sweet smile and a heart of gold. Nevertheless, the changes were made in an effort to protect the box office numbers. The most notable change is a dramatic scene inserted into the middle of the movie (hastily filmed at the end of the production process), in which Finn and Estella ride in a taxi together. Estella explains to Finn, through metaphor, that she is not to be blamed for her actions because Ms. Dinsmoor poisoned her against men from an early age. Cuarón admits in an interview with Pamela Katz, "Understanding *why* she is 'like that' was said to make her more sympathetic."[99] Predictably, Estella's sudden emotional openness is unmotivated, and the taxi scene feels tacked-on and out of place.

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[95] Katz 100.
[96] Dickens, *Great Expectations*, 56
[97] Dickens, *Great Expectations*, 166.
[98] Dickens, *Great Expectations*, 224.

One might suppose that in the process of updating the *Great Expectations* story to the late-twentieth century, Estella would be given a job. And, in early drafts of the screenplay, she did have a career as an art restorer—a position that would have been especially interesting considering Finn's upstart opportunity to work as a young artist in New York. However, studio executives decided that it was "not necessary" to the story for Estella to have a career, and the character detail was cut in the interest of time.[100] Unfortunately for Estella, that "unnecessary" little detail probably would have added more dimensionality to her character and given audiences further grounds on which to relate to her. After all, people are inclined to be less sympathetic to a wealthy socialite who does nothing but flit about wearing expensive designer clothes and enticing men. By omitting her career, we lose the last detail that might have allowed us to see Estella as a woman on her *own* terms. Estella's joblessness is all the more evident in light of Finn's new agency: in this version, he is still expected to produce art, and thus is at least given the appearance of control over his success, even if his opportunities are secretly orchestrated by his convict benefactor. In the novel, Pip is just mysteriously whisked away to become a gentleman; in the updated film, he is given a purpose: his artistic livelihood. Robbing Estella of the same is not really much of an "update."

The "interest of time" excuse is especially flimsy when one considers the amount of screen time allotted to the sexual interactions between Estella and Finn. There are three erotic scenes between the young leads, and ironically, Finn keeps his clothes on during two of them. The first scene occurs while they are still teenagers: Estella leaves a swanky society soirée to visit Finn's home for the very first time. She boldly walks into his bedroom and admires his artwork while Finn (and the camera) sits back and admires her. When she coyly walks up to him and nudges his hand between her legs, the camera follows it up past the tulle ruffles of her cocktail dress, over her thighs, and up to the folds of her undergarments—now the only thing obscuring her crotch from the audience. The one-sided erotic scene that follows is spent focused on Estella's face; her closed eyes and heavy breathing signify that Finn is pleasuring her manually underneath her dress. We fade out from one shot of Estella lifting her head back in ecstasy, only to fade in on another. And then another. Only occasionally does the camera flash down to Finn, who is panting also, but from nervousness and arousal rather than sexual release.

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[99] Katz 100.
[100] Katz 98.

After Estella climaxes, she kisses Finn tenderly before abruptly turning around and walking out of the room. As a method of displaying Estella's selfishness, the scene works well. However, the prolonged focus on Estella's (and only Estella's) sexual enjoyment objectifies her to the audience. In her canonical article, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Laura Mulvey describes Freud's theory of scopophilia, the pleasure derived in looking at others, which

> continues to exist as the erotic basis for pleasure in looking at another person as object. At the extreme, it can become fixated into a perversion, producing obsessive voyeurs and Peeping Toms, whose only sexual satisfaction can come from watching, in an active controlling sense, an objectified other.[101]

The viewer, safely separated from the goings-on of the universe of the film by a screen and darkened movie theatre, is given the distance to comfortably take pleasure in peeking in on this intimate moment. But because the camera remains so firmly fixed upon Estella, we do not objectify Finn in the same way we do her. Like the aforementioned on-screen encounter, the pleasure is entirely one-sided. Filmic scopophilia, Mulvey explains, is almost exclusively used to objectify women, presenting them as Other to a male audience:

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[101] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*, ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 201.

> In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female…In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness.[102]

In other words, the film's cinematic focus on Estella is anything but coincidental. The film's sex scenes in particular are orchestrated to display Estella while Finn takes secondary focus.

The second erotic scene in the film occurs after Finn has moved to New York to work on his gallery show. It also works as an exercise in scopophilia, because Finn and Estella do not even touch: the eroticism stems from Finn sketching a nude Estella. She arrives at his apartment, uninvited, letting herself into Finn's room while he is sleeping. As she closes the door and approaches the bed, he begins to wake up. The camera films from just behind and above Finn's head, turned on its side and out of focus, so the viewer shares Finn's sensation of blurred vision and horizontal positioning on his bed. By opening the scene "through Finn's eyes," so to speak, we are made to identify with him, viewing Estella throughout the rest of the scene with his desire, his longing. Watching her disrobe for the portrait is akin to watching a striptease, the way the camera studiously follows her fingers as she slowly unbuttons her shirt. Her suggestive question, "So, do you want me sitting or standing?" and Finn's flustered answer, "Both," injects the scene with even more sexual tension—heightened, undoubtedly, by the fact that she is half-nude by this point. The audience is fully aware that Estella's desire to be painted has little to do with art and everything to do with sex. She removes her miniskirt in a similar fashion, slowly, seductively, and entirely for Finn's (and the viewer's) benefit.

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[102] Mulvey 203.

Most shocking of all, however, is when she saunters up to Finn's open window in her bra and panties—a window that looks out on the sunny, busy streets of New York City—and unhooks her bra and slides her panties down *directly* in front of said window. Estella strips, not just for Finn, but also for anyone outside who happens to be in the window's sightline. The camera then changes position, moving behind Estella, capturing a shot of a mother and daughter folding a bed sheet through the window in an adjacent apartment building, making for one of the strangest and inappropriately placed shots in the film. By "giving permission" to the viewers to gaze upon her naked body, the character effectively quells any feelings of guilt or uncertainty the audience members might be experiencing as they watch this scene.

There are those who would argue that by allowing Finn to see her naked on her own terms, Estella actually holds the upper hand. Paltrow, for example, found the nude scenes "both empowering and liberating."[103] She explains:

> It's one of those things they make you do starting out. I don't want to be naked in a movie. But, this character in *Great Expectations*, her sexuality and her nudity was so much a part of manipulation. It was her power. So I didn't think the nudity was exploitative.[104]

It is true that the character (as played by Paltrow) draws most of her power from the ease with which she sexually entices men. But when placed in the context of the way female sexuality is approached in the rest of this film, filtered through the cinematic male gaze, the nudity cannot be read as anything *but* exploitative. By allowing her naked body to be placed up for consumption in such a way, Estella "okays" it, for herself and for other women, both real and fictional. The basic premise behind the scene is that Estella *enjoys* being objectified, reinforcing the idea that the male gaze is somehow the natural order of things: women are designed to be looked at, and men are designed to do the looking.

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[103] Valerie Milano, *Gwyneth Paltrow* (Toronto: ECW Press, 2000), 88.
[104] Ibid.

In many ways, the portrait scene has the look and feel of a music video. Estella undresses with the laid-back opening strains of Pulp's "Like a Friend" in the background; when the music accelerates with a steady drumbeat and an electric guitar crescendo, Finn begins sketching frantically. The camerawork appears to follow the tone of the music, using long shots at first and then switching to quick-cut, frenetic shots while Finn sketches Estella, never lingering on any one shot for more than a second. The song winds down by the scene's end, and the film resumes its normal pace. The "music video"-esque camera techniques deployed here help the narrative retain a fresh, "hip" aesthetic in an effort to appeal to the tastes of a younger demographic, further distancing itself from the "traditional" Masterpiece Theater/BBC miniseries-style presentation of Dickensian adaptations. Additionally, the presence of contemporary popular music aids the film's quest to make the narrative "current," while simultaneously promoting the soundtrack album (which spent sixteen weeks on the U.S. Billboard 200 chart).[105]

The portrait scene's quick-shot technique is also successful as a means of further sexualizing and objectifying Estella. The film's cinematographer, Emmanuel Lubezki, explains that they shot the scene with a hand held camera, to "keep the tension and focus on what was important. Because we didn't want to show her completely naked, we kept only pieces of her body in focus—naked shoulders, hands."[106] This stylistic effect is echoed throughout the movie, but never is it more obvious than during this scene. The shots appear on screen, one after the other, isolating Estella's lean torso, her legs, her feet, her back. Interestingly enough, her breasts and crotch are never shot in this way; each time they are shown, they are shot out-of-focus. These shots of Estella are interspersed with shots of Finn eagerly sketching her, using his charcoals to frantically document every inch of her bare skin. We are also shown quick shots of his drawings as he makes them—and these are almost entirely close-ups of her sketched breasts and carefully shaded pubis. Desson Howe of the *Washington Post* comments wryly, "As Paltrow struts her ermine-like, barely clad body and Hawke sketches and salivates, you're seeing…the movie's prime *raison d'être*."[107]

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[105] "Great Expectations [Original Soundtrack]," Billboard.com, accessed November 12, 2010, http://www.billboard.com/charts/hot-100#/album/original-soundtrack/great-expectations-original-soundtrack/278790.

[106] Pauline Bonnie Rogers, *Contemporary Cinematographers on Their Art* (Boston: Focal Press, 1998), 119.

Estella is fragmented in this way throughout the film, even as a child. During Finn's first visit to Paradiso Perduto, Ms. Dinsmoor requests that he sketch the young girl. In a brief scene that would parallel her adult portrait-drawing session, the camera runs smoothly across her eyes, her neck, and her pink tongue as she licks her lips. These shots are uncomfortably sexual, especially when viewed in context with Estella's portrait scene. If the audience learns anything from the cinematography of Cuarón's film, it is that no female is too young to be objectified. Finn's high school bedroom is likewise plastered with sketches and paintings, some of which are fragmented images of Estella: a nose here, a mouth there, a torso there. By showing these recurring fragmented close-ups of Estella's individual features, Cuarón ends up fetishizing her body parts. We no longer see a woman, we see *pieces* of a woman, disembodied erogenous zones that serve no practical purpose other than to be looked at. The danger lies in the inundation of shots like this, which imply that Woman is not a thinking, feeling being, but a mere compilation of so many fetishized parts.

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[107] Desson Howe, "Not So 'Great Expectations,'" *Washington Post*, January 30, 1998, Arts Section.

Finn and Estella's third erotic encounter is the film's only sex scene; ironically, it is the shortest of the three, lasting only twenty-five seconds[108]—apparently, filming two characters having sex is less alluring than watching a single woman put herself on display. After the two make love in Finn's upscale apartment, she saunters up to an enormous full-length window and watches the rain for a moment—still nude, of course. She then sits in a chair, directly in front of the window, where she stays for the remainder of the scene.

In defense of his choice to turn the outwardly chaste Victorian novel to a modern erotic Hollywood movie, Cuarón claims, "If Dickens were writing today, he would have more sex in his own novels too."[109] And, being a populist writer, it is quite probable that he would. Cuarón's film is not problematic merely because the female characters are given sexualities; after all, sex is a much more open and acceptable topic in Western society today than it was a hundred and fifty years ago. The problem lies in the way he records this sexuality on film, while the male bodies are virtually unseen. Obviously, a major reason for giving the women in the film a prominent sexuality was to boost box office sales: everyone knows that sex sells. Nevertheless, according to Hollywood filmmakers, sex clearly does not sell across the board, as none of the film's men are given a similar sexual "updating." In his article, "Manual Conduct in *Great Expectations*," William A. Cohen examines the masturbation imagery and homoerotic content present in the novel, locating "at the very heart of the Victorian literary canon a deeply saturated perversity."[110] (Most of these homoerotic elements can be found in the scenes between Pip and his friend and business partner, Herbert Pocket, a character who was omitted from the 1998 film adaptation.) Why did Cuarón and Glazer not explore elements of Finn's sexuality, allowing the audience the voyeuristic pleasure of looking at *his* body? Alas, the Hollywood cinematic codes are structured upon the assumption that the audience is solely comprised of heterosexual men, and allowing a man's body to be put on display would disrupt the active/male, passive/female power binary. Naked women sell tickets; naked men just make the mainstream audience uncomfortable.

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[108] Estella and Finn's first tryst lasts for one minute and ten seconds, and the nude portrait scene lasts two minutes and forty seconds.

[109] Katz 97.

[110] William A. Cohen, "Manual Conduct in *Great Expectations*," *ELH* 60.1 (Spring 1999): 220.

Unsurprisingly, *Great Expectations* made many nineteenth-century readers uncomfortable as well (although not due to the homoerotic elements, which were largely overlooked). In response to the female characters in Dickens's serialized novel, contemporary reviewers found them to be unnatural and in need of much "softening." One journalist from the *British Quarterly Review* called Estella "cold and cruel through mere waywardness," believing a successful romantic alliance between her and Pip to be unlikely unless preceded by several years of "taming."[111] Could it be possible that by "sexualizing" these characters, Cuarón and Glazer were attempting to "soften" them, depicting their mortal weaknesses via their need to be physically fulfilled, and/or gazed upon? Even with the sex and nudity added in, modern audiences still found discomfort in the fact that they could not easily sympathize with Estella. By viewing Maggie and Estella in a sexual context and highlighting their "to-be-looked-at-ness," as Mulvey refers to it, these cruel characters can be controlled or "tamed" by the viewer. As for Ms. Dinsmoor, her sexuality is depicted as unnatural, and her psychological problems are written as ones that could have been remedied if only she had found a man in her younger days. When these strong female characters are subjugated to the male gaze, they suddenly become less threatening, portrayed as objects to be desired or ridiculed. This is not to imply that Cuarón and Glazer somehow completely "misogynized" *Great Expectations*, for Dickens was no great feminist and his novel is no great feminist text—there is plenty of blame to be spread around. But through their cinematic choices, Cuarón and Glazer have placed the female characters up for visual consumption, effectively controlling them and nullifying any power they once had. Like too many elements of Hollywood filmmaking, the "sexing up" of these women serves one purpose: to reify the dominant male ideology, turning the characters into elements of male fantasy rather than three-dimensional women with ownership over their sexualities.

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[111] Nicolas Tredell, *Charles Dickens: Great Expectations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 33.

Chapter Three

The Postmodern Dickens: Parody and Irony in Christopher Durang's *Mrs. Bob Cratchit's Wild Christmas Binge*

In 2002, Obie Award-winning playwright Christopher Durang was commissioned by the City Theatre in Pittsburgh to write a "comic alternative Christmas play." Influenced by the prevailing narrative of the holiday season—Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*—Durang set out to create a musical parody-pastiche[112] that fondly mocks the stories contemporary Americans identify with Christmas. Although the play is still set in Victorian London, much of the dialogue and sensibilities of the three main characters (Scrooge, Mrs. Cratchit, and the Ghost) are distinctly contemporary, presenting the narrative through a postmodern lens. The word "postmodern" immediately recalls a myriad of definitions and associations, and pinpointing its meaning as a mode of representation has been the subject of many a lengthy treatise; however, I have found Todd Gitlin's definition to be both helpful and concise:

> "Postmodernism" usually refers to a certain constellation of styles and tones in cultural works: pastiche; blankness; a sense of exhaustion; a mixture of levels, forms, styles; a relish for copies and repetition; a knowingness that dissolves commitment into irony; acute self-consciousness about the formal, constructed nature of the work; pleasure in the play of surfaces; a rejection of history.[113]

Mrs. Bob Cratchit's Wild Christmas Binge (hereafter referred to as "*Binge*" for brevity's sake) manages to embody nearly all of the qualities that Gitlin calls "postmodern." In the previous chapter, I explored the consequences of temporally "updating" *Great Expectations* to pre-millennial America; in this chapter, I will analyze the stylistic and structural elements that make *Binge* such a felicitous example of a postmodern stage adaptation. In doing so, I will examine the cultural journey *A Christmas Carol* has taken since Dickens's time, from didactic family entertainment to near-mythical status in American society. Through his use of irony, subversion, and contemporary literary conventions, Durang's parody is a sly critique of "traditional" *Carol* productions, questioning the efficacy of Dickens's moral in the cynical twenty-first century.

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[112] With only four songs, *Mrs. Bob Cratchit's Wild Christmas Binge* is less a typical musical than a "play with music."

[113] Todd Gitlin, "The Postmodern Predicament," *The Wilson Quarterly* 13.3 (Summer 1989): 76.

One of the hallmarks of Dickens's novels is his preoccupation with the state of London's lower class. During the 1840s, only one third of children attended school. Without a proper education or vocational training, most of London's poor were fated to grow up ignorant, unemployed, and unable to escape the poverty of their birth.[114] Thoroughly moved by these wretched conditions, Dickens wrote *A Christmas Carol* in little over six weeks, crafting a tale that imagines a London in which the upper and middle classes have a responsibility for the well-being of the poor.[115] The story follows Ebenezer Scrooge, a miserly old businessman with little use for companionship, charity, kindness, and least of all, Christmas. He is visited by the ghost of his late business partner, Jacob Marley, who warns him he must change his ways or be condemned to spend eternity in wandering the earth in chains. Marley tells Scrooge that he will be visited by three spirits before the night is over. The first spirit, the Ghost of Christmas Past, takes the old man to several events earlier in his lifetime, allowing Scrooge to reflect on his transformation from a kindhearted youth to a hardened old man. The second spirit, the Ghost of Christmas Present, brings Scrooge to the Cratchit residence, where his clerk and his family make the most out of a very meager Christmas dinner. The third and final spirit, the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come, takes Scrooge into a hypothetical future, after his death, where he is shocked to find that his business associates and servants are indifferent or even relieved at his passing. Aghast, Scrooge fervidly promises the spirit that he will mend his selfish ways so that the future may take a different course. From that day forward, Scrooge treats his fellow man with kindness and munificence, never forgetting the three apparitions who visited him one snowy Christmas Eve.

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[114] Ackroyd 406-407.
[115] Ackroyd 412.

Approximately six thousand copies of the book were sold within its first week of release in December of 1843, and many more were sold into the new year. It was uniformly well-received by critics, who appreciated the social message accompanying the captivating narrative. Fellow writer William Makepeace Thackeray lauded the *Carol* as a "national benefit, and to every man and woman who reads it a personal kindness." Although the novella was initially less popular in the United States than in England, Ebenezer Scrooge's conversion supposedly inspired a guilt-ridden Boston factory-owner to give his employees a spontaneous Christmas holiday, complete with one turkey each.[116] Indeed, the story had a profound effect across Britain, even impacting the way in which Christmas was celebrated. The concept of Christmas as a joyous feast day and time of family "togetherness" was abandoned under Puritan influence, but the *Carol*'s popularity had a secularizing effect on the holiday and helped revive these English traditions, solidifying its place in the Christmas literary canon.[117] To date, *A Christmas Carol* has never been out of print. The story has endured because it promotes social values of generosity, kindness, class equality, and redemption. Dickens often gave readings of the novella for charities, hospitals for sick children, and working-class crowds; he counted it among his very favorite works to read before an audience because it created a mood of "familial and national harmony."[118]

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[116] Robert Douglas-Fairhurst, introduction to *A Christmas Carol*, by Charles Dickens (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), xx.

[117] Richard Michael Kelly, introduction to *A Christmas Carol*, by Charles Dickens (New York: Broadview Press, 2003), 9-10.

[118] Ackroyd, 683-684.

Almost immediately, writers began penning their own versions in an effort to capitalize on the feelings of happiness and holiday nostalgia evoked by the *Carol*. The first stage adaptation was performed at the Adelphi Theatre in January of 1844, a mere month after the novella was released. A flurry of new versions soon followed—at least seven more by March. Across the pond, American adaptations began to be staged by the next Christmas season. Although Dickens eventually aligned himself with one adaptation, he took very little of the ticket profits, and was unable to stop the legions of unauthorized adaptations from being produced. Oddly, after the 1840s, we have little record of any new play adaptations of *A Christmas Carol*. The creation of new productions picked up a little after Dickens's death in 1870, but dwindled again soon afterward.[119] The advent of radio and film brought forth a bevy of new adaptations in the twentieth century. Radio and television adaptations of the story flourished during the mid-twentieth century as stage adaptations waned in popularity; then, in the 1960s, stage versions of *A Christmas Carol* began to boom once more in Britain and the United States. Dickens scholar H. Philip Bolton observes, "Here is a case in which the live stage seems to have won back from the electronic entertainment industry the prime right to productions."[120]

During the twentieth century, the *Carol* has been adapted for the stage and screen more than any of Dickens's other novels.[121] The novella also has the singular distinction of having the bulk of its adaptations written *after* 1950: Bolton catalogs only about seventy-five adaptations before the mid-twentieth century, as opposed to the two hundred twenty-five new stagings, feature films, radio dramas, and television movies written between 1950 and the 1987 publication of *Dickens Dramatized*. Bolton theorizes that the explosion in stage adaptations is due to the fact that it is often cheaper for a theatre to commission a new adaptation than to obtain the rights to produce an existing script,[122] but this explanation obviously does not account for the dozens of film and television adaptations of the *Carol* that are made year after year. The story has achieved mythic status in contemporary culture, evidenced by our desire to see it re-presented again and again in a multitude of ways. As a result, some of *A Christmas Carol*'s most ardent fans have never actually read the Dickens text and are familiar with it only through adaptations. Linda Hutcheon refers to the "generally circulated cultural memory" that canonical works elicit, regardless of whether or not an individual has had direct experience with the adapted work.[123] In an introduction to the text, editor Robert Douglas-Fairhurst writes that "we tend to know the *Carol* even before we know how to read, and our knowledge comes from many different sources."[124] Even those who have not read the novella or seen any adaptations of the *Carol* will probably be able to recall the basic plot and understand what it means to be called a "scrooge." Without a doubt, this story has been deeply embedded within our culture for over a century and a half.

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[119] Bolton 234.
[120] Bolton 235-236.
[121] Bolton 234.

The advantage of adapting a story that has such widespread familiarity is the seemingly limitless possibilities for experimentation. The majority of *A Christmas Carol* films and stagings are "straight" adaptations—that is, they were created with the intention of preserving the plot, characters, themes, genre, and tone of the original text. Over the last fifty years, however, there has been a growing trend of *Carol* adaptations that take a more liberal approach to recreating the story: there are musical versions, animated versions, two operas, a BBC mimed teleplay starring Marcel Marceau, multiple films with female Scrooges, a comedy with a contemporary setting imagining Scrooge as a greedy television executive, and even a nude production by Pinchbottom Burlesque in 2009.[125] Another popular approach has been to insert popular fictional characters into the story; for example, Mister Magoo, the Flintstones, the Jetsons, Bugs Bunny, Mickey Mouse, Barbie, and Jim Henson's Muppets have all held starring roles in filmed and televised adaptations of *A Christmas Carol*.[126] While some of these nontraditional adaptations may be seen as sillier or more "gimmicky" than their more literal counterparts, their appeal lies in their novelty. Amid a sea of traditional *Carols*, these creative adaptations offer a fresh perspective on the familiar old narrative. Christopher Durang likewise anticipated that audiences crave some variety in their holiday entertainment when he wrote, "I like *A Christmas Carol*. I maybe don't want to see it 103 times."[127] Rather than pen yet another "straight" adaptation, he chose to write a parody poking good-natured fun at the classic morality tale.

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[122] Bolton 236.

[123] Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 122.

[124] Douglas-Fairhurst ix.

Binge's plot loosely follows Dickens's story at first: the cantankerous Ebenezer Scrooge is confronted by a Ghost (the playwright condenses the three spirits of the novella into one all-purpose Ghost) who intends to show him his past, present, and future so that he may reform himself. Here is where Durang's adaptation radically departs from the original text: the Ghost's magic misfires, and Scrooge spends a little too much time at the Cratchit's house, where he falls in love with his clerk's irascible wife. Durang inserts literary and pop culture references into the story as we watch Mrs. Cratchit break down and come to the conclusion that a life of poverty with her goody-goody family is too obnoxious to bear. In the end, rather than learning to be kind and generous Christians, Scrooge and Mrs. Cratchit delight in their selfishness, proclaiming their love of money above all else.

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[125] Neil Genzlinger, "Come On, Santa, Put Your Clothes Back On," *New York Times*, December 11, 2009, accessed July 20, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/11/theater/11holiday.html?_r=3&pagewanted=1&hp.

[126] "IMDb Search: A Christmas Carol," The Internet Movie Database, accessed July 20, 2010, http://www.imdb.com/find?s=all&q=a+christmas+carol.

[127] Christopher Durang, "Afterward," in *Mrs. Bob Cratchit's Wild Christmas Binge* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 2005), 69.

Durang's choice to parody the *Carol* seems an obvious one, considering that he is primarily known for his comedies (including another parody, *For Whom the Southern Bell Tolls*, a take on Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie*). Linda Hutcheon defines parody as "an ironic subset of adaptation," with the unique ability to imitate while maintaining a critical distance.[128] Although parody has existed for thousands of years, Hutcheon maintains that the postmodern period has experienced a resurgence in parodies largely as a result of our complicated relationship with the established literary canon. "Postmodernism signals its dependence by its *use* of the canon," she writes, "but reveals its rebellion through its ironic *abuse* of it."[129] To again utilize Gitlin's definition of "postmodernism," the urge to parody a highly-regarded piece of art belies a "sense of exhaustion" with it, a feeling of stagnancy surrounding a familiar narrative or ubiquitous image. Adapting a work by altering its style or mode of representation is a method of revitalizing it—making the "old" seem "new" again. Parody achieves this revitalization by using mockery as a tool to critique and reevaluate, offering a fresh perspective on an element of mainstream culture.

In an article reviewing several nontraditional Off-Off-Broadway holiday adaptations (including Durang's play), *New York Times* reporter Neil Genzlinger acknowledges the recent trend of skewering iconic Christmas narratives onstage. "Yes, it's the holiday season, and that means beloved sacred and secular stories are being bisected, dissected, and disrespected all over town," Genzlinger writes. "Santa, George Bailey and Jesus are all being shredded on various

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[128] Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 170.
[129] Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 130.

New York stages, but no one is being reimagined in more ways this year than Ebenezer Scrooge. Maybe it's the economy."[130] Perhaps there is an iconoclastic thrill in scoffing at these beloved characters, a guilty joy watching our heroes and childhood legends tweaked and ridiculed. In writing *Binge*, Durang admits that he had no radical purpose in mind beyond entertainment for entertainment's sake,[131] but the work indeed critiques major elements of the characters and values of Dickens's work, especially lampooning the styles in which straightforward stage and film adaptations have presented it. Today, the average audience member will probably be more familiar with one or more adaptations of the *Carol* than the text itself; therefore, it may be difficult for viewers to distinguish one from the other. Even Durang admits that he had never read the original before writing his play. And yet, his familiarity with the source text is immaterial when the majority of the audience only knows the story through its plethora of film and theatrical adaptations. In a way, the dominance of these adaptations over Dickens's novella illustrates Jean Baudrillard's concept of the hyperreal. In *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard writes,

> Today abstraction is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror, or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory—*precession of simulacra*—that engenders the territory.[132]

In the 167 years since *A Christmas Carol* was written, it has skyrocketed from entertaining fiction into cultural mythos. No longer do the *Carol* adaptations need to "map" out the "territory" of Dickens's text—in our postmodern culture, they have superseded it altogether. In order to create a strong parody of the *Carol*, it is not enough for a playwright to mock the novella; (s)he must also burlesque its most famous adaptations, the "copies" that, for all intents and purposes, have become more "real" than the "real" itself.

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[130] Genzlinger, "Come On, Santa, Put Your Clothes Back On."
[131] Durang, "Afterword," 69.
[132] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Glaser (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 1.

In *Binge*, Durang adapts these adaptations, along with contemporary ideas of "Dickens-ness," adding another level of humor to the play. He achieves this first of all by maintaining the setting of the original story: on the surface, the play appears to be much like any traditional adaptation of Dickens's story. He describes the City Theatre production's set as a "pretty purposely generic backdrop of old London,"[133] and specifies in the stage directions that the city should have a "Dickens look."[134] Although he does not explain precisely what constitutes a "Dickens look," the average audience member with a passing familiarity of Dickens adaptations will likely be able to recognize the visual cues that represent Dickensian London: outdoor marketplaces bustling with activity, the air filled with the calls of Cockney merchants; period architecture separated by gloomy alleyways lurking with sly pickpockets and sooty-faced street urchins. Dickens was preoccupied with painting an accurate and unsettling picture of London's slums in an attempt to raise social awareness of the degrading conditions in which the poorest classes lived.

And yet, as time passed, popular representations of Dickens's London became idealized and charming, "a British counterpart of a Norman Rockwell scene."[135] Cultural historian Jeffrey Richards laments the "quaintification" of nineteenth-century London by the hands of Dickens adaptors, and wryly observes that many adaptations of Dickens have been "sanitized and jollified…forever characterized by troupes of well-scrubbed, well-drilled cockney urchins dancing up and down picture-postcard streets."[136] For contemporary audiences—particularly contemporary *American* audiences—a "Dickens look" evokes a sense of comfort, of quintessential "Englishness," and (due to the visibility of *Carol* adaptations) enduring Christmastime traditions. Setting the parody against a generic Dickensian milieu serves to subvert the audience's expectations more than if the story had been transplanted to a different time and place. The closer the set resembles a traditional *Christmas Carol* backdrop, the greater effect Durang's zany dialogue and other anachronistic elements have on the viewer.

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[133] Durang, "Afterword," 70.

[134] Christopher Durang, *Mrs. Bob Cratchit's Wild Christmas Binge* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 2005), 7.

[135] Nancy A. Comorau, "A City Visible but Unseen: Postcolonial London in Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*," in *Territorial Terrors: Contested Spaces in Colonial and Postcolonial Writing* (Würzburg, Germany: Königshausen & Neumann, 2007), 165.

For the most part, the characters' costumes are intended to look similarly traditional and period-appropriate. In photographs from the City Theatre production, the Cratchits are dressed somewhat shabbily to denote their lower-class status; Scrooge is austere and imposing in a black suit with a high starched collar, etc. Although most of the cast is attired in a way that depicts Victorian "realism," some characters' costumes are so cartoonishly extreme that they are a closer parody of *Carol* adaptation costumes than an attempt to recreate what people actually wore. Durang uses Mr. and Mrs. Fezziwig to personify the "Dickens look"—they are "dressed [and padded] to look like a male and female Tweedledee and Tweedledum; they have bright orange wigs on and look extremely 'Dickensian' in a clichéd, over-the-top way."[137] In previous adaptations, the party at the Fezziwig residence represents the happier times in Scrooge's past, a welcome respite from the serious tone of the preceding scenes; in one of *Binge*'s many meta-moments, the Ghost mentions that the Fezziwigs are "usually quite an audience favorite."[138] The outrageous costumes they wear in *Binge* only amplify their roles as purveyors of lighthearted holiday cheer to the point where they are almost manic in their jocularity. (Mr. Fezziwig almost dies of a heart attack at the end of "Fezziwig Song.") The Ghost, a character who otherwise does not closely resemble the three Spirits of Dickens's story, begins a scene dressed comically as the Ghost of Christmas Present, donning "some big robe, a garland of Christmasy greens on her head…[and] a pretty fake-looking beard." Durang notes that her appearance is meant to imitate the look of the character found in many film adaptations.[139]

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[136] Richards 347.
[137] Durang, *Binge*, 26.
[138] Durang, *Binge*, 25.

As extreme or absurd as these costumes are, audiences will undoubtedly recognize them as exaggerated representations of the "Dickens look." As much as *Binge* mocks the conventions of traditional *Carol* adaptations, it simultaneously embraces them. After all, part of the pleasure of watching a parody is recognizing the visual and thematic cues that hearken back to the original work (or, in this case, the cues that hearken back to both the original text and its many adaptations). *Binge*'s four musical numbers are intended to come across as intentionally "stagey" or self-consciously choreographed. Durang is very emphatic that the songs ought to resemble something out of the tremendously popular Dickensian movie-musical, *Oliver!*.[140] He elaborates, "The staging is mostly swaying back and forth but with great commitment and happiness. Any other staging could and should be 'traditional' and satisfying in that old-fashioned, traditional way."[141] His insistence on "traditional" staging in keeping with beloved commercial musicals perfectly illustrates the ambivalent relationship between the parody and its sources. On the one hand, the earnest, old-fashioned presentation of the musical numbers is meant to look humorously absurd when juxtaposed with the ironic song lyrics; but on the other hand, Durang acknowledges that this time-tested staging *is* “satisfying in that old-fashioned, traditional way,” and may elicit feelings of nostalgia from the audience.

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[139] Durang, *Binge*, 32.

[140] The *Oliver!* film was adapted from Lionel Bart's stage musical, which turn takes many of its plot and character cues from earlier stage and film adaptations of *Oliver Twist*.

[141] Durang, "Afterword," 71.

And it is no coincidence that *Oliver!*, Durang’s stylistic model, is explicitly parodied within the play when the Ghost takes Scrooge back to his childhood, only to find that she has mistakenly brought him to Oliver Twist’s orphanage. The short scene plays on the absurdity of encountering different Dickensian characters within the *Carol* story, as well as Dickens’s penchant for the writing about the English lower-class so much that his settings have begun to become interchangeable. But Durang is less concerned with critiquing the Dickens canon as he is with spoofing traditional Christmas narratives. One of the Cratchit children mentions her night job “selling matches in the snow,” a throwaway reference to Hans Christian Andersen’s sentimental holiday tale, *The Little Match Girl*. Durang includes a bit which parodies the “twist” ending of O. Henry’s short story, *The Gift of the Magi*, which concludes with the married couple cheerfully deciding to kill themselves. Part of *Binge*’s plot revolves around Mrs. Cratchit’s desire to kill herself by jumping off the London Bridge, a reference to Frank Capra’s beloved Christmas classic, *It’s a Wonderful Life*. The film’s lead character, George Bailey, makes an appearance to spout some of the film’s most memorable lines; he is followed by Clarence the Angel, who employs a device from the film by showing Mrs. Cratchit what the world would be like if she were never born. As it turns out, they discover that her family would have been considerably better off without her.

There is something bitterly funny in watching these cherished Christmastime narratives reimagined with vaguely misanthropic morals. However, Durang has insisted that *Binge* is not a vicious attack on all Western Christmas traditions. He explains, “I don’t have a satiric purpose of ‘I hate Christmas stories.’ Instead it’s to play with the Christmas sentimentality by mixing it up all together."[142] His pastiche undercuts the traditional lessons of these stories by approaching them from a cynical perspective. *It's a Wonderful Life* hinges on the humanitarian idea that every person's life has value, Durang counters that notion by creating characters so unabashedly selfish and rude that the world truly *would* benefit from them not being born. Neither Scrooge nor Mrs. Cratchit undergo any changes throughout the play; no great truths are unearthed, no tears of redemption shed. In the end, they continue to revel in their materialism and delight in being cruel to their servants, leading the befuddled Ghost to the difficult task of parsing out a moral. "So the moral is, 'If you're poor, you can be happy; and if you're mean, you better get money," she shrugs dubiously, "I'm sorry if that doesn't sound uplifting, but the story doesn't make sense to me anymore."[143] This ending, a tongue-in-cheek celebration of late capitalism, turns the *Carol*'s conclusion on its head and subverts Dickens's intent of uniting the classes for the common good.[144] By allowing the "bad" characters to triumph over the good, *Binge* establishes itself as a refreshing theatrical alternative in a holiday season glutted with treacly, "feel-good" Christmas specials.

Indeed, an impatience with the cheerful, morally-edifying environments of *Carol* adaptations provided the inspiration behind *Binge*'s concept. In the play's "Afterword," Durang explains:

> Somewhere in the midst of relooking at the Dickens story, I suddenly wondered what would happen if Mrs. Bob Cratchit—who is barely in the story or in the movies, but merely exists as a stoic, 'good' mother and wife, who bears all the family's suffering with never a complaint—just hated her life and wanted out…And so the impulse behind this play was to have this super-modern, super-not-good-sport, super-fed-up Mrs. Cratchit plopped down in the play.[145]

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[142] Durang, "Afterword," 69.
[143] Durang, *Binge*, 68.
[144] Ackroyd 684.
[145] Durang, "Afterword," 68.

And so, the story's perspective shifts from Scrooge to Mrs. Cratchit, who serves the play by acting as a modern, cynical voice of reason drowning in a sea of earnest, soft-hearted Dickensian characters. By refocusing his adaptation on a tertiary character, Durang engages in a storytelling practice that has gained in popularity over the last half-century. Revising a well-known narrative to express an alternate character's point of view—especially one that conflicts with previous understandings of it—is one way adaptors can challenge the reception of the work.

In *Adaptation and Appropriation*, Julie Sanders explores "postmodernism's recurring interest in voicing the silenced or absent characters of the canon," citing Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs* as two literary works that use this revisionary technique to comment on their adapted texts (*Jane Eyre* and *Great Expectations*, respectively).[146] If, as Jean-François Lyotard theorizes, postmodernism can be defined as "incredulity toward metanarratives" in favor of numerous diverse and "localized" narratives, it should be no surprise that the "Classics" are being dissected and rewritten from alternate perspectives.[147] Often, these revisionary adaptations use contemporary theory to critique the original works, as in the case of Aimé Césaire's postcolonial play, *Une Tempête* (*A Tempest*) or Alice Randall's racially-themed novel, *The Wind Done Gone*; some, such as John Gardner's *Grendel* and Gregory Maguire's *Wicked*, sympathize with the "villainous" character's point of view, calling readers to question the Good/Evil dichotomy presented in the originals. Still others invent a personal background to expand on a minor character as a way to flesh out or complicate the story without any apparent political aim, such as Geraldine Brooks's *March* and Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*.

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[146] Sanders 100-101.

[147] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiv.

Binge falls into the last category. Part of the fun in adapting a minor character into a leading role is that it offers the writer a chance to create a complex personality for a character with whom people are already somewhat familiar. It is up to the adaptor to determine whether the new characterization will support or subvert that of the original. Durang settled on the latter option for his parody, most likely because challenging the audience's expectations of the character provided for more comedic opportunities. In the novella, Mrs. Cratchit is a loyal partner to her husband Bob, making the best out of his fifteen-shilling-per-week salary so that they might have a respectable Christmas dinner. Her first appearance finds her "dressed out but poorly in a twice-turned gown, but brave in ribbons, which are cheap and make a goodly show for sixpence"; [148] in other words, she is humble, yet maintains a positive attitude. Her most notable scene comes when Bob Cratchit lifts his glass to toast Scrooge as "the Founder of the Feast." The agitated Mrs. Cratchit scoffs in disgust.

> "The Founder of the Feast indeed!" cried Mrs. Cratchit, reddening. "I wish I had him here. I'd give him a piece of my mind to feast upon, and I hope he'd have a good appetite for it."
> "My dear," said Bob, "the children; Christmas Day."
> "It should be Christmas Day, I am sure," said she, "on which one drinks the health of such an odious, stingy, hard, unfeeling man as Mr. Scrooge."[149]

This outburst may have inspired Durang's conception of the character as a dissatisfied, overworked housewife. We meet her in *Binge*'s first scene, when the Cratchit family is introduced during the song, "It's Nearly Christmas." Bob proudly states that he and his wife love Christmas, turning to Mrs. Cratchit for her response. The stage directions note that she does "not realiz[e] she was going to be asked to speak," perhaps a joke referring to her lack of lines in the novel and most adaptations.[150] Her next appearance several scenes later depicts a harried, irascible woman who hates her own children and considers suicide as a means of escape from her dreary life—a far cry from the stouthearted and tirelessly maternal Mrs. Cratchit that Dickens had envisioned. In one scene, the Ghost disapproves of the alteration in her character, sighing, "There's no point in depressing everyone with that sour rendition of Mrs. Bob Cratchit which is nowhere to be found in Dickens."[151]

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[148] Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol* (Philadelphia: Running Press Kids, 2002), 88.
[149] Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, 97.

Durang's characterization is, of course, an exaggerated one, but it does question the idyllic poverty of *Carol*'s Cratchit family, where everyone is cheerful and no one loses their temper. *Binge*'s Mrs. Cratchit seems to have been plucked out of the present-day United States and dropped into this Dickensian plot against her will. Her exasperation with her impoverished circumstances and chipper family is the source of much of the play's humor, and in this way, her grousing serves as a cynical counterpoint to Dickens's celebrated morality tale. She feels out of place in every way: she and the Ghost (another "anachronistic" character, as I will discuss later) are the only characters who speak without British accents, aurally distancing themselves from the other characters.[152] At one point, Mrs. Cratchit bewilderedly asks of Tiny Tim,

> MRS. BOB CRATCHIT: Why does he talk this way? Is he a British child?
> BOB CRATCHIT: Yes, darling, we're all British.
> MRS. BOB CRATCHIT: Really? I feel like I'm from Cleveland.[153]

When it is suggested to Mrs. Cratchit that she may have a bad attitude, she defends herself with the perspective of a woman from the present: "I'm living in 1840s London, there's no plumbing, everybody smells all the time, I have twenty children—no, twenty-one—or forty-seven, I don't know!—there's never enough food, my husband earns no money cause this man won't pay him anything…"[154] In other words, the Dickensian milieu is enough to make anyone a little cranky. She is similarly frustrated with her society's strict definitions of women's roles, telling her children, "God, when will feminism be invented so people won't just assume I'll be cooking all the time, and be positive and pleasant."[155] This line is probably the closest thing to a political statement in the entire play, which is one reason *Binge* diverges from adaptations like *Wide Sargasso Sea*, et al. Mrs. Cratchit may be a victim of the patriarchal Victorian belief that women should exist solely within the domestic sphere, but Durang does not portray her as an object of sympathy. Recognizing that parody may not be the ideal medium to further a social message, he keeps the play's tone light and snarky without delving into preachiness or seriousness.

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[150] Durang, *Binge*, 10.
[151] Durang, *Binge*, 25.
[152] Durang, "Afterword," 71.
[153] Durang, *Binge*, 42.

Just as Durang reimagines Mrs. Cratchit as jaded, materialistic, and mean, he conversely exaggerates the "niceness" of the supporting characters. Durang admits, "I love the writing of Dickens, but it's also true his Good Characters can be on the goody-goody side."[156] He is correct in observing that the typical Dickensian hero[ine] is indefatigably Good, with a sympathetic heart, sound mind, and a firm understanding of Right and Wrong. Jeffrey Richards gives an apt description of the Dickensian ethos as "a definition of English character which includes individuality, a sense of humour, a sense of fairplay, stoicism and the stiff upper lip, a capacity for moral indignation, a mistrust of authority…[and] a spirit of 'dauntless decency'."[157] While these characters have been previously celebrated for their pureness of heart, Durang portrays them as bland, simpering milquetoasts. In the *Binge* universe, we observe that it is much better to be selfish and sarcastic than to be Good and insufferably boring. The meek and hardworking Bob Cratchit of Dickens's novella has turned into a vacuous twit: sweet and well-meaning, but ultimately an idiot. Introduced in the stage directions as "a mild-mannered, suffering blob of a man," he is rather spineless ("I have trouble saying no to people," he admits to Scrooge) and demonstrates little personal dignity, going so far as to slap himself in the face at his employer's request.[158] He has twenty children, most of whom he has adopted without any thought as to how he can afford to feed them, keeping the family in a perpetual state of poverty. (In the novella, the Cratchits have six children, none of whom are adopted.) His effortless "goodness" renders him ineffectual as a father and provider, which irks his wife to no end. When Mrs. Cratchit overhears the Ghost refer to Bob Cratchit as "generous," she snorts with contempt. "'Generous,' indeed. He just has this image of himself as noble and good, he's so good out of puffed-up self-regard."[159] Rather than attempt to change his family's circumstances, Bob Cratchit seems to take a martyr-like delight in their suffering.

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[154] Durang, *Binge*, 53.
[155] Durang, *Binge*, 41.
[156] Durang, "Afterword," 68.
[157] Richards 327.

Even the Cratchit's youngest son, Tiny Tim, is not spared in Durang's parody. As the most recognizable and beloved supporting character from Dickens's *Carol*, Tiny Tim is the embodiment of childlike innocence and virtuosity. Dickens's Tiny Tim is described as "good as gold…and better"; he is a young disabled boy who displays an extraordinary amount of maturity and perspective regarding his illness when he tells his father that he hopes curious churchgoers are reminded of their faith when they observe him on his crutches.[160] His famous line, "God Bless Us, Every One!" has been oft-repeated in film and stage adaptations (including Durang's). In *Binge*, however, Tiny Tim is less sweet than cloyingly saccharine, and his unwavering positivity is downright annoying. "I love you, Mummy," he chirps to the downtrodden Mrs.

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[158] Durang, *Binge*, 13.
[159] Durang, *Binge*, 40.
[160] Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, 91.

Cratchit, "My heart is so filled with goodness that I can only see your goodness."[161] Durang also uses Tiny Tim to expose one of *A Christmas Carol*'s minor plot holes:

> TINY TIM: I have a feeling I may die.
> MRS. BOB CRATCHIT: Nonsense. What would you die of?
> TINY TIM: Of being a cripple.
> MRS. BOB CRATCHIT: That doesn't make sense. That's like saying you're going to die because you have brown hair.
> TINY TIM: Nonetheless I feel it. Unless Mr. Scrooge reforms his personality and learns to value Christmas, I can tell I'm going to die.
> MRS. BOB CRATCHIT: What does Mr. Scrooge have to do with it?[162]

Naturally, Tiny Tim's fate has little to do with Scrooge's spiritual reformation. Dickens likely intended the reader to conclude that Scrooge would have provided medical aid that the boy would not have had access to otherwise, but because this is never adequately explained in the novella, the connection between the state of the old man's soul and the child's health is tenuous at best.

Not content with mocking the insipid goodness of Dickens's *Carol* characters, the playwright inserts another virtuous literary child into the Cratchit family, Little Nell, the devoted granddaughter who comes to a tragic end in Dickens's 1841 novel, *The Old Curiosity Shop*. In the Afterword, Durang describes Little Nell as "one of Dickens' most famous pathetic good children";[163] her addition to the script is meant to highlight further the namby-pambyness of Dickens's Good characters. Even without Durang's help, Little Nell has been criticized as "a contrived unreality" intended to facilitate "a gross and virtuous self-indulgence" in the reader;[164] Oscar Wilde once famously joked that "One must have a heart of stone to read the death of Little

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[161] Durang, *Binge*, 39.
[162] Durang, *Binge*, 50.
[163] Durang, "Afterword," 70.
[164] F. R. Leavis and Q. D. Leavis, *Dickens the Novelist* (London: Penguin, 1972), 54.

Nell without laughing."[165] Dickens scholar John Bowen writes that *The Old Curiosity Shop* is "almost universally, thought to be a text of notorious sentimentality, morbid and uncontrolled, embarrassing and absurd by turns."[166] Durang's pointed inclusion of the most mawkish character from Dickens's most sentimental novel strengthens his parody of the author's fascination with unrelentingly Good characters. Little Nell helps the Cratchit family pay the bills by working in a sweatshop, an allusion to Dickens's enduring sympathy for children who are forced to toil in workhouses.[167] Like Bob Cratchit, Little Nell lacks common sense—her Goodness somehow makes her incapable of managing money wisely: she gives most of her salary to a beggar on the street, and spends the rest on wrapping paper for a few empty boxes that serve as "presents" for her family. With these gestures, Durang exaggerates Dickens's favored personality traits of selflessness and generosity, correlating Goodness with foolishness and ultimately subverting the author's original moral.

Durang thrusts his parody into the twenty-first century with his reimagined version of the Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present, and Yet to Come, by combining all three spirits into one character, a highly uncommon approach when compared with most traditional *Carol* adaptations. This conflation of spirits establishes Durang's Ghost as a main character alongside Scrooge and Mrs. Cratchit, and also serves a practical purpose by allowing small theatres with modest finances to hire one actor instead of three. Most unusual of all, however, is Durang's choice to rewrite the role for an African American woman. It is unclear why the character must be Black, as none of the play's storylines have racial themes, and the playwright does not specify any other character's race. In my opinion, Durang has inserted a Black leading character into his adaptation in an attempt to "modernize" it. In the first place, audiences will not be familiar with a Ghost of Christmas Past, Present, and Future as played by a Black woman. It is clear from her very first entrance onstage at the beginning of Act One, Scene One that this play will be a very divergent incarnation of Dickens's *Carol*, as the most predominant film and theatrical adaptations have cast White actors and actresses as the three Ghosts.[168]

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[165] Joseph Pearce, *The Unmasking of Oscar Wilde* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 45.
[166] John Bowen, "Spirit and the Allegorical Child: Little Nell's Mortal Aesthetic," in *Dickens and the Children of Empire*, ed. Wendy S. Jacobson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 13.
[167] The injustice of the English workhouse system is mentioned in *A Christmas Carol* and explored at greater length in *Oliver Twist*.

Dickens never wrote any prominent Black characters into his novels, so the presence of one onstage in *Binge* instantly indicates to the audience that the Ghost is either the result of the adaptor's creative license or the director's color-blind casting. Durang's character is decidedly the former; her race is specifically mentioned twice within the script. Scrooge initially dismisses her existence in the first scene with his flippant line:

> SCROOGE: I don't think there even are Negro people in 1840's London.
> GHOST: I stand outside of time.[169]

Of course, there *were* people of African and Afro-Caribbean descent living in London during Dickens's time, but one would never know this by reading his novels, and *Binge* reflects that. Although the Ghost is the only character whose race is specified, in the context of the play, it would appear that every other character is intended to be White. In Act One, Scene Five, Mrs. Cratchit refers to the Ghost (who is dressed as a UPS employee at the time) as "the black delivery woman."[170] These lines from Scrooge and Mrs. Cratchit imply that the Ghost's Blackness differentiates her from the rest of the cast. As a Ghost, she is an outsider in a world of mortals; as a Black woman, she is an Other, a visual anachronism in Dickens's predominantly

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[168] I have found a few exceptions, notably a 1997 animated *Christmas Carol* with Whoopi Goldberg and a 2004 television movie-musical with Jesse L. Martin, both playing the Ghost of Christmas Present.

[169] Durang, *Binge*, 9.

[170] Durang, *Binge*, 21.

White, nineteenth-century London. She serves as a contemporary guide through Durang's caricature of Dickensian milieu, offering the point of view of one who stands "outside of time," and her race is meant to illustrate this, culturally and temporally distinguishing her from the traditional *Carol* characters.

Although *Binge*'s Ghost claims to exist within the realm of the timeless, she is not at all atemporal; rather, it is quite evident that her character is intended to evoke very specific and recognizable postmodern character types. Durang contemporizes the play by creating a Ghost that fulfills the role of two Black "stock characters" prevalent in late-twentieth-century American film and television: that of the "Sassy Black Woman" and the "Magical Negro." For over two hundred years, African American women have lacked nuanced portrayals in American media, too often being reduced to racist and sexist stereotypes. In her book, *Mammies No More: The Changing Image of Black Women on Stage and Screen*, Lisa M. Anderson lists the Mammy, the Tragic Mulatta, and the Jezebel as the three prevailing stereotypes of Black women in the twentieth century. Although the Sassy Black Woman type does not fit neatly into one of these categories, it can be argued that she generally has strong elements of the Mammy in her, as evidenced by her toughness and her tendency to be cast as the "best friend" to a White character. The Sassy Black Woman is a comic type that generally features a strong, confident Black woman with a no-nonsense attitude and a talent for spitting out snarky one-liners with an aptly-timed head swivel. At first glance, such depictions of Black women may appear empowering, and indeed, they may have started out that way: the writers at TVTropes.org hypothesize that the Sassy Black Woman evolved from the iconic heroines of 1970s blaxploitation films.[171] But over the decades, these characters have slipped into caricatures. In contemporary film and television, the Sassy Black Woman often serves as a foil for the (White) main character, where her Otherness is intended to highlight and reinforce the Sameness of the protagonist. Rarely are they written as well-rounded characters with complex emotional lives; instead, they are played for laughs, willing to provide a saucy retort or arch criticism on demand. Adding a Sassy Black Woman to one's play (or film, or novel) is usually a form of tokenism, giving the work an illusion of "diversity" even when there are no other characters of color in the story.[172]

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[171] "Sassy Black Woman," TV Tropes, accessed June 7, 2010, http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/SassyBlackWoman.

The Ghost may be considered the Sassy Black Character in Durang's play. From her first appearance, she is described in the stage directions as a "striking, theatrical black woman."[173] She sharply advises Scrooge to change his ways and let Christmas into his heart, giving him the tough love she feels is necessary to enact a spiritual reformation, even if that requires "zapping" him with her magical powers. She opens the second act by singing a stanza of the Billie Holiday jazz standard, "Tain't Nobody's Business if I Do," even after admitting earlier that it "doesn't seem very Christmasy" and makes little sense within the narrative.[174] No matter, though, as the song allows her to show off her vocal prowess and ability to sing something "a bit sassy."[175] In the play's Afterword, Durang recalls that January Murelli (who played the Ghost in *Binge*'s first production) "added an occasional Lena Horne-ish sass to her voice on certain lines" which he liked.[176] While the character is often entertaining, she is not especially interesting or well-developed. To be fair, parody is rarely the medium in which to find emotionally complex and introspective characters, but Durang's decision to write the character as a spunky, "theatrical"

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[172] In many ways, the "Sassy Gay Man" character parallels the Sassy Black Woman in the way writers incorporate both stereotypes into a narrative merely to provide humor and emotional support for the White, heterosexual protagonist.

[173] Durang, *Binge*, 7.

[174] Durang, *Binge*, 12.

[175] Durang, *Binge*, 45.

[176] Durang, "Afterword," 70.

Black woman inevitably invites comparisons with the popular Sassy Black Woman stereotype, particularly when the Ghost is the only Black character in the show.

Another racial stock type evoked by Durang's Ghost is the "Magical Negro." Popularized in 2001 during a speech by Spike Lee, the term describes a trope found in twentieth and twenty-first-century narratives in which a Black character with magical powers (be they literal or figurative) enters a story with the sole purpose of helping the White protagonist complete a task or achieve self-actualization.[177] Lee theorizes that the Magical Negro is a mere "recycling [of] the noble savage and the happy slave," in that character seemingly has little else to do than impart mystic wisdom and sage advice to the White characters. In an article investigating Stephen King's reliance on the stock character, Nigerian author Nnedi Okorafor-Mbachu writes:

> The archetype of the Magical Negro is an issue of race. It is the subordination of a minority figure masked as the empowerment of one. The Magical Negro has great power and wisdom, yet he or she only uses it to help the white main character; he or she is not threatening because he or she only seeks to help, never hurt…[He] is like the happy slave, glad to sacrifice himself, his happiness, his time, something of value to him, in order to help the white character.[178]

Use of this trope dates back to the mid-twentieth century: Okorafor-Mbachu cites Sidney Poitier in *The Defiant Ones* (1958) as the earliest film example of the Magical Negro, and dozens more have followed throughout the decades. Apart from several Stephen King novels-turned-film adaptations (*The Green Mile*, *The Shawshank Redemption*, and *The Shining* being the most egregious examples), the character can be found in such twentieth and twenty-first-century films as *Driving Miss Daisy* (1989), *Ghost* (1990) *The Matrix* (1999), *The Legend of Bagger Vance*

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[177] Susan Gonzalez, "Director Spike Lee Slams 'Same Old' Black Stereotypes in Today's Films," *Yale Bulletin and Calendar* 29.21 (Mar. 2001), accessed June 8, 2010, http://www.yale.edu/opa/arc-ybc/v29.n21/story3.html.

[178] Nnedi Okorafor-Mbachu, "Stephen King's Super-Duper Magical Negroes," Strange Horizons, accessed June 7, 2010, http://www.strangehorizons.com/2004/20041025/kinga.shtml.

(2000), to name only a few. *Binge*'s Ghost fits well within the schema of the Magical Negro: she is a Black supporting character with literal magical powers, and she uses these powers to help Scrooge. By tapping into this archetype, Durang highlights both her Otherness and her otherworldliness. Whether Durang was conscious of it or not, his play furthers the idea that the portrayal Black characters as mystical, powerful servants is somehow positive or empowering.

The inclusion of twentieth-century racial stereotypes is only one example of Durang's reliance on popular culture as a method of "updating" his adaptation into the postmodern age. The main characters speak in contemporary-sounding dialogue (aside from Mr. Cratchit and the children, whose speech is slightly more formal-sounding in order to mimic Dickens's English characters), which often includes casual mentions of twentieth-century people, products, or events. At three points within the play, the action is actually interrupted by these contemporary references, further situating Durang's *Carol* adaptation within pre- and post-millennial America. During *Binge*'s second scene, Kenneth Lay and Jeffrey Skilling encourage Scrooge to join their business selling "energy units" to swindle the poor out of more money, recalling the Enron scandal of 2001. The play's *deus ex machina* comes in the form of Tess and Monica, the main characters of the Christian-themed television series, *Touched by an Angel* ("Used to be on CBS Sunday nights, now you can see it on the Pax Channel?" Clarence the Angel explains.)[179] The angels conclude that both Scrooge and Mrs. Cratchit were born in the wrong century—they belong in 1977 New York City, not Victorian London. The final scene presents the couple in their new city and time period, and we see that they have been transformed into the notorious billionaire real estate moguls, Harry and Leona Helmsley.

Durang's implementation of twentieth and twenty-first-century people and characters at once updates the narrative from its nineteenth-century context, while simultaneously miring the play within its own specific cultural place and time. As humorously inane as it to encounter the former Enron CEOs in Dickens, these topical elements prevent *Binge* from finding much success in the future, as well as outside the United States. Several reviews of the show make a point of discussing the "outdatedness" of the script; Ann Miner of Talkin' Broadway prophesizes that the numerous contemporary references will not age well, as they already "seem tired in 2002,"[180] and Backstage.com reviewer Erik Haagensen writes of a 2009 Off-Off-Broadway production, "Durang's references to Kenneth Lay, Jeffrey Skilling, 'Touched by an Angel,' and Harry and Leona Helmsley, among others, no longer land the laughs they undoubtedly once did."[181] These methods of "contemporizing" the *Carol*, while admittedly lacking in long-term appeal, nonetheless embody the postmodern trend of combining "high" culture (Dickensian literature) with "low" culture (television, news scandals, etc.). This technique, closely associated with pop art, camp, and kitsch, attempts to erode the barrier between the two, allowing for (to quote Andreas Huyssen) the "reevaluation of formerly devalued forms and genres of cultural expression."[182]

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[179] Durang, *Binge*, 58.

In the introduction to their book, *Theatricality*, Tracy C. Davis and Thomas Postlewait advocate for metatheatricality as a characteristic of the postmodern: "This postmodern theatre defines the historical moment by means of an aesthetics of self-irony that depends on the simultaneity of what has come before and what is transpiring in the very moment of presentation."[183] Much of *Binge*'s humor relies on self-referential jokes recognizing that the audience is, in fact, watching a play. Characters grouse about not having enough lines, set changes and intermissions are announced to the audience, and formal staging conventions such as tableaux, choreography, and double-casting are commented on. In many productions, such devices are taken for granted; here, they are treated as peculiarities, emphasizing the constructed artificiality of traditional theatre. In the first chapter of this thesis, I define "self-aware adaptations" to be works that openly acknowledge that they have been adapted from another text. *Binge*, like *Drood*, is "self-aware" because there are several lines of dialogue that explicitly refer to the play's relationship to the original text. However, *Drood*'s "self-awareness" serves as a substitute for the intertextual experience the audience would undergo when comparing an adaptation to its original; most audience members will not be familiar enough with *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* to watch the show *as an adaptation*. *Binge* employs the device for the opposite reason. Nearly everyone in the audience will know the story of *A Christmas Carol*, and will already experience "the doubled pleasure of the palimpsest" when viewing *Binge* in relation to more traditional versions of the story.[184] By pointing out aspects of the play that radically diverge from the traditional representations, Durang gives voice to this back-and-forth oscillation between the adaptation and the adapted text. The resulting humor is a product of the audience's surprise in seeing this internal process articulated within the play itself, and the recognition that the playwright, too, is "in" on the joke.

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[180] Ann Miner, "World Premiere of Christopher Durang's *Mrs. Bob Cratchit's Wild Christmas Binge*," Talkin' Broadway.com, accessed July 19, 2010, http://www.talkinbroadway.com/regional/pitt/p47.html.

[181] Erik Haagensen, "Mrs. Bob Cratchit's Wild Christmas Binge at the Gallery Players," Backstage.com, accessed July 20, 2010, http://www.backstage.com/bso/reviews-ny-theatre-off-off-broadway/mrs-bob-cratchit-s-wild-christmas-binge-1004051504.story.

[182] Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), 59.

As stated earlier, most of the "nontraditional" *Carols* have traded on some sort of "gimmick" in order to appeal to varying audiences (e.g., the *Carol* with Muppets, the *Carol* with an all-female cast, a country-western *Carol*, etc). *Binge* is no exception, marketing itself as a *Carol* for people who are tired of *Carols* altogether—a postmodern antidote to the productions that drip heavily with sappy sentimentality. But paradoxically, the play's success as a parody is entirely reliant on the proliferation of *Carol* adaptations, leading Hutcheon to reason that "parody always implicitly reinforces even as it ironically debunks."[185] Each adaptation is built upon the adaptations before it, meaning that all *Carols*, traditional and nontraditional alike, are inextricably linked. Even plays that mock the *Carol* inherently perpetuate their subject of parody, solidifying its place in our culture. The question is: with such a preponderance of *Christmas Carols*, why do we continue to adapt the story? If *Binge* seems to suggest that we have perhaps reached a saturation point, why is the *Carol* still considered to be a holiday cash cow for regional theatres? There is certainly something to be said for its prominence as a secular Christmas narrative in a society that has become increasingly secularized over the past few decades. Likelier still is its ability to remain relevant after more than a century and a half. The class struggle depicted in Dickens's story is timeless: there have always been selfish rich men who are unsympathetic to the plight of the poor and marginalized classes, just as there have always been inspirational tales of redemption. In *The Life and Times of Ebenezer Scrooge*, a history of public reception to the *Carol*, Paul Davis surmises that we have put the story to many uses throughout the past hundred years:

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[183] Thomas Postlewait and Tracy C. Davis, "Theatricality: an introduction," in *Theatricality*, ed. Tracy C. Davis and Thomas Postlewait (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 16.

[184] Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 116.

> In the twentieth century, the *Carol* has ministered to cultural needs to recover childhood innocence, to affirm social stability in the midst of economic distress, to find sources of personal fulfillment and happiness, and to reconcile economic individualism with the social good.[186]

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[185] Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000), xii.

[186] Paul Davis, *The Life and Times of Ebenezer Scrooge* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 239.

In short, *Carol* adaptations can be read as a reflection of the culture in which they are produced. Nontraditional adaptations like *Binge* are especially useful subjects of analysis because they are more likely to take risks with the structure and presentation of the narrative, enabling the adaptor's cultural influences to be more readily visible. *Mrs. Bob Cratchit's Wild Christmas Binge* blends the Dickens classic with the stylistic trappings of postmodern theatre and storytelling, creating a parody that tells us as much about our historical moment as it does the *Carol* itself.

Conclusion

The adaptations in this thesis demonstrate a range of ways in which one can mold an established work into something new. With *Drood*, the act of "nontraditionalizing" the novel offers unique opportunities for solving its inherent difficulties. The unfinished ending was previously seen as a handicap, and may have deterred writers from adapting *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. However, Rupert Holmes uses this component to his advantage by having the audience choose their own ending; what was formerly a detriment to the novel becomes an asset to the adaptation. Transposing *Great Expectations* to '90s New York City shortens the gap, so to speak, between the contemporary film-going public and the nineteenth-century time period in which the story is set. Transcultural adaptations may help attract a wider audience than the average period film, which can be perceived as stodgy or even intimidating to those who are not familiar with the original text. Indigenizing or updating a work makes it more accessible. However, this method of "updating" Dickens need not be temporal or geographical, as demonstrated by Christopher Durang's *Mrs. Bob Cratchit's Wild Christmas Binge*. Durang's adaptation provides plenty of critical distance through its use of parody, pastiche, irony, and other conventions associated with postmodernism. There are countless ways to adapt a text nontraditionally, all with varying degrees of success; what works well with one text may flop with another, and so on. Each one demands a healthy amount of creative license from the adaptor, balancing a respect for the original text with the willingness to bend it, change it, and add or subtract to it in order to serve the needs of the adaptation. Adapting a literary work to a new medium is always an exciting challenge—an exercise in translation, one might say—but the creative freedom offered by nontraditional adaptations can be downright exhilarating.

From the start, Dickens's novels have exuded a theatricality that practically begs them to be adapted for stage and screen. It is this inherent Dickensian "liveliness" that leads Jeffrey Richards to criticize the slew of traditional adaptations that insist on period accuracy and production values over the story itself:

> It is perhaps the influence of television, of which the preferred mode, because of its intimacy as a medium, is naturalism. But Dickens is the opposite of a naturalistic writer. His was an intensely stylized world, compounded of stage melodrama, Gothic novel, investigative journalism and social reform propaganda, a larger-than-life world teeming with vitality and variety, seasoned with his comic genius, conceived on an epic scale, and peopled with a gallery of larger-than-life characters. To scale down the characters, to stress genuine locations and documentary authenticity, to de-melodramatize the work, is to remove its essence.[187]

Richards is onto something when he writes that the "toned down" television Dickens is not entirely representative of the author's over-the-top aesthetic. Not all traditional adaptations fall into this trap, of course, but the Dickensian miniseries most often relies on naturalistic performances and "documentary authenticity" as a style of presentation. The notion that a nontraditional adaptation might be *better* suited to Dickens's broad comedy, melodrama, and sentimentality radically diverges from contemporary conceptions of what a Dickensian adaptation "should" look like. Yet, I suspect traditional adaptations will continue to be the dominant mode of presenting Dickens—we are, at the core, a literary culture, and Western society has a history privileging the written word over oral and visual media. In the first place, adaptations—even traditional ones—are generally considered secondary to their source text.[188] On top of that, the theatre, film, and television arts have long been considered less sophisticated and intellectually rigorous than literature; therefore, a stage or screen adaptation of a written work is considered doubly inferior to the novel upon which it is based.

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[187] Richards 344.

[188] In *A Theory of Adaptation*, one of Hutcheon's definitions of an adaptation is "a work that is second without being secondary" (9), which is a positive way of discussing an adaptation without privileging the source text.

The challenge of adapting a popular novel to the stage or screen is made all the more difficult by assumptions that a successful adaptation must stay as "true" to the original work as possible, as if any creative adjustments on the adaptor's part are somehow defiling or dishonoring the source. As I have discussed in the preceding chapters, it is simply not possible to magically transpose a work from one medium to another without making changes; no adaptation can be a wholesale reproduction of its source. Alteration is inherent to adaptation. However, because a literary adaptation is usually seen as merely "the next best thing" to actually reading the book, adaptors are pressured into making as few changes as possible, clinging to the text as though it were some kind of Platonic ideal. Of course, not all canonical literature is handled with kid gloves, as evidenced by the bevy of *Christmas Carol* adaptations I listed in my third chapter (which represent only the tip of the iceberg of nontraditional *Carol*s). Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is another nineteenth-century British novel that has its share of nontraditional adaptations—*Bridget Jones's Diary*, *Bride and Prejudice*, and the television miniseries, *Lost in Austen* are three critically successful examples produced in the last fifteen years. Perhaps most conspicuous of all the nontraditional adaptations, the plays of William Shakespeare have been routinely updated, transculturated, condensed, expanded, musicalized, and parodied in virtually every available medium. It would be a wonderful thing indeed if the enthusiasm for experimental Shakespearean adaptations could find its way to the adaptation of novels.

Nontraditional adaptations are no different from any other kind of adaptation, in that some of the adaptor's choices "work" while others flounder or fail. They may not all be paragons of innovative storytelling, but neither should they be dismissed as “fluff” entertainment. As the works in this thesis have shown, nontraditional adaptations can bring some interesting insights, parallels, and critiques to a familiar text, and they have a rightful place in critical discussions about the study of adaptation.

Appendix A

The novel opens in a seedy London opium den, where the sallow-faced John Jasper awakens from a drug-induced stupor and makes his way back to Cloisterham, where he lives the respectable life of a church choirmaster and where his darker proclivities are unknown. His nephew, Edwin Drood, has come to stay with him while Edwin calls upon his fiancée (and Jasper's music student), Rosa Bud. They have been betrothed since childhood, but it is clear they both feel a twinge of doubt regarding the happiness of a future together. Meanwhile, Neville and Helena Landless, twins from colonized Ceylon, arrive in Cloisterham, where they will continue their education under the eye of the kindhearted Reverend Crisparkle, their new guardian. Rosa and Helena become fast friends, and Rosa confides to her that she is deathly afraid of Jasper, whose dark, piercing gaze threatens and haunts her. She must keep this fear a secret from Edwin, whose close attachment to his uncle prevents her from freely airing her criticisms.

Helena is not the only Landless to have taken a fond attachment to Rosa Bud: upon being introduced to her, Neville is instantly smitten and nearly comes to blows with Edwin for having such a blasé attitude about his engagement. The young men reluctantly reconcile at the behest of Reverend Crisparkle, but rumors quickly spread around town about Neville's hotheadedness and violent tendencies. And although Neville's reaction may have been unnecessarily volatile, it took him mere hours to perceive what Edwin himself needed a lifetime to see: that his relationship with Rosa was completely devoid of romantic passion. Rosa had reached the same conclusion, and she and Edwin mutually decide to end their engagement, preferring to share a platonic love. Meanwhile, Jasper has been expressing a mysterious interest in the crypt of the Cloisterham Cathedral. He convinces Durdles, the stonemason, to show him around the crypt in the dead of night. After drinking from a bottle of suspiciously potent wine provided by Jasper, Durdles passes out. It is implied that Jasper takes his key and explores the crypt alone.

A few days later, it is Christmas Eve, and Jasper is hosting a dinner at his home with Edwin, Rosa, and the Landlesses. On his way to dinner, Edwin is stopped by a bedraggled old woman (the reader later learns that she is "Princess Puffer," the woman who operates the opium den Jasper frequents) who tells Edwin that someone named "Ned" is in grave danger. As Jasper is the only one who refers to him as "Ned," he brushes off this encounter and hurries to his uncle's house. Dickens does not describe the Christmas Eve dinner, but continues directly to the next morning, when Edwin is discovered to be missing. A frantic Jasper accuses Neville Landless of foul play; Reverend Crisparkle maintains the young man's innocence and sets up a flat for him in London. When Rosa's guardian informs Jasper that Rosa and Edwin had called off their engagement a few days prior to the disappearance, he turns white as a sheet and appears to go momentarily mad, shrieking and rending his clothes. The next morning, Edwin's distinctive pocket watch and shirt-pin are found in the river. He is presumed dead.

Six months pass when a mysterious stranger, Dick Datchery, arrives in Cloisterham and rents the room below Jasper's quarters, quietly observing the comings and goings of his upstairs neighbor. Jasper, who shows all appearances of being in mourning for his nephew, visits Rosa and wildly professes his tormented love to her. She is horrified, but he threatens that if she rejects his advances, he will destroy Neville Landless. When Jasper returns to the familiar London opium den for the first time since Edwin's disappearance, Princess Puffer follows him back to Cloisterham, certain that he is hiding a terrible secret. Under the watchful eye of Dick Datchery, she observes the choirmaster during a church service, bristling with the knowledge that he is not all that he seems.

Appendix B

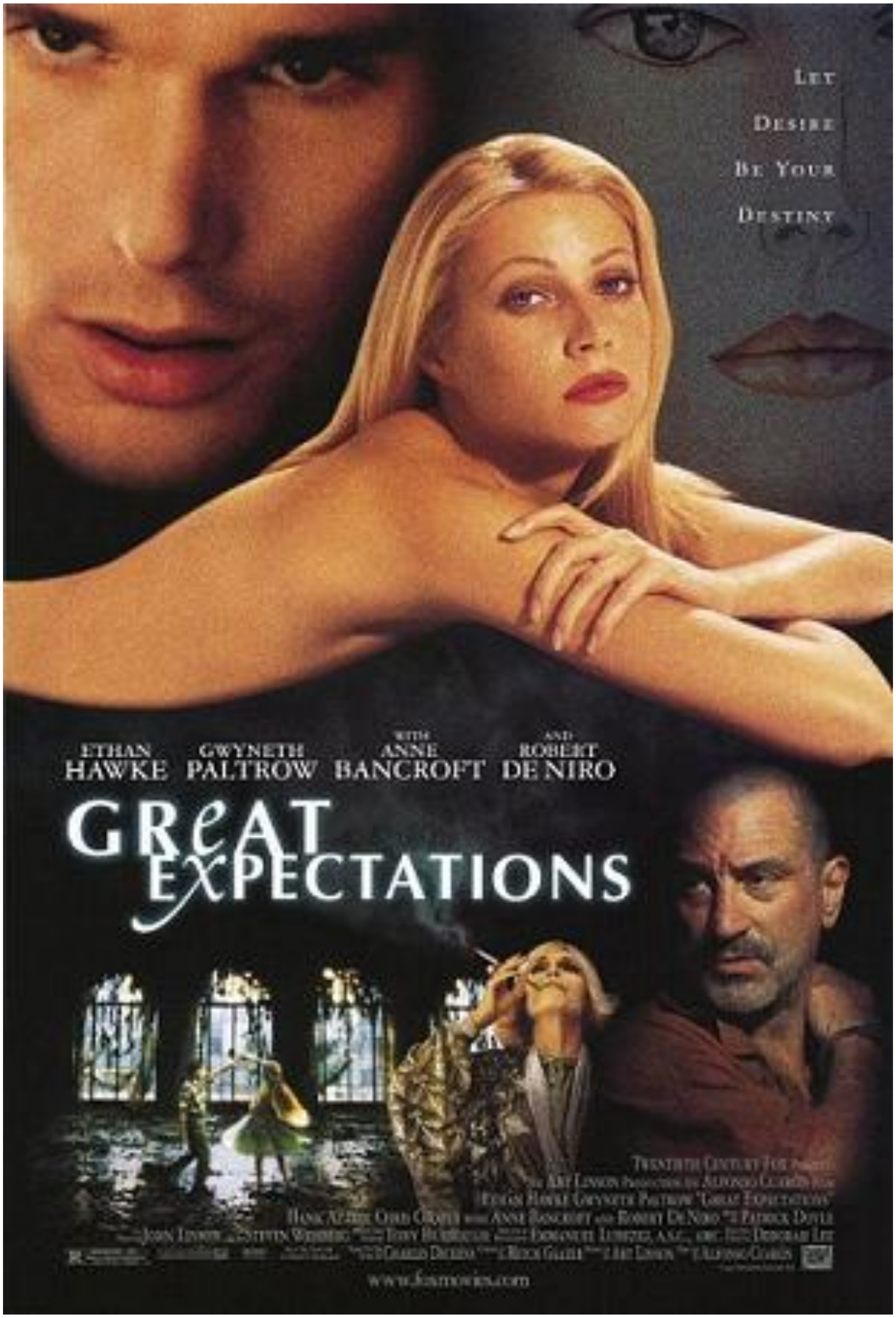
LET
DESIRE
BE YOUR
DESTINY
ETHAN HAWKE
GWYNETH PALTROW
WITH ANNE BANCROFT
AND ROBERT DE NIRO
GREAT EXPECTATIONS
TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX
www.foxmovies.com

Image 1

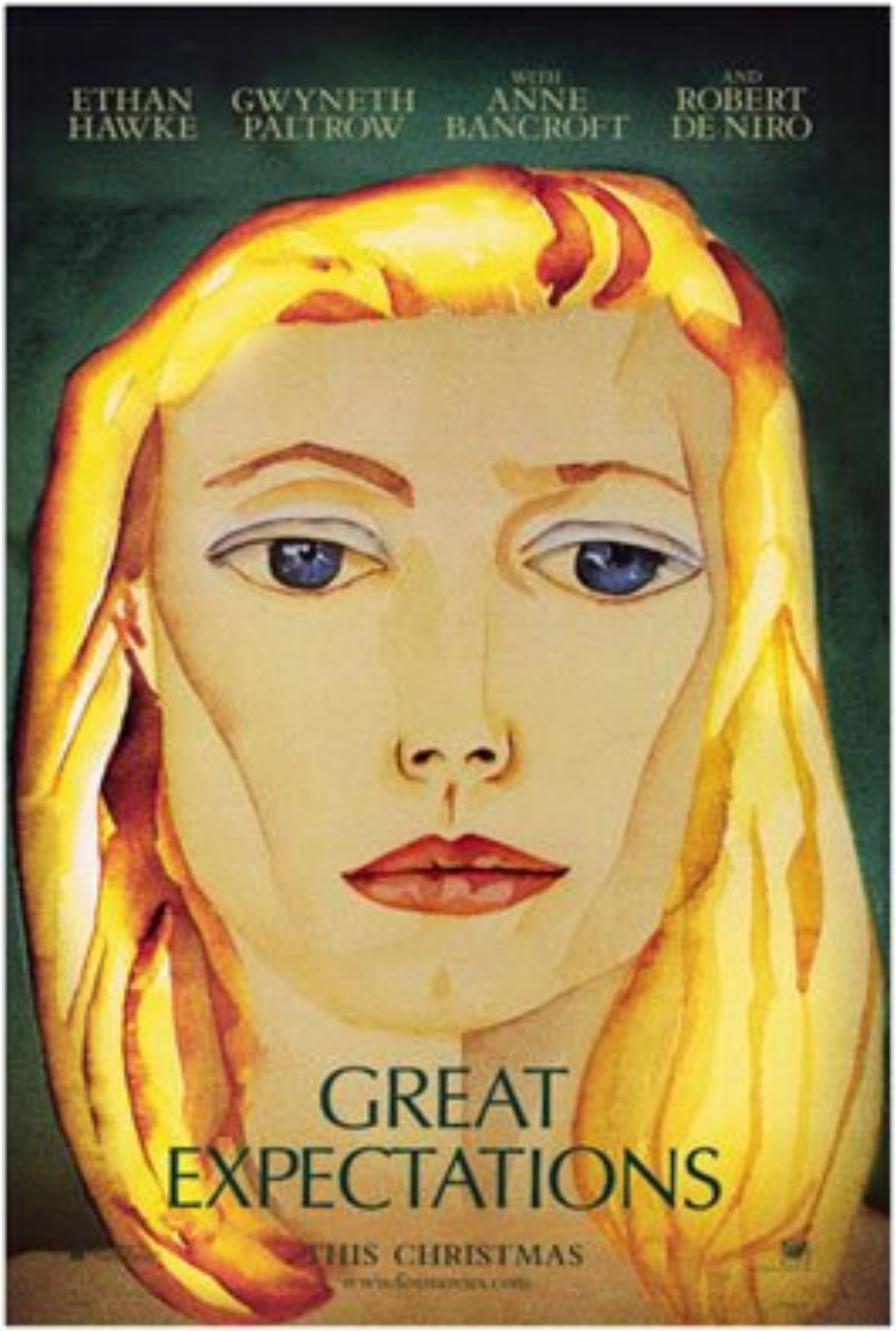
ETHAN HAWKE
GWYNETH PALTROW
WITH ANNE BANCROFT
AND ROBERT DE NIRO
GREAT EXPECTATIONS
THIS CHRISTMAS

Image 2

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