

# Stories Retold: Investigating Adaptation

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## Introduction

This is a discussion of six different disciplines and their approaches to studying a story that is told multiple times by multiple authors. In an attempt to find the “right” methodology to apply to a Classical myth that was adapted by modern authors the literature of six different fields was considered. This quickly became a project of its own as, much like the stories they were studying, each discipline echoed but did not perfectly match each other’s lenses of interpretation. This preliminary literature review means to point out obvious overlaps and trends in order to invite further discussion. As each discipline is nuanced, evolving, and interdisciplinary, strict divisions simply do not exist.



## Literal Adaptations

Literal adaptations focus on reproducing the message itself, sentence to sentence and concept to concept, in order for the audience to understand as much of the original content and context as possible. Whether scene-by-scene or word-by-word, faithfulness to the original is of the utmost importance. Literal adaptation is now largely considered to be flawed and insufficient in these disciplines.

## Spirit Adaptations

Spirit adaptations acknowledge the impossibility of truly equivalent translations across mediums, languages, and cultures. They aim instead to use the affordances of the new mode to model the spirit of the original, rather than the literal meaning. This style often presents fresh insights to the source material and prompts the audience to reassess its meaning.

## Creative Adaptations

Creative Adaptations use the original source as a seed from which they spin a story that is remarkably *theirs*. This might mean taking a short poem and transforming it into a feature-length film, changing a story’s setting from historical to modern, or adding a surprise twist ending. Creative adaptations are often used to critique the source material, make sociopolitical arguments, or update an old story to appeal to modern audiences.



## Lenses of Interpretation

- Intertextuality
- Cultural Values
- Communities as Author & Audience
- Structures & Patterns
- Economic Factors
- Canonization & Authenticity
- Changing Mediums
- Switching Languages
- Feminist Theory
- Queer Theory

While each lens could arguably apply to each discipline, this review focuses on the disciplines where the lens was discussed most prominently during a preliminary literature review, and where the lens directly influenced the way in which a story was adapted. Boundaries between lenses can be blurry, as they are often interconnected and interdependent.

### Suggested Readings.

1. Bassnett, Susan. *Translation Studies*. 3rd edition. London: Routledge, 2002.
2. Hellekson, Karen, and Kristina Busse. *The Fan Fiction Studies Reader*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2014.
3. Morford, Mark P. O., Robert J. Lenardon, and Michael Sham. *Classical Mythology*. 9th edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
4. Sims, Martha C., and Martine Stephens. *Living Folklore: An Introduction to the Study of People and Their Traditions*. 2nd edition. Logan: Utah State University Press, 2011.
5. Slethaug, Gordon. *Adaptation Theory and Criticism: Postmodern Literature and Cinema in the USA*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014.
6. Williams, Raymond. “The Analysis of Culture.” In *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*. 2nd edition. Edited by John Storey, 48-56. Athens, Georgia: Prentice Hall, 1998.

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