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Strange Masks of Adapted Identities in Patrick McCabe's *Winterwood* and *The Holy City*

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Abstract Patrick McCabe's novels dramatize how people make use of character archetypes, media ideals, and fiction to adapt to new realities. These concerns are especially notable in two of his later novels, *The Holy City* and *Winterwood*. In the protagonists' process of social adaptation, they illustrate how the construction of self-identity is defined by narration, and how a world in flux demands constant re-negotiation of the narrative and adaptation to the new story to make self-identity, life patterns, and their contexts match. In effect, the narratives suggest that engagement in media adaptations can guide audiences to find strategies for social adaptation.

Keywords: *Identity, Self-narration, Socialization, Reception, Patrick McCabe.*

SOCIAL AND MEDIA ADAPTATIONS

The enduring appeal of fiction may partially be explained by the narrative convention to represent characters' journeys towards somewhat satisfying states of normalcy in life (Hogan 126). Stories may thus serve as guides when readers and spectators navigate through life. While engaging in fiction, we may adapt our perception of the fictional characters to fit our selves, and temporarily adjust our self-images to better match the characters' ways of relating to the world. There is thus a possibility for a symbiotic relationship between life and fiction, and between self-identity and storytelling. However, in times when everyday life experiences are described in terms of fluidity and instability, and any fixed self-identity may seem vulnerable, simple stories about happy endings may not suffice. Instead, narratives that activate what Laurence Raw calls 'the power of adaptive thinking' (97) for the purposes of personal development become more relevant. Making constructive use of Jerome Bruner's theories about narrative identity formation, he draws attention to the analogy between media adaptations and identity formation through self-narration.

The connection between novel-to-film studies and 'identity politics' is far from new and it has been addressed by scholars for at least a century (Elliott 26). In this article, I interrogate the analogy between social adaptation, or personal socialization, and media adaptations, and argue that media adaptations and fiction characters may serve as metaphoric guides for audiences who want to explore strategies for personal adaptation in the constantly developing social world, especially if the concept of self-narration is embraced with both care and caution.

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I will first consider some of general facets that connect media adaptation(s) and socialization, who both to a degree depend on re-narration and imagination, and concern identity and adjustment in relation to a cultural environment. I then let two of the Irish novelist Patrick McCabe's protagonists illuminate the possibilities and pitfalls of integrating fiction and adaptations in the process of self-narration. McCabe, best known for *Butcher Boy* (1992), often lets his protagonists narrate their own life stories. In *Winterwood* (2006) and *The Holy City* (2009), Redmond Hatch and Christopher McCool adapt and appropriate characters and attributes from media images to fit their own personas, and vice versa. Through their narratives, they exemplify the problems and possibilities of shaping a self-identity through the processes of adaptation and storytelling. Hatch and McCool may be seen as warning examples, but they foremost illustrate how the construction of self-identity is conditioned by narration, and how any world in flux demands constant and cautious re-negotiation of the narrative and adaptation to new story versions to make self-identity, life patterns, and their contexts match.

LINKS BETWEEN SELF-NARRATIONS AND ADAPTATIONS

Producers' and audiences' interest in adaptations has been fairly stable since the advent of feature length films (MacCabe 5). Famously, *Gone with the Wind* (Mitchell, 1936; Victor Fleming, 1939) led people to discuss Scarlett O'Hara's true character and identity, as David O. Selznick made the search for the perfect cinematic representation of her a vital part of the marketing strategy for the film (Leitch 144). Subsequently, tie-ins of the novel have projected portraits of Vivien Leigh and Clark Gable onto the text since the *Illustrated Motion Picture Edition* was published in 1939. However, it is only recently that the democratized media landscape, information access, and the intense marketing of adaptations as adaptations has made conversations about adaptations a norm when people talk about fiction (cf. Hutcheon xxi–xxiii). This may also be related to a contemporary readiness to project narratives openly onto our own life narratives and self-images, with an awareness that fictional characters are representations of lived experiences and created with the purpose to affect us (Phelan 14).

Such integration of fictional characters with self-identity for the purpose of socialization is thematized in *Sopranos* (David Chase, 1999–2007), as Tony turns to *The Godfather* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1972) for counsel, and through identity theme parks in *Austenland* (Shannon Hale, 2007; Jerusha Hess, 2013) and *Westworld* (Michael Crichton, 1973; 2016), among others. They all amplify Dennis Cutchins' point that fictional characters become part of 'who we imagine ourselves to be' when we integrate them into our systems (77). Therefore, when a media adaptation challenges our perception of a character and story, we may feel that our judgement, values, and even our identities are under attack, because the way we look upon the world has been questioned. On such occasions, Cutchins admits, only his scholarly intellectualization works to restore the balance. Similarly, the Swedish novelist Klas Östergren says he chooses his characters carefully, since he will have to live with them inside his mind for a long period time. What they both highlight is that engagement in fiction may lead to an involuntary simulation of the everyday volatility of one's self-identity, and the experience of a state of liminality similar to that which, according to Stacey Peebles, defines adaptations (2).

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Raw, in turn, emphasizes the transformative possibilities of such experiences (97), and advocates that we enter these simulation and identification games with a child's playful curiosity, because 'as we play, we learn how to adapt ourselves to new situations' (92). However, with all adult responsibilities in mind, this is an easy task. As adults, we often have to manage balance costs and benefits instinctively, with a long-term perspective in mind. We thus make use of the tools we have developed to navigate, making slight adjustments of our course, as we move between work place, home, and other habitual spaces. Still, play seems to be a necessary feature for adaptive success and for a full appreciation of adaptations alike.

Children, on the other hand, have in general not developed the adult need to consciously control their identity positions (Berg). To adults, children often represent the capacity to cross from one reality and truth to another, seemingly unaffected by the world they have left, knowing it will still be there, to return to, when they are done (Warner 54–55; Boyd 588). At best, they play and create the worlds they inhabit in acts of becoming. As they make use of what they perceive, and what they can apply from the worlds they have visited before, they change character in manners that are less conventional in an adult context. To the romanticizing eye, children thus appear to be simultaneously in total command and open to impulses and influence from their environment. In worlds that demand constant renegotiations of narrative truths to make self-identity, life patterns, and their surroundings agree; they become balloon masters, carrying at all times a set of bubbles that they can mix and match, merge and enter, happy to cross-contaminate and expand each balloon into new shapes with new possibilities, in harmony with the expectations of others at play.

When fiction is thus used to make sense of oneself and the world, the dual or multiple centres of focus that both media and social adaptations offer may activate thoughts about border crossing, similarities, and differences. Especially in times when 'identity is an attitude taken toward a constant state of flux' (Lampinen et al. 245), people tend to need these alternating centres of gravity for the self and truth, rather than one preordained singular (Dennett). Thus, media adaptations' capacity to invite cognitive oscillations between different versions of what is both the same and different (Hutcheon xv) makes them intensely didactic. They seem to trigger a never-ending desire in audiences and commentators to consider concepts like originality, sources, identity, fidelity, and their relation to modification and change. In Suzanne Diamond's words, engagement in a novel-to-film adaptation 'offers a rich metaphorical corollary to the processes . . . usually involved in remembering and negotiating "who we are"' (102). Instead of being threatened, as we wonder about the different versions of characters' personalities, our resourceful minds may begin to unveil hitherto unseen possibilities regarding our own identities, through the interplay between texts, experiences, and imagination. Therefore, when Rosi Braidotti describes nomadic identity formation as 'creative repetitions, i.e. retelling, reconfiguring and revisiting the concept from different angles', her words might just as well address media adaptations and their effects on our minds (2010: 412).

The consequence is an ontological erosion of the borders between reality and fiction, similar to that of children's play or Jean Baudrillard's description of how we sometimes exchange our relation to reality for something else, so immersive that we may

experience the real world as a fictionalization (1995). Other examples of how the distinctions between fiction and narratives about the empirical world are blurred can be found in so-called nonfiction novels, where stories of factual events or characters are told in fiction form and style, or in fiction films adapted from nonfiction stories, like *JFK* (Oliver Stone, 1992) and *The Big Short* (Adam McKay, 2015), which make use of representations of real or as-if-real documentaries as important elements in the stories. The technique also occurs in McCabe's *Winterwood*, where quotes from the protagonist's articles and documentary about contemporary Ireland create a bridge between the social reality and fiction, and, in *The Holy City*, when the narrating character connects to the readers by sharing fictional references and medialized characterizations of pop-culture icons.

When narratives thus merge various modes of consciousness and elements from disparate worlds, audiences are asked to adapt and immerse. On such instances, and in the social world, the suspension and activation of disbelief usually work actively in tandem to create a balance and a productive cognitive flow between the real and the fictive, due to the natural urge both to believe and to distrust what fiction communicates. However, if this equilibrium is not maintained, readers and spectators may get so mentally engaged in narratives and characters that their emotions and imaginations transgress the borders to the fictional world and they reach full descent (Zunshine 108).

Adaptations take a step further, since their characters and stories are migratory artefacts and beings, with eventually rhizomatic identities, which are affected by past representations, media landscapes, changing genre and media conventions, and their almost social interaction with audience expectations and perceptions. The result might be likened to expansions of the self, and to fully appreciate adaptation characters there is thus a 'need to impose coherence on disparate experiences, and . . . to rewrite the past in accordance with present conditions' (Raw 98). Yet, in worst-case scenarios, the characters may seem to lose identity, either by detachment from the past, or failure to change with the demands of the new narrative environment, and audience may suffer from confusion due to an uncontrolled oscillation between various versions of an adapted character.

Regardless of this sometimes enchanting danger, the benefits of using fiction for didactic purposes are overwhelming, not least as simulation arenas to practise ethical and strategic thinking, emotional response, making judgements and choices (Vermeule). Together, these capacities amount to the ability to adapt and to 'absorb an unfamiliar experience into our personal world' (Iser 293). In this both bi-directional and double-edged engagement, human imagination is an essential element, as we 'make sense of fictional characters by investing them with an inexhaustible repertoire of states of mind', which may also breed a suspicion that even they may 'harbour some secrets' (Zunshine 20). Thus, the cognitive process of coming to terms with a fictional character clearly resembles our own social process of self-making in a world riddled with uncertainties and opportunities. Again, we are reminded that the understanding of the fictive through previous experiences of reality goes hand in hand with our comprehension of reality through fiction. This is what makes fiction life-like and social life so much like fiction.

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In this context, it is worthwhile to remember that adaptation entails an evolutionary ambition for balance or harmony, since the term involves 'that the structure of an organism is a function of its environment' (MacCabe 3). Like so many before him, Colin MacCabe notes that this fundamental definition has bearing regardless of whether social, media, or biological adaptations are concerned. In the hypothetical case where the environment remains constant, there is no notable need for a character, story, or person to adjust. Conversely, dramatic external changes forces organisms to adapt, or to fade away. Everyday life may entail degrees of both phenomena, but in Bruner's words, 'trouble is what impels us to refashion Self' (1996: 158), and it with this line of reasoning as a backdrop that I ask what the narratives of McCabe's characters have to add about the relevance of media adaptations in the social world.

THE QUEST FOR IDENTITIES IN *WINTERWOOD* AND *THE HOLY CITY*

In McCabe's novel *The Holy City,* the retired Christopher McCool tries make a coherent narrative of the fragmented memories of his life, from his room in what he calls 'The Happy Club'. In *Winterwood*, Redmond Hatch tells his story of broken marriages and changing careers in the media sector. Like McCool he constantly returns to disturbing childhood incidents in his recollections. Divorced, abandoned, jobless, and surrounded by 'identikit houses' and 'transatlantic accents', they both realize that changing times have made them migrants, at risk of 'hurtling . . . towards some amorphous, haphazard future' (*Winterwood* 52), or of becoming 'impotent witnesses, to a world now fast fading, if not already gone' (*Holy City* 16). At the onset, as fictional beings Hatch and McCool thus resemble characters in a novel long since forgotten, waiting to be picked up for an adaptation so that they may become relevant again. As their narrations and quests for tangible self-images proceed, they deliberately appropriate other fictional characters to fit their own personalities and in tandem adapt themselves to suit those prototypes. Still, they keep yearning for a stable and original identity that will allow them to belong to a surrounding socio-cultural context. The mere title of *The Holy City* signals this 'idealisation of union and purity [… and …] ideals of undiluted origins and an undivided self' (Heinz and Schmitt 89), or, as it is expressed in *Winterwood,* at least 'one as close to *complete* as any person could dream of' (153).

However, such simplification of origin as a concept by necessity demands a neglect of complicating elements and subtexts. In the case of media adaptations, the belief in original wholes demands that source texts and characters are regarded as identifiable unities with permanent qualities that can be returned to, or even transferred and re-integrated, as a constant whole or identity, in a new environment. Indeed, film adapters may sometimes strive more to protect and represent a source novel than to realize the screen idea and film, as they enshrine the significance of the story, entombing the characters rather than letting them be affected, adapt, and survive.

The notion of adaptation through an absolute return thus harbours an illusion that identity can be defined, broken, and healed, and thus that a mythical unity of past, present, and future can be completely restored if the right adaptive choices are made, when in fact 'only that which has no history is definable' in a world of change (Nietzsche 80). Once the book is opened, the film starts to roll, or life and the adaptation process begin in the reader's mind, the myth of the incorruptible source-text is transformed

into time and instability. McCool's and Hatch's shared dream of a fixed, given or invented, identity thus illustrates the 'impossible exchange' between thought and reality (Baudrillard, 2001: 3), between the time span and the demands for constancy that adaptations are often subjected to.

Because a person's self-identity is conditioned by the fluidity of time, people, places, and the relationships between them, identities—our own, characters', or stories'—cannot be verified or discovered, but must be invented (Bauman, 2004: 15). For McCool, but also Hatch, the most tangible offer is a set of stereotype repetitions (Heinz and Schmitt 77). Since the characters are offered no complete solutions by the reactive returns to their own past identities, they instead choose to seek to adapt, appropriate, and project the remediated ideals from films, television, and magazines onto their own identities, as part of their socialization projects. Their alternative logic posits that identity, when replaced with identifications in 'a never-ending, always incomplete, unfinished and open-ended activity' (Bauman, 2001: 152), will satisfy both their need for originality and for a return to an origin. For Hatch and McCool, the fusion of fiction and reality is the ideal condition, since it also allows them to relinquish 'all idea, desire, or nostalgia for fixity', as Braidotti says about the nomad (2011: 57), while they are still anchored in a 'common fund' of narratives, to speak with Bruner (2002: 16).

Harbouring romanticized notions of a migrant's progress, Hatch's and McCool's mutual ambition is to become something outside the texts of their selves, always developing through their narration, beyond what has already been written. In a manner, they seek refuge in nomadic identities, observing and tracing the trodden paths, without fixed points or connections for beginnings, hinges, or ends. The effect this has on them is an exhausting cognitive dissonance, as their lives become nothing but text, without existing referents on the outside, as if influenced by Jacques Derrida's postulation 'il n'y a pas de hors-text' (158).

However, the kind of unpredictability that McCabe's characters are subjected to typically 'breeds anxiety and fear' and subsequently reinforces the yearning for security through identity (Bauman, 2001: 141), 'to arrest or slow down the flow, to solidify the fluid, to give form to the formless' (Bauman, 2000: 82). Thus, suffering from severe mental fluctuations, Hatch and McCool try to navigate through the contradictions that the cost-benefit process of adaptation entails, and try to make themselves 'relevant or easily comprehensible . . . via the processes of proximation and updating', as Julie Sanders writes about film adaptions (19). Their greatest problem is of course to master the adaptive way of thinking and to maintain a stable relationship to both self and environment. In the end, McCabe's protagonists seem to dissolve, and so their stories suggest that the greatest peril that looms over all forms of adaptations is the loss of identity, given that the crystallization of the future, present, and past, of everyday life, cultural conditions, and available options are not properly managed.

McCabe's novels thus ask what kinds of truths can be found when identities and contexts are adapted and appropriated to include and exclude anything at will. They also provoke the question whether adaptation, without losing any sense of a stable self-identity and the connection with the person one has been and its context, is at all possible, or even desirable. The alternative they propose is a break with the past and a transition to 'cleaner, more clinical perhaps, but distinctly pronouncing aggressively

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individual times' (*Holy City* 124). Above all, they illustrate how engagement in media adaptations assists and affects us through cognitive transfers, in a world where negotiations between 'ourselves and the communities we inhabit' (Raw 99), between the idea of a fixed identity and the instinct to adapt, are ever present.

McCOOL'S FASHIONABLE IDENTIFICATIONS

Conscious adaptations always entail a return to what has been, either to ensure a future connection, to guarantee that all undesired elements will be left behind, or simply to take a stance for an inspired leap. In *The Holy City,* the optimism of a progressive and liberal approach to adaptation is summarized by Christopher McCool's exclamation that each new era is a 'great permissive age of opportunity' (124), in line with the belief that the identity a person chooses is 'eminently negotiable and revocable' through perception and narration, as described by Zygmunt Bauman (2004: 11).

Arguing for the protection of a 'sovereign, autonomous, self-contained ego formation . . . against both its own passions and the invasions of others' (10), McCool first presents himself as 'C.J Pops, International Celeb', 'retired businessman', 'tall and handsome' (*Holy City* 2), and a 'dutiful, respectful, and ever-appreciative' husband to a beautiful woman (1), in a tirade of inflated, self-narrating idealizations of what it is to be a man, which he has picked up from various media. McCool's self-image is that he is 'every inch the gentleman', a 'mr Wonderful' (139), and a true hunk in accord with the mediated ideals adopted from magazines and films: 'in the smartest of neat blue blazers with brightly polished brass buttons complete with white loafers and razor-creased grey slacks, a Peter Stuyvesant King Size cigarette (the international passport to smoking pleasure!) louchely dawdling' between his lips (1). This creative act renders him the 'conviction of autonomy' (1) which most narrations of self-identity and adaptations are more or less designed to achieve, although there is no way he can hide his self-identity is based on other stories. Like some media adaptations he rather appears as a superficial pastiche.

Moreover, because he creates a new identity through appropriation of already re-mediated stereotypes, he re-invents, rather than invents that self-image. This may challenge his 'status as a primary creative force', in Raw's words about adapting filmmakers (96). Yet, it is only through such fluid fictionalization of identity that McCool can locate a subject position that allows him to adapt to the surrounding fragmented and ambiguous cultural landscape, so that his 'good fortune and well-being continue apace' (*Holy City* 1) to completion. In particular, Roger Moore carries relevance for McCool, 'cool, suave' with a sophisticated intelligence as Bond, and in the role of Simon Templar, The Saint, a 'self styled "jet-setting, country club" schmootzer' (2) and 'cool globetrotting bachelor' (105).

When McCool appropriates these attributes, and adapts his own persona to fit them as much as possible, he also adopts the adapter's liminality and creativity. In a further step towards an involuntary abstraction, he implements a simulacric identity, which only exists in a narrative shape, the way Moore seems to be inseparable from The Saint and Bond. McCool's appropriation of a set of qualities through an act of self-narration is supposed to render him an air of an exemplary global nomad: in control and transgressing borders of geography, class, law, style, and culture, with an identity deceptively

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'made of transitions, successive shifts, and coordinated changes, without and against an essential unity', to quote Braidotti (2011: 22). Her words would form a devastating verdict if they were found in a review, but if a balance is maintained between roots, coherence, progress, and a desire to explore, the nomadic qualities are productive, as if designed for adaptations. On the other hand, a desire to escape any imposed conventions or prototypes may tip the balance. In McCool's case, his exaggerated fear of becoming a repetition of unsophisticated Irish stereotypes and his accompanying ambition to connect make him subscribe to other pre-ordained identities. Due to his conflicting and unsettling ambitions, the effect is a nostalgic return to past representations of novelty, the inherent paradox of all adaptations.

Under such conditions, a character may become an inconsequential tourist in life, unless the re-invented or adapted persona is equipped with a grounding component (Bauman, 1996), a destiny shared by many characters who have migrated from one story version to another. So, in an effort to connect his international hero-self to the locally situated husband/father, McCool employs the myth of the Irish Protestant and his presumed father, Dr Thornton, 'a sophisticated gentleman […] of the noblest, verifiable Protestant stock' (*Holy City* 2). The allusion to Roger Moore's perceived qualities both links his adopted style to his father, as a descendant, and identifies McCool as a new breed. Aware that he is nevertheless neither a true cosmopolitan, nor an ideal protestant, but a 'bastard' half-breed (80), as a result of his mother's extramarital affair, he thus creatively triangulates Bond and the protestant father figure to conjure a new narrative identity: 'Christopher Thornton, our own Protestant kind' (77). With an amalgamation self-identity, like a character in a mash-up adaptation, he finds that he is 'every bit as competent a yokel as any of them' (15).

Still, he remains an isolated vagabond, because 'neither the New Man nor the New Lad truly exists outside its media invention' (Edwards 4), and it is apparent that McCool fails to adhere to Murray Smith's warning not to mistake the 'representation for its referents' (80). Hence, his attempts to conjure a united self-image through narration results in what Braidotti calls the 'molecularisation of the self' (2011: 36), because there is no hope for him to reach the moment 'when the self is emptied out, dissolving into rawer and more elementary sensations . . . heightened levels of awareness and receptivity' (Braidotti, 2010: 415) until the re-union is completed in his mind.

It is indeed the impossible exchange between the real and the imaginary that is attempted. However, as Braidotti notes, 'given that identifications constitute an inner scaffolding that supports one's sense of identity, shifting our imaginary identifications is not as simple as casting away a used garment' (2010: 411). McCool may adhere to Erik H. Erikson's (1980) explanation of identification as simulation and the practice of gradually adapting and internalizing specific traits into what can be recognized as a person of one's own. He also selects and subsequently investigates various characters' personalities, on which a self can be modelled and developed, and thus challenges 'self-appointed custodians of morality' (124) who strive to preserve and return to origins.

All the same, McCool fails because he never abandons the idea of the constancy of essence. Eventually, the return of the uncanny is summoned by the contradictions, the simplifying selection of facts and causal connections, and cannot be held back by any

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imagination. As it turns out, McCool's entire meandering narrative is a web of adapted truths, and McCool's narrative is a creation of his mind to shield his mediated identity, in the absence of a true one, as he has tried to be neither an original, nor an adaptation and yet both at the same time. The Happy Club that he resides in is nothing but a mental institution from which his narration is projected, and his final narrative truth is the context he has tried to avoid: a narrative out of context, without direction, coordination of thoughts, or priorities, circumscribed by a set of padded walls. The parallel to film adaptations is obvious: regardless of whether they construct an aura of pure originality or of absolute fidelity, the theatre becomes a cell, which only the ignorant spectator can consider a home adapted to suit reality. If, on the other hand, there are too many stakeholders with disparate ambitions, the adaptation falls apart.

REDMOND HATCH'S HAUNTED RE-INVENTIONS IN *WINTERWOOD*

In *Winterwood,* Redmond Hatch is under the impression that the world is 'almost out of control: the carnage on the roads continues as though some inconsequential, diverting carnival', and 'old-timers haunt the fringes of the city, afraid to penetrate its boundaries' (51). His concerns illustrate the human reluctance to external changes and also to adaption itself, stability being the preferable state, due to the natural fear of moving in the wrong direction. Getting too immersed in attempts to adapt to a changing environment, which also relates to novel-film adaptations, leads to a continual risk of taking the wrong turn, and thus of increasing the rifts between former self-identities and narratives on the one hand, and the world on the other, but also between the need for community and to have an individual place to belong to. Seeking something to 'regulate [his] life – dispel this pervasive, all-consuming uncertainty' (*Winterwood* 58), Hatch initial comfort lies in the ironic sense of belonging to a whole community that has migrated mentally through a gradual process of adaptations. 'If I had become debilitatingly civilized and grown apart from my people and background, then at least I wasn't alone', he thus ponders (15).

Thus, as if all the instabilities are caused by a departure from an origin that people should have been faithful to, the quest seems to be for an enduring normative style or a genre. As he realizes, the performative aspects of adaptations, to some extent, always involve compromising appropriations and performances of both pre-existing prototypes and imagined opportunities. Hatch's first instinct is to return to a point where his imagination positions a sense of stability and authenticity, essence, and relevance. He turns to a mythical sanctuary, to which the title *Winterwood* refers, and the memories of his imaginary visits there, together with his daughter during her childhood. The recollections, well fashioned to suit his purposes, propose a more perceptible sense of unity for him, than any convention-bound institution may do, as long as he manages to censor his darker past. Only in Winterwood, he first assumes, can he come to terms with the conflicting values of individuality and belonging, as is the common theme in the Bildungsroman genre (Moretti 27), Joseph Campbell's accounts of the monomyth (1949), and many media adaptation debates.

However, Hatch soon realizes that his imagined origin stories are too detached from the conventions of the social world, and like mythical characters they may be 'hospitable, certainly, but never, under any circumstances, to be trusted' (*Winterwood* 43),

especially for someone who desires the stability of a self-narrative that can be performed in harmony with a surrounding social culture. In this context, he observes that a storytelling man of wisdom can function as an anchoring archive of narratives in times of change, to 'make sure we don't lose our way' (16), as if identity, or the source-text to identity, can be transposed into audiences' minds, or into film characters in the adaptation process.

Accordingly, in his journalist role, Hatch begins to perform a series of remediating acts as he obsessively interviews and writes articles about his home-town old-timer and local story teller, Ned Strange, in search of a truth that can replace his own past. He thus lends his voice to the authentic character, in a process of exploring his own relationship to, and position in, the culture that Strange supposedly represents. Like McCool, he seeks a springboard for a leap to become someone different and at the same time someone similar to the person he was before.

This both Freudian and Derridean approach to adaptation, with the estranged, or different, as a defining part of the self-identity, is further highlighted by Strange's name, and is something that Hatch must manage at several levels. Besides identifying with Strange, the idealized self-identity that he has adopted from glossy magazines depends on his capacity to be a successful entrepreneur and productive provider, as well as a sensitive, caring husband. As indicated before, merging two self-identities involves the risk of suffering from liminality and confusion. To safely reinforce his same-but-different persona throughout his narration, Hatch therefore recurrently links his own ability as a father figure to his work identity. 'If you were to ask any of my workmates who of us all is the most devoted father, I guarantee you this, they would seriously consider me', he assures the reader (196). Like McCool, he thus strives to control the narrated image of himself, and to create a distance from traditional Irish identities, especially the stereotypical bully that his father was, he who beat the mother to death (127). Hence, Hatch's new persona defines him as someone distinct from the originals he wants to avoid, yet still akin to sustaining traditions, while he also introduces new elements to his personality to make him even more appropriate for the changing world, the way he sees it, unaware of the acts of violence he performs against his self-identity.

In films and social life, as Hatch's and McCool's violent histories show, the efforts to shape someone else by brute force rarely leads to anything but reduction and restrained potentials. Worse still is that the inability to adapt with respect to anything else but one's own will generally leads to serial variations of these violent acts. The repression of the past is such an act of violence, and Hatch's awareness gradually reminds him of his and Strange's sinister past lives, as both abused and abusers of other's identities and bodies. When what has been hidden and made strange comes to the surface, it tends to grow into a defining element. In the flow of narration, Hatch cannot ward off the parts of his self which he has repressed. In a haunting return, Strange's voice comes to life in his head: 'You make up stories. . . . You make up stories the same as me' (107), suggesting that his self-construction is but a hollow narrative, as an effect of hiding behind an appropriate surface. To Strange, this is to 'take refuge behind a close-knit tribe so nobody can ever get blamed' (107) or identified. Still, confronted by the knowing audience, here in the shape of Strange's ghost, the appropriation and adoption of pre-fabricated identities offer no protection from responsibility or from the possible lack of individual

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meaning. Likewise, neither the adapted character nor its source can be concealed from the audience. Sensing the lack of features that he needs in order to grasp his own self, Hatch also loses the perspectives that he needs to be an observer and adapter of reality and of his past. Like a representation of his self-identity, that ultimate adaptation, his articles become 'hopelessly digressive and badly written' (28).

As stated at the beginning of this essay, for an adapting character the logical consequence to severe crisis is either to adapt or escape, or to do both: disappear, transform, and re-emerge in a developed form. So, to avoid awakening memories and to escape justice from killing his daughter, Hatch re-invents himself and takes on, like one of McCool's costumes, a rather developed identity. Under a new name, Domenic Tiernan, TV producer, he evolves from the New Man and makes adjustment towards an existence as a New Lad, with a young American wife, which re-establishes his status as a prosperous and progressive subject. 'It's not every man can boast of a woman as desirable as Casey Breslin selecting them over others', he states (159). Confident enough in his new suit, he thrives by sharing her 'propensity for high achievement', 'learning from Casey every single day' (162), borrowing not the status of past sources, but from a target source, which he imagines himself able to become and eventually surpass, like an embodiment of the screen-idea of a script, with Ian McDonald's analogous term. Prosperous adaptation, he seems to suggest, also demands the adaptation of qualities from subjects who already flourish in their environments.

In spite of his turbulent history, like any optimistic film adapter, Hatch still believes in orderly adaptation and a stable progression without flux or disturbing interruptions. So, when his second wife leaves him, he simply re-writes his story once more and asserts that any talk of marital bliss is 'all lies' (198). Rather, he reasons that the adjustment to the superficial elements of the new age has created a narrational distance from the past and prevented him from solidifying his self-identity. However, the career that he has built, documenting and re-constructing the past through the filter of another medium, turning his articles into a TV documentary, has prepared him for a final identity transformation. In an ironic and problematizing twist, the solution for peace, he concludes, is to 'don the mask of the Paddy', as Declan Kiberd describes the Irish adaptive tradition (29), and to let the original, the ghost of Ned Strange, possess his entire body and character. This time the narrative identity appropriates him, and, in the end, all there is of truth, of narration, and of identity is the anonymity that reality, fiction, and adaptation may lend us.

LESSONS LEARNED

Adaptation, in terms of personal identities and stories, novels, and films, is a perilous but unavoidable hermeneutic game, in which the particularities must always be checked to match the totalities, Patrick McCabe seems to tell us. In a complex system, this is challenging enough, but processes of adaptation are conditioned by instabilities, change, and uncertainties as well. This renders adaptations their social dimensions. Fiction characters must interact with their new environments and establish new self-identities if they migrate from one version of a story to another. In the social world, we similarly act in roles, for adults are shaped in line with social conventions, while children more often act on impulse to learn what each situation might allow. Eventually,

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the world may seem to be a place of adults enacting their pre-fabricated selves, with the benefit that the world appears to be a place of order where all play their parts. As audience members of fiction narratives that are concerned with adaptation in one way or another, we are socialized and learn to allow adaptations an appropriate freedom, but we also delimit adaptations' possibilities through judgement for the sake of own gradual development. If an adaptation is too radical, McCabe's characters inform us, it fails to connect with its mental and physical environment. Still, as Hatch and McCool illustrate, the social dimensions of adaptation also entail that fiction characters, and we ourselves, must be creatively re-invented again and again to maintain the balance between individuality and community, between self-identity and belonging.

In McCabe's world, adaptation thus unfolds as a cost-benefit game, based on the balance between various needs and fears. These are triangulated with previous actions, both physical and self-narrational; inferences, from mediations of conventions and from observations of the world; and speculations about short and long term developments, all of which are mentally re-configured in the process. The core need in Hatch's and McCool's worlds is to find a sense of unity to direct and give meaning. Their illusion of a pure and stable unity is two-fold, since they seek their own illusive essence, which can be anchored in and render them the experience of community. In effect, they seek novelty, uniqueness, and freedom all at once, to avoid the featureless, while they yearn to be rooted, connected, and to belong, concerns that are in constant play as novels are adapted for the screen.

Both when we encounter media adaptations and our selves, McCabe's stories indicate, we need the simplicity of the mythological origin, or source, as a backdrop to make the features of the version and the development visible, before we can begin to unfurl the possibilities that lie ahead. Thus, media adaptations remind us that all conscious forms of adaptations are conditioned by the need to return to past narratives. When we review and compare versions of a story or a character, we simultaneously practise the split vision that we need to monitor ourselves and our own behaviours. As we so do, we commonly ask which version of ourselves is best fit to prosper in harmony with the environment and the changing world we live in. In this sense, narratives related to adaptations teach us that adaptation is by definition normative, to some extent.

In this context, McCabe's characters demonstrate the necessity to draw inferences from sources external to the perceived self-identity in the process of adaptation, as they turn to mediated texts and show how fictionalized narratives form useful explanatory frames of reference. Adapting and evolving characters indeed exemplify the particularities of what it means to migrate from one world to another. Thus, when different versions are compared, each media adaptation seems to work as a magnifying glass for stills from the everyday experience of continual social and mental adaptation in a world of flux. However, as McCabe's protagonists suggest, the instabilities also seem to hold epistemological issues to ransom, as the borders between fiction, narratives, and realities evaporate. And so, like Hatch and McCool, we slide, negotiate meanings, and adapt, and must eventually ask what can be known or true about identities and the world if we do not even accept them as true or real.

The greatest peril of adaptation is indeed that we might be caught in a liminal loop of contentless narrativization, where nothing remains of any self-identity and meaning

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but fiction. It is thus easy to identify with McCabe's heroes when they violently simplify their personalities, either by identifying themselves as tangible stereotypes or by turning themselves into fluid abstractions in their acts of narration. Either way they violate their past and their possibilities, because adaptations make it seem so easy to be both instead of neither.

As McCool and Hatch invite their narrative imaginations to their meandering, autobiographical accounts and senses of self-identity, they become serial adaptations themselves, nomadic migrants of sorts, with memories of the past which they cannot erase. We can bear in mind that most adapted characters have migrated many times between perceptibly complete worlds: a novel, five or six thorough screenplay versions, a film, and perhaps even beyond, to a game, and a graphic novel, yet they still keep all those past versions of themselves within themselves, as remembered beings who can come to life again. Each time they migrate they adapt their selves, but they also appropriate the worlds they enter, while those worlds in turn appropriate them and adapt to some extent, with the effect that both bubbles expand.

So, if we regard adapted characters empathetically as migrant fictional beings with a past, as McCabe's characters beg us to do, we may understand more clearly their personal processes of adaptation to become what they appear to be, that is, who they have become in order to be relevant again in the new setting. We may also recognize why they have migrated and what they have gone through in the process. We may even ask not just what they left behind, but what they still carry inside and hold back, how they relate to their former selves, and who they want to be in their new lives, if they were given all the opportunities available. We may even realize in what ways they contribute to their new habitats. In the end, the adaptations might incite us to ask ourselves all those questions.

For better and worse, adaptations are thus subversive and oppositional, since they impose new inferences on us and affect the 'value-system and hierarchies' they are a part of, as Julie Sanders argues (9). The way to re-establish harmony escapes and haunts Hatch and McCool, although their narratives clearly tell them that the essence of adaptation lies in the crystallisation of the experiences of now, past, and future. Keeping these perspectives separate, Hatch and McCool fail to engage a balanced exchange between past, present, and future, between movement and solidity, acceptance and progress. But for the adapting character, there is no such thing as outside-the text. On the contrary, 'becoming has to do with emptying out the self, opening it out to possible encounters with the "outside"', Braidotti explains (2010: 416). As Linda Hutcheon argues about media adaptations, 'simultaneity, not priority, reigns' (xxiv), because self-identity and truth cannot be based on subjective selections. Only then can the potential of fiction adaptations to function as guiding therapeutic metaphors be fulfilled.

While media adaptations are external to ourselves, we can regard them both as objects and processes. It is, however, rare that we find time in social life, except when we enjoy fiction adaptations, to reflect upon our own simultaneous dimensions of being and becoming, or from another perspective our romantic longing for the adaptations we have performed, we want to be, and for the pleasure of being in the process. From McCabe's perspective, we still need to be stable to handle adaptations, because the environment is itself adapting and affecting a character's constitution, while every character

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has unforeseeable effects on their environments, in a never-ending bi-directional process. If we engage, adapting and adapted characters have a lot to teach us, whether our goal is a somewhat happy life, to uncover timeless truths, or to adapt a popular novel for the screen.

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