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Introduction

The ubiquity and popularity of novel series defined by the presence of a central recurring character or characters is such that it is easy to overlook the fact that this species of works has not always been a dominant feature of the literary and wider cultural landscape. The experience enjoyed by the contemporary reader who awaits and consumes the next Harry Potter (1997 - 2007), Inspector Rebus (1987 – 2018), or instalment of *Game of Thrones* (1996 -) might be familiar to their analogue in the early twentieth century anticipating the next story featuring Sherlock Holmes (1887-1927). However, this type of reading experience would be essentially foreign to the reader a further hundred years earlier. It is from the early nineteenth century onwards that the lineaments of a recognizable tradition of novels featuring recurring characters begin to coalesce. Though this is not to say that it commences *ex nihilo*. The concept of the 'sequel' is at least as old as Classical literature; Homer's *Odyssey* may be regarded as a sequel to The *Iliad*, picking up characters and themes treated in the earlier work[1]. In Western drama the notion of successive linked works has similarly ancient roots in Greek theatre, and theatregoers in Shakespeare's time would have recognized the connections across subsets of his history plays, not least the reappearance of characters such as Prince Hal/Henry V and Falstaff. Another notable early example of recurring characters would be Beaumarchais' trilogy of plays *Le Barbier de Séville* (1775), *Le Mariage de Figaro* (1778), and *La Mère coupable* (1792), though only two characters appear in all three works. However, a key contention of the present study is that the widespread adoption of recurring characters in the novel and the subsequent, accelerating, embrace of this device across the newer media of cinema, radio, television and the web – including the frequent adaptation of specific literary characters by those media – has amounted to an underappreciated revolution in storytelling.

The recurring character narratives in which this paper is interested may broadly be defined as those where the same character or characters reappear *in new stories*, rather than in retellings or variations. In terms of adaptation the focus will mostly be upon those where the scheme of recurrence is underway in the original narrative medium *before* adaptation takes place. In its most straightforward form this is exemplified by a body of novels featuring a recurring character or characters which are subsequently adapted for the screen. In practice, the interplay between the creation of narrative series 'instalments' or artefacts in an inaugural medium and their reappearance through adaptation in another encompasses a welter of variants and complications. Charting and

analysing a selection of these and their antecedents is the principal undertaking of this paper, which proposes the following typology as an initial sketch of their variety:

- Instalments may not be adapted sequentially, and may have a lesser or greater connection – in terms of autonomy and overall narrative comprehensibility – to others, including existing as 'free-standing' texts. For example, of James Lee Burke's 22 crime novels featuring the recurring character Dave Robicheaux (1987 – 2019), two have been adapted to film (1996, 2009) with different actors and no connection beside the fact of their source;

- Equally, where a character or characters recur across a body of texts, adaptation can mean that a single creative team manage the comprehensive transliteration of an entire corpus, e.g. the journey of the *Game of Thrones* novels (1996 -) to television[2] (2011 – 2019);

- Adaptations from the same corpus by multiple 'authors' – say, directors - or other entities, means that those recurring characters will be figured in different ways, including through the re-adaptation of the same individual instalment or work. This would certainly be the case for the many renderings, across multiple media, of the Sherlock Holmes or Miss Marple stories;

- The adaptive process may, when the generation of the original works is still underway, influence the 'source' novels. This occurs in respect of Bernard Cornwell's *Sharpe* series of historical adventures, discussed at length later;

- Adaptation can, depending upon the success of the adapted version, become the driver for subsequent stories. That is, adaptation may be the *cause* of a character's recurrence in both a 'source' and secondary medium. David Morrell's character Rambo dies at the end of his 1972 novel, but – at the insistence of actor/producer Sylvester Stallone – survives the movie adaptation[3], giving rise to both the five film *Rambo* series (1982 – 2019) and two novelisations by Morrell;

- The adaptive transit is not necessarily from page-to-screen, and may even be mono-medial, as in 'continuation' fiction where a recurring character is no longer steered by their original creator – discussed later here in respect of James Bond continuation novels;

- Recurrence of characters may also take place outwith the commercial and legal purview of their creators and executors, for example after copyright has expired or in the era before it constituted an effective safeguard of authorial rights. Characters treated as 'common

property' (Brewer 2) have long re-appeared in unauthorised works, up to and including contemporary fan- and slash- fiction;

- An adaptive recurrence can take the form of a significant temporal relocation that places the character in a new (even 'impossible') setting. For example, the already-adapted figures of Sherlock Holmes and the Scarlet Pimpernel are anachronistically recruited to the fight against Nazism in the wartime pictures *Sherlock Holmes and the Secret Weapon* (1942) and *'Pimpernel' Smith* (1941) where actors strongly associated with 'correct period' portrayals of the titular characters, Basil Rathbone and Leslie Howard, continue or reprise the roles in a new timeframe;

- Portmanteau adaptations such as *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* (comic from 1999; film 2003) and *Penny Dreadful* (TV 2014-2016) combine multiple characters known from several celebrated originals and their multiple retellings such as *Dracula* and *Frankenstein,* creating new stories centred on their interactions.

- These processes may also take place in combination, as for example with the figure of Flashman created by Thomas Hughes in 1857, who bullies the central character of *Tom Brown's School Days*. Repurposed by George MacDonald Fraser, he becomes the recurring antihero of 12 new novels (1969 – 2005) that deliberately counterpoint Flashman's amorality, cowardice and cunning with the Victorian Christian worldview espoused by Hughes.

'Pioneering' recurring characters in the novel: Cooper and Balzac

James Fenimore Cooper's five novels that comprise the *Leatherstocking Tales* (published 1823-1841, *set* 1740 - 1804) are a very early example of linked works that feature a recurring protagonist, the frontiersman known *inter alia* as 'Leatherstocking', 'Natty Bumppo' and 'Hawkeye'. It is notable that the character is an old man in the first novel, *The Pioneers,* while the second, *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), the story that 'brought him national and international fame' (Wallace 701), is set decades earlier and presents him as a much younger man. As Geoffrey Rans observes, Cooper's 'achronological composition' (59) means that 'the reader who reads in the order of composition' experiences a 'resonance' caused by foreknowledge of what will happen to characters (105). The question of a proper order in which to read the tales has long intrigued readers and scholars, including D.H. Lawrence who argued in 1923 for such a reading in chronological order of publication. The third novel, *The Prairie* (1827), takes a dramatic leap forward, leapfrogging *The Pioneers* by an

additional decade and thereby requiring a temporal fix by Cooper to avoid making the Leatherstocking character, now styled as either 'the old man' or 'the trapper', about a hundred years old. As suggested by the shift in character name, continuity with the previous novels is achieved by inference rather than explicitly. After thirteen years Cooper resumed publication of the *Tales* with *The Pathfinder* (1840)[4], set immediately after *The Last of the Mohicans*, followed by *The Deerslayer* (1841), which spans fifteen years of story-time before *The Last of the Mohicans*. Allen Axelrad, who favours a reading order based on the chronological order of Leatherstocking's life, disputes Lawrence's interpretation of the *Tales* as the hero's regression to innocence (an interpretation which supports a reading order based on date of publication) on the grounds that, although the last published novel is set earliest, the backwards trajectory is 'irregular' and there is a 'lack of explicit evidence that Cooper at least semi-consciously organized the Tales in the descending order of Leatherstocking's age' (193).

The *Leatherstocking Tales* anticipate some of the properties and problems that will prove enduring in recurring character narratives as they acquire more concrete characteristics over the next two hundred years, particularly those associated with the idea of a preferred order of consumption and of the age/aging of characters. They also reveal the extent to which this type of storytelling was, at this point, a nascent narrative mode, its characteristics still in significant respects unformed. It is instructive to consider contemporaneous reviews of Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales* as the pattern of character recurrence emerges and develops. The anonymous reviewer for the *London Magazine* in May 1826, besides noting sourly that *The Last of the Mohicans* is 'clearly by much the worst of Mr. Cooper's performances' (in Dekker and McWilliams, eds. 83), observes only towards the end of his review that 'the principal personage in the drama - the hero and bore in one - [is] no other than our old friend Leatherstockings' [sic] (87). In March 1826 another unsigned piece for the *New-York Review and Atheneum* also uses 'old friend' (94), though more positively, to refer to the reappearance of both Leatherstocking and Chingachgook from *The Pioneers*. The former is also described as a 'favourite' of the author. For the unnamed reviewer of the *United States Literary Gazette* in May 1826 it was evidently not a matter of absolute certainty that Cooper really had presented readers with a younger version of the same character:

> Hawk-eye, or, as he is half the time called without any obvious propriety, 'the scout'; or, according to another alias, Nathaniel Bumppo, is by far the best drawn, as well as the most important person of the whole. It is true that he is only a second-edition of Leather-stocking in the *Pioneers*, and he is by many supposed to represent the same person at an earlier period of his life. But it is no small merit, to have taken up the same character and carried it through a second novel, with complete success. We would gladly travel over a third in his company.' (101-102)

It is noteworthy that carrying through a character from one *novel* to another was deemed remarkable, and the reference to a possible third - linked - novel proved prescient. The unnamed writer of 'Tales of Indian Life' discusses Cooper's third *Leatherstocking* Tale, *The Prairie*, in *Colburn's New Monthly Magazine* in 1827, observing that:

> [T]he most popular character of the whole will probably be that of the old Trapper, who is already familiar to Mr. Cooper's readers, as Hawkeye, the scout of the *Last of the Mohicans*, and the Leatherstocking of the *Pioneers*. This character is the most felicitous of the author's creations, and, having borne a good part in two previous novels, does not fall off in the end [...] we feel when he dies that we are parting from an old friend; and seriously lament that we can hope to meet with him no more in a future novel (123).

Here it is worth recording that, at least in terms of that particular reviewer's understanding, Leatherstocking's death at the conclusion of *The Prairie* means that the character will not recur in any future work, despite the fact that Cooper had already taken him back in time once before. Russian critic, V. G. Belinsky, writing in 1841 after the publication of *The Pathfinder* but before *The Deerslayer,* was equally certain that this fourth novel featuring Leatherstocking represented a final instalment. Listing the works in order of character chronology, rather than publication, he states that Cooper has completed 'a wonderful tetralogy, a vast and splendid poem in four parts' with 'a character indispensable to the continuity of the action' (193). The unsigned review of *The Deerslayer* in the *New-York Mirror* in September 1841 makes a similar claim in respect of the series' finality, describing Leatherstocking as 'drawn in the vigour of early manhood, thus completing the history of his life and death' (205). Whilst *The Deerslayer* was Leatherstocking's fifth and final published outing, much research and speculation has focused on 'the author's apparent, though unfulfilled, interest in writing a sixth Leather-Stocking Tale' (Murray 495) portraying 'Natty's exploits during the Revolutionary War' (Harthorn 51). One of Cooper's publishers, William Adee Townsend, related to *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* in 1895 that nine months before his death the author had proposed another Leatherstocking novel but was turned down on the basis that 'the series was a perfect one as it was left [..] a complete drama in five acts' (qtd. in Harthorn 60). Cooper had himself used a similar expression in the preface to *The Deerslayer,* describing the *Leatherstocking Tales* as now having achieved a form 'something like a drama in five acts; complete as to material and design' (x).

At a time when the novel sequence featuring a recurring character or characters was coming into being it is clear that author and critics alike sought explanatory and interpretative models for this development in the terminology of drama, where both sub-divided compound works (trilogies and tetralogies[5]), and firmly demarcated narrative phases within a single work (acts) were already familiar. The use of the recurring character evidently tested their sense of the nature of the novel as a coherent, complete, and unified work. Recasting and reconceptualising the novels as parts of a

complete whole served to reconcile them with existing paradigms and elucidatory categories, even as it seemingly stymied the possibility of further works. It is certainly obvious that a potentially endless series of novels featuring a popular protagonist seemed unimaginable to key individuals at this juncture. Relatedly, it is also significant that, in contrast to the experience of some of Cooper's early readers, a modern recurring character story series would place no real cognitive demand on the reader to understand that a new story was a series instalment or return to a key protagonist.

For our present purposes, perhaps the most significant of the contemporaneous commentators on Cooper was French novelist Honoré de Balzac who, writing for the *Paris Review* in 1840, described the character of Leatherstocking as a 'fine personality that binds into one' (Dekker & McWilliams, eds, 196) the four novels in which he had featured up to that point. Balzac merits particular attention as the writer who had already begun and would continue, through the interlinked novels and stories of *La Comédie humaine,* to develop and extend the use of recurring characters across a great swathe of connected works set during the Restoration and the July Monarchy (1815–1848). Besides the sheer scale of *La Comédie humaine* (91 completed works, others unfinished, more existing only as titles), the most important difference in terms of recurring characters between Cooper - who wrote a great deal besides the *Leatherstocking Tales* - and Balzac, is that the latter, from the publication of *Le Père Goriot* in 1835, would make them the single most distinctive aspect of his writing. This included amending earlier versions of his stories and re-naming characters to bind them to his other works as a connected whole. Anthony Pugh observes that, from this point 'Balzac is above all concerned to admit his early stories into the single world which the publication of *Le Père Goriot* has so unequivocally announced' (91). That year Balzac declared, through a puff piece signed by Felix Davin, that when readers discerned he was using 'personnages déjà créés' (618) they had seen one of his boldest intentions, a technique that would help convincingly to weave a 'société fictive qui sera comme un monde complet' (627).

Pugh uses the term 'sponsors' to describe how newly created principal characters are linked by Balzac to the wider series by making them the friends or relatives of characters from earlier works (462). He likens *La Comédie humaine* to 'a revue in which the different actors, having known their hour of glory, step back into the chorus once it is over' (470). Throughout, Balzac continued to create new figures, mostly as the principal characters, at the same time as he returned to his existing company of players. It is here, perhaps, that we see the sharpest contrast with most modern examples of recurring character fiction. Even his best-known recurring character, Eugène de Rastignac, only appears as a major protagonist in a handful of the stories that comprise *La Comédie humaine* and is mentioned much more briefly in several others. In this respect Balzac's work anticipates that of Anthony Trollope whose Barsetshire novels (1855 - 1867) and Parliamentary

novels (1864 – 1879) also involve significant recurrences of characters, families, and settings. Perhaps because their scope was less enormous than *La Comédie humaine,* Trollope's series have proved more amenable to comprehensive adaptation than Balzac's. The BBC adapted the entirety of the Parliamentary novels into a 26-part series *The Pallisers* (1974) for example. Though there have been numerous adaptations from *La Comédie humaine*, an all-encompassing adaptation of is inconceivable.

Whilst any well-crafted single work of fiction might be said to comprise a *sui generis* 'complete world' of characters, settings, and themes, it is apparent that Balzac was, with *La Comédie humaine,* engaged upon an infinitely more expansive undertaking. For the reader or viewer of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, equivalent worlds - such as the Middle Earth imagined by J.R.R. Tolkein across *The Hobbit* (1937), *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (1954 – 1955), and the *Silmarillion* (1977), or the screen texts that comprise the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) (2008 – present) – have become an increasingly ubiquitous part of popular culture, a lucrative staple of the adaptation industry. Clare Parody contends that contemporary franchise entertainment, in which the 'genres of science fiction and fantasy predominate' is 'organised by and oriented around worldbuilding', giving rise to 'narrative spaces vast in their scope and minute in their detail, wholesale envisionings of millennia of fictional history, and continents of imaginary geography' (214). Much of what Parody describes falls under the rubric of transmedia storytelling which, as outlined by Henry Jenkins, involves a story that 'unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution' (97-8). Whilst the recurring character need not necessarily step outside a single medium, and whilst the process of adaptation is not synonymous with transmedia storytelling – in that adaptation is more often used to describe the retelling of a pre-existing story in a secondary medium, rather than a new contribution to a multi-part meta-story – it is evident that Balzac's expansionist accumulative *Comédie humaine* anticipates aspects of the media landscape that Jenkins would later chart:

> [S] torytelling has become the art of world building, as artists create compelling environments that cannot be fully explored or exhausted within a single work or even a single medium. (116)

Yet if Balzac and the makers of modern fantasy franchises are linked by the deployment of recurring characters and the conjoined aim of 'worldbuilding', it is equally apparent that they diverge in important respects. While Pugh argues that Balzac's use of recurring characters is linked to 'an impression of veracity' (66), 'the need to make his fictional world seem realistic' (71), and 'creating a society meant to mirror the real world' (461) the same patently cannot be said for the many reappearances of Gandalf, Wolverine, Luke Skywalker, or the Incredible Hulk where their own regimes of genre verisimilitude prevail. The worlds in which these characters operate may be

minutely and painstakingly drawn, but their referent is not our external reality. Rather, their success is, at least in part, judged by the completeness with which they conjure an alternative, or alternate, reality. It is also evident that the film fantasy franchises, whilst accommodating a sizable assemblage of recurring characters, what Margrit Tröhler terms a 'multiple protagonist constellation' (459), are nonetheless dealing with a number that can plausibly be remembered – and engaged with on the basis of that recollection – by a moderately attentive consumer. Individual films may, as in the case of *The Lord of the Rings* movies, feature most of the key characters in each iteration, or they may, as has been the case with MCU movies, combine this approach with stories in which an individual character or smaller sub-set predominates, for example *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011) . By contrast, the 3000 characters of *La Comédie humaine* comprise an aggregation too impossibly numerous to recall accurately, even at times for their author, to whom H. J. Hunt attributed 'negligence in establishing a clear chronology for his characters' careers and [..] forgetfulness when fitting new details into their lives as one novel succeeded another' (121).

In summary, Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales* and Balzac's *La Comédie humaine* prefigure the two most salient dimensions of recurring character storytelling as it has unfolded in the intervening years. With the former, and the story series defined by a key named protagonist, we may discern the early contours of a storytelling tradition spanning multiple genres – including adventure, crime, espionage, mystery, war stories, and the thriller – that includes many of the most popular narrative properties ever created. A significant proportion of these have also given rise to adaptations: Sherlock Holmes, James Bond, Katniss Everdeen, Jack Ryan, Lisbeth Salander, Harry Potter. The latter, the storyworld too vast and populous to be contained in a single text, portends a diversity of narratives. These include the *Star Wars* series (1977 – present); *The Wire* (2002-2008) where each season focused upon a different institution of a single city, with relatively few recurring characters bridging the seasons; *Game of Thrones*, which in its television adaptation utilized a mutable opening credit sequence recapitulating its fictional geography to better orient viewers to the principal settings of each episode; and the television adaptation of *Westworld* (2016 – present) which vastly expands the environment, *dramatis personae*, and storylines of Michael Crichton's 1973 film and its 1976 sequel.

The foundations of recurring-character storytelling

No single factor accounts for the growth and ascendency of recurring character storytelling from the era of Cooper and Balzac to the present. Rather, a set of technological, industrial, legal, economic and cultural determinants – including some already in train before the nineteenth century – may be seen to conduce the conditions favourable for its prevalence. Initially, these relate to the production

and consumption of printed stories: to books, other formats such as magazines, and their cost; to publishing, authorial rights and copyright, and their enforcement – including (ultimately) internationally; and to literacy rates, the growth of 'popular' reading, and the evolution of popular tastes. The expansion of literacy through the nineteenth century in the UK and elsewhere is widely documented (Stephens, Mitch), resulting in what Sider describes as 'modernity's increasingly diffuse and heterogeneous reading publics' (451). Although the origins of this ambition date to the political project of the Reformation and the wish for worshippers to engage directly with the Bible, the popularity of texts such as *The Newgate Calendar; or, the Malefactor's Bloody Register* (first published 1773) demonstrated a public enthusiasm for sensational and picaresque narratives of an entirely different character. Gillingham (2009) argues that the enormously popular 'Newgate novels' of the 1830s and 1840s by authors such as Edward Bulwer and Harrison Ainsworth, so labelled for their focus on criminal subjects, were influential in shaping the future direction and character of the novel as a whole. Although these works belonged to a then 'minor' genre, the intervening years have seen crime, thrills, and adventure firmly ensconced in the mainstream of reading and storytelling tastes. James Chapman states, for example, that the Bond stories – themselves hugely influential on subsequent books, films, and television - have their 'origins in a tradition of 'shocker' literature' (10).

Cachin (2002) notes that Victorian 'sensation' novels attracted much press criticism at the time, not so much for their content, as for how, and for whom, they were produced and disseminated. That is, widely and relatively inexpensively through circulating libraries, in periodicals and in railway bookstalls, reaching a far wider readership with entertaining literature than were formerly understood to be the proper constituency of the novel. At around the same time, the unmatched popularity of Sir Walter Scott's historical novels, though altogether more respectably positioned, also attested to the existence of a readership drawn to daring escapades, stirring tales, and romance. For Eder, Jannidis and Schneider, a related change that gathers momentum in this period relates both to the types of characters with whom readers wished to engage and, particularly, to the nature of readers' felt experience with and through that character; 'Much literature before 1800 aims more at creating an attitude of admiration than it does at immersing the recipient in the situation of the character' (49). Immersion would become more prevalent as the century wore on. 'Feeling' is evidently an apposite term in understanding both the changes underway in nineteenth century fiction and in contemporary responses to that writing. In 1845 Archibald Alison warned would-be writers of the historical romance that readers 'look for excitement; they desire to be interested, and unless they are so, the author's productions will very soon be neglected' (71). In Sider's analysis, for Victorian readers, genre was the terrain where these expectations and their

delivery – or not – played out, being both a 'locus *of* feeling', and a 'medium *for* feeling' (454 *my italics*).

The formats in which printed stories appeared and their respective costs are also pertinent to the creation of conditions favourable to the generation of recurring characters. The triple-decker novel predominated through the nineteenth century, with wealthy households able to purchase all three volumes at once while those belonging to the rising middle class were likely to access one volume at a time, paying for this privilege through their membership of a circulating library. Lewis Roberts observes that the 'three-volume novel was a product well suited to the needs of the circulating libraries' (2). With the three parts being read simultaneously by three different subscribers, each eager to move on to the next volume or novel, or pay an enhanced subscription to access more parts simultaneously, the format benefitted both those involved in production and distribution. As a story-telling, or rather 'receiving', experience, it bears comparison with the modes of subscription television enabled by pay-to-view satellite, cable and latterly web-based technologies, especially insofar as multi-part narratives may be experienced at intervals as distributed elements or as a 'box-set' whole. Caroline Levine observes of one of the most celebrated three-volume novels, *Bleak House*, that using the 'expansive form of the long, loose, baggy triple decker, Dickens had tried to represent all of England as interconnected' (517). What Levine identifies as an 'affordance' of the triple-decker format, its potential scale and scope, enables the novel to be as much about the 'network' – including the law, disease, kinship, and especially city space - that connects its many characters, as about a linear plot (517-519). That is, Dickens is world-building as much as telling a story, as well as giving shape to the critical schemata with which we will later interpret such shows as *The Wire*.

It is in the Victorian magazines that a recognizably contemporary storytelling mode involving recurring characters comes to the fore. *The Strand Magazine* (monthly, 1891-1950) launched Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* stories and achieved peak sales with its publication, in serial form, of the Holmes novel *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1901-1902). Peter McDonald contends that, with the character of Holmes and the manner of his appearances in print, Conan Doyle had managed to 'create an influential narrative form particularly suited to the conditions of the monthly magazine market' (19). By 1900 Arnold Bennett could credit Conan Doyle with having spawned a popular format of 'the connected series of short stories, of five to six thousand words, in which the same characters, pitted against a succession of criminals or adverse fates, pass again and again through situations thrillingly dangerous, and emerge at length into the calm security of ultimate conquest' (qtd. in McDonald 19). His description of this popular formula, centred on recurring characters,

anticipates innumerable variations spanning genres and media that would play out to the present and for the foreseeable future.

From the late nineteenth through to the early twentieth century, these modes of consumption facilitated by popular magazines, with stories and characters periodised and returned to at regular intervals, anticipated and paved the way for the new storytelling practices made possible by technology. Cinematic serials, and especially (later) the varieties of narrative enabled by broadcast media facilitated the generation of the 'continuous serial' (Geraghty 362). Texts such as *The Archers* (BBC radio 4. 1951 - present) and *Coronation Street* (ITV. 1960 - present) are defined by their 'sense of a future, the continual postponement of the final resolution' (363). Here the storyworld outlasts particular characters, including even celebrated roles - often coterminous with actors' lives - lasting decades, such as Joe Grundy and Hilda Ogden. With different episodes broadcast several times a week, they comprise and necessitate a volume of writing simply too enormous for an originating author to sustain. Instead, teams of writers, often guided by a 'Bible', manage both the episode-by-episode particulars and pull together the longer-running narrative threads. Characters from continuous serials, including especially well-known actor/character combinations, may represent one of the most prodigious expressions of recurring character storytelling, but unlike the protagonists of eponymously-named narrative series they are not, ultimately, indispensable to the formats and storyworlds in which they appear.

Finally, the growth and expansion of copyright law, and the stuttering accrual of authorial rights, building to the Berne Convention (initially 1886) is too vast a topic to address in full here. However, for the present argument it is sufficient to note that the existence of legal protection for story materials, including characters, and its enforcement is a positive inducement for writers to devise *and continue* a character across a series of works. The reverse is equally true, if not more so. Where no or inadequate protections exist, where other parties may seize upon a writer's story materials, reproducing them in whole or refashioning them for a new purpose or format, and without payment or permission, the inducement pulls wholly in the opposite direction; that is, towards the creation *ab ovo* of fresh narratives, situations and characters from whom the original author might hope to profit before these compositions are, in turn, plundered. Brewer observes that in the eighteenth century 'the linkages between authorship, ownership, and the copyright statutes which now seem to be self-evident were […] both highly contested and widely disregarded' (23). More specifically, in situations where protections only existed in respect of the original medium - that is, where stories and characters might, for example, make the unsanctioned transit from page to stage - adaptation and adaptability did not generally benefit creators. Richard J Hand notes that prior to the 1911 Copyright Act in Great Britain 'the somewhat absurd situation reigned whereby novelists could only

protect their work *against adaptation* if they dramatized it themselves' (57 *my italics*). Patently, this is the obverse of the structures, imperatives and governing paradigms of contemporary writing and publishing in which adaptation from, or of, an author's recurring character series typically represents the lucrative zenith of the business. This jackpot of compound success takes the form of an economic virtuous circle in which the adaptation of the literary property (typically chosen because of relevant measures of esteem and popularity) generates increased sales of existing and future works in the book series which in turn adds to the potential value of the rights to any related literary property.

Adapting the Recurring Character: a Survey

Broadly speaking, recurring character stories tend to either have characters who appear to remain the same age throughout a series or to portray their characters undergoing an aging process in the course of that series. Adaptations of such stories or series generally, though not unfailingly, follow their sources in this respect, though this may pose problems of its own. For example, even with the assistance of make-up, CGI, and stunt-doubles, a real screen actor can only play a non-aging character for so long before plausibility is strained to breaking point. Kingsley Amis observes that Ian Fleming must falsify the chronology in the James Bond novels to keep 007 the same age (34), which Brian Richardson describes as 'a powerful fixed characterization triumphing over mimetic considerations' (537). Eon productions, which has produced all but two of the Bond films since the series began in 1962, has managed the on-screen realization of this powerful fixed characterisation for nearly sixty years. The principal means by which the franchise has dealt with this issue has been through succession, with younger or younger-looking actors taking over the role after each screen 007 has done their stint, maintaining a screen Bond 'who is always a contemporary rather than a period figure' (Chapman 20). Although this means that audiences must accept multiple discontinuities and temporal impossibilities across the totality of films that make up the series, enough remains the same from film-to-film for the corpus to cohere. While Eon has controlled the overwhelming majority of Bond's movie appearances, his recurrence in literary manifestations, including a substantial body of Bond continuation fiction written after Fleming's death, has been overseen by Ian Fleming Publications Ltd. When the author died in 1964 Bond was already established as a successful literary property, the first two Bond films had been released and the third was imminent. Although this left several more Bond novels available for adaptation, there was no equivalent pool of new Fleming Bond novels to satisfy a readership swelled by the popularity of the Bond movies. Hence, in 1968 the first Bond continuation novel, *Colonel Sun,* was published. Written by Kingsley Amis, under the pseudonym Robert Markham, it set in train the post-Fleming recurrence of a literary Bond who has been stewarded by many more authors than the Eon screen Bond has had

actors. While Amis could effectively pick up where Fleming left off, partly fudging the issue of Bond's age and presenting the novel as the latest in a linear chronological sequence of 007 outings, the passage of time has made this more difficult for later continuation authors. Some, such as John Gardner (writing 1981-1996), have made modest reference to 007's aging. Though the appearance by 1981 of only 'minute flecks of grey' (20) seems benevolent for a character who was in his mid- to late thirties in 1953. Others have dealt with the issue by transporting Bond back in time, inserting new adventures into the existing chronology.

Between 1977 and 2002 the twenty-seven Bond continuation novels included seven novelizations, works which attested to their subaltern status relative to the dominant screen franchise and necessarily endeavoured to figure the recurring character of Bond as *the same* across page and screen. By contrast, since the Bond continuation novels recommenced in 2008 a re-balancing appears to have been sought by the estate. There have been no novelizations of any of the post-2002 Bond films. Higher profile authors have been sought to write one-off Bond continuation novels (Anthony Horowitz writing two is the exception), and the recurring character of Bond is not presented as tied to the chronology or deeds of his film alter ego. Rather, apart from Jeffrey Deaver's *Carte Blanche* (2011) which jettisons a canonical chronology in favour of a modern setting, all have adopted the Fleming timeframe and characterisation, presenting Bond as – precisely – a period rather than a contemporary figure. Sebastian Faulks' *Devil May Care* (2008) returns him to the 1960s, as does William Boyd's *Solo* (2013), albeit that the latter is set in 1969 and Bond is described as a veteran agent of 45. Horowitz's *Trigger Mortis* (2015) is set shortly after the events of Fleming's *Goldfinger* in 1957, and his *Forever and a Day* (2018) travels back further still to 1950, being a prequel to *Casino Royale*. Beginning with the line "So, 007 is dead", which plays reflexively with our knowledge that nobody would kill off such a lucrative property, *Forever and a Day* has the recurring character on his first 00 mission, investigating the death of the predecessor whose prefix he acquires.

The *Sharpe* series of historical adventures (novels/stories 1981 – 2006; TV films 1993 – 2008) shows the influence and workings of the adaptation industry not only in respect of how the screen texts differ from their source novels, but also in how the engagement with television had ramifications for subsequent novels, including the commissioning of a new beginning. The opening chapter of the first published *Sharpe* novel, *Sharpe's Eagle* (1981), set in 1809 during the Napoleonic wars, establishes many key characteristics of the series' protagonist, Richard Sharpe. He is already commissioned, a Lieutenant (4), has a facial scar from a sabre cut, enjoys an important friendship with Sergeant Harper, wears cavalry overalls taken from the body of a Chasseur Colonel of Napoleon's Imperial Guard, and has been sixteen years in the British Army (5). Sharpe wears the dark green jacket of the

elite 95th Rifles, carries a rifle like a regular (non-commissioned) soldier as well as an unorthodox heavy straight-bladed cavalry sabre (6-7). We learn that he had been a 'redcoat', rising from private to sergeant in India, is 'tall, black-haired' and that his 'fiercest struggle' has been the climb from the ranks into the officers' mess' (7). In terms of his more immediate history, the previous winter his Captain was killed and 'Sharpe and his thirty men, lost and forgotten, had headed south' to join the British garrison at Lisbon (8-9). Sharpe is known personally to Sir Arthur Wellesley (later the Duke of Wellington), and was, like Wellesley, at the Battle of Assaye in 1803 'where he had been commissioned on the battlefield' (11). In the opening chapter he also first encounters his (recurring) nemesis and commanding officer, the incompetent Lieutenant Colonel Simmerson (17). Sharpe is 32 (30) and has performed an 'act of suicidal bravery' to get the vanishingly rare battlefield commission from Sergeant to Ensign (32). Taken as a whole, it is a first-time novelist's torrent of exposition, with little besides the particulars of the suicidally brave act left unexplained.

Cornwell published seven more Sharpe novels between 1981 and 1987, with story events proceeding chronologically and consuming much of the remainder of the peninsular and Napoleonic Wars into 1814. The first major intervention in the story timeline occurs with *Sharpe's Rifles* (1988) which Cornwell describes as 'the first 'prequel' I wrote for the Sharpe series' (7). Explaining the genesis of this story Cornwell recounts how in 1987 'some splendid television producers wondered whether I could not provide them with a new story with which to begin their series', that one of the investors was a Spanish company 'and the producers, quite rightly, wanted a story in which a Spaniard played a prominent part' (7). *Sharpe's Rifles* thus became the template for the first of the eventual TV episodes, set a few months before the events of *Sharpe's Eagle*, and also became the story in which Sharpe meets Harper. Hence, when 're-starting' the book series in 1988 Cornwell was providing the desired jumping-off point for the projected television series, but was simultaneously engaged in writing for his existing readership, playing with their fore-knowledge and expectations, rationing out information and delivering confirmation far more stealthily than he had in Sharpe's first beginning in *Sharpe's Eagle*.

Chapter one delays definitively naming Sharpe until the close, though it insistently teases the knowing reader, reminding them that this novel is conjointly a new beginning and a continuation. An unnamed character is identified as a 'tall Lieutenant in the green jacket of the 95th Rifles' (17), with a scarred cheek (18), described by another as a 'jumped-up sergeant' (ibid 19); promoted as 'a reward for an act of suicidal bravery on a battlefield' (19-20). His hair is long and black (23). He is an unknown quantity to the men in the much-diminished unit, of whom we learn in an end-of-chapter rhetorical flourish; 'they did not know their man. They thought of him as nothing more than a jumped-up Sergeant, and they were wrong. He was a soldier, and his name was Richard Sharpe' (38).

The type of knowing reader posited here bears consideration in terms of the 'model reader' figured by Umberto Eco - 'a sort of ideal type whom the text not only foresees as a collaborator but also tries to create' (9) - though the inculcation of obedience that Eco describes begins in predecessor texts and the present text must simultaneously offer intelligibility and pleasure for readers who do not have this priming.

Reception Theory provides a useful lens to examine recurring characters. The 'implied reader' considered by Wolfgang Iser 'incorporates both the prestructuring of the potential meaning by the text, and the reader's actualization of this potential through the reading process' (*Implied Reader,* xii). In the context of *Sharpe's Rifles*, a significant element of 'prestructuring' may come from earlier-written novels in the series, though once the novels were adapted to the screen and texts could be experienced in a host of different sequences, the pattern of potential prestructurings and actualizations underwent combinatorial explosion. Iser's later proposition of the 'wandering viewpoint' in which a reader's presence in the text 'at a point where memory and expectation converge, and the resulting dialectic movement brings about a continual modification of memory and an increasing complexity of expectation' (*Act of Reading*, 118) is also fruitful for considering how readers, and viewers, engage with recurring characters. Memory of a recurring character from a previously-consumed series instalment will almost inevitably have prompted engagement with the 'present' text in the first place and, in terms of structuring expectations, readerly obedience to a preferred interpretation is highly likely. We do not visit and revisit recurring characters to experience the *verfremdungseffekt,* but to experience a satisfying concordance between our expectations and what the text delivers. Familiar elements will significantly outweigh unexpected properties, foundational presuppositions are unlikely to be overturned (though they are not infrequently 'jeopardised', so we may enjoy the return to a status quo) and in many cases set-piece or signature scenes are reprised – either more-or-less unaltered, or consciously seeking to 'top' their predecessors, as for example in the stunt-packed chase sequences of Bond films.

Genette's concept of hypertextuality, which 'refers to any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call the hypertext) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the hypotext), upon which it is grafted' (*Palimpsests*, 5) may also be seen to apply. In this instance, the earlier-written Sharpe novels may straightforwardly be said to constitute hypotexts for those written later, and those same novels brought to the screen may likewise be hypotexts for their adaptive hypertexts. The classificatory dynamics are necessarily muddier in respect of novels written after the adaptations begin and are influenced by them; though this necessarily allows that certain of the novels exist in, *inter alia*, a hypertextual relationship to screen hypotexts. As *Sharpe's Rifles* progresses the friendship with Harper begins inauspiciously when Sharpe's status as leader is questioned, though it is cemented

through acts of courage and military competence. Key objects associated with Sharpe from hypotexts, namely the earlier-published works - his Chasseur's overalls, and heavy sabre - are now acquired in the principal timeframe of the story, thereby both playing self-consciously with an established character mythology and aligning the prequel to those other texts that it both follows and precedes. Equally, the telescope presented by Wellesley for saving his life at Assaye keeps that key incident in his backstory. The novel also introduces Major Blas Vivar, the Spanish character created to secure the participation of Spanish co-producers (and their finance) in the intended film project. Hence, we see the envisaged hypertext, the TV *Sharpe's Rifles,* exerting a structural influence upon its own hypotext, the *Sharpe's Rifles* novel.

Adaptation would change Sharpe's beginnings twice more. The original intended co-production was developed by, *inter alia*, two key industry figures who had previously worked on *Inspector Morse*; Central Television's Head of Drama, Ted Childs, and producer Kenny McBain; both of whom therefore brought experience of working with the less common format of the two hour serial drama with recurring characters. Despite the promised £500,000 from a Spanish production company, the project fell through. The budget, even with the scale of Cornwell's original battle scenes significantly reduced, was deemed too high. This, coupled with the death of McBain, led to the project being shelved. However, a wholly unexpected historical and economic determinant led to a critical downwards revision of the budget. The end of the Cold War made possible relatively inexpensive location filming behind the Iron Curtain, leading to the eventual shooting of significant portions of the series in the Crimea. Although military scenes on the scale of Bondarchuk's *Waterloo* (1970) were still financially inconceivable on a TV budget and the series would consistently be obliged to replace Cornwell's grander encounters with skirmishes and fragments of battles, the new filming location nonetheless made feasible otherwise unaffordable scenes.

Sharpe's Rifles, first broadcast in 1993, whilst including much of the new material Cornwell had wrought to re-introduce his recurring protagonist, nonetheless included a number of further changes to the novel on which it is based. Sharpe's rescue of Wellesley is now relocated (in time and space) from the Assaye backstory to the principal timeframe of the Peninsular campaign, becoming the first scene as the opening credits conclude. This serves to make his sudden promotion both the story's inciting incident and his introduction to viewers. The arrival of Sharpe's first screen love-interest is also brought forward from later in the (original) chronology. Perhaps most significantly, the last-minute casting of Sean Bean following the withdrawal of Paul McGann meant that Sharpe was played by a lighter-haired man with a Yorkshire accent, notwithstanding the profusion of references in the novels to his being dark-haired and coming from a London rookery. Whilst the latter made scant difference for TV producers eager for their long-frustrated project to succeed on

its own terms, or for viewers unfamiliar with the novels, it set a challenge for Cornwell in the ongoing project which he had begun with *Sharpe's Rifles*, of making his novel series and recurring character conform to the evolving conditions of their adaptations. Unsurprisingly, references to Sharpe as dark-haired in novels written after 1993 tail off, while a supplementary backstory in which a 15-year-old Sharpe kills a London gang-leader and flees to Yorkshire serves to accommodate Bean's accent into the wider lore of the entwined novel and television series. As Cornwell observed in a 2003 interview – an epitextual intervention that further modified the interpretive possibilities of the Sharpe book/film corpus - the casting of Bean 'definitely affected the way I wrote subsequent books – the "new" Sharpe has a distinct Yorkshire accent!' (qtd. in Cannon 44).

Having already transposed Sharpe's beginnings once, Cornwell ventured further into what had previously been backstory; Sharpe's pre-Rifles adventures in India. This became the principal time-frame for *Sharpe's Tiger* (1997), *Sharpe's Triumph* (1998) in which the author finally recounts Sharpe's saving Wellesley in 'live action', even though this now contradicts its earlier on-screen rendering, and *Sharpe's Fortress* (1999). A seemingly inherent difficulty of adapting these prequels would be the plausibility of an older Bean playing a much younger Sharpe. The final screen stories in the series, the two-part television films *Sharpe's Challenge* (2006) and *Sharpe's Peril* (2008), resolved this issue by adapting the events of the three novels far more loosely than any of their predecessors and, crucially, relocating the story to 1817, after Waterloo. Whilst this brought about, at a textual level, a divergence between *Sharpe* novels and television of the type that Cornwell had generally laboured to paper over, behind the scenes the two media were increasingly working in concert. Since first writing *Sharpe's Eagle*, Cornwell had become an internationally best-selling writer of historical adventure, a status facilitated at least in part by the success of the screen adaptations. In 2002 it had been reported that the author had signed a 'spectacularly large deal' for a 'seven-figure' sum with publisher Harper-Collins; the six-book deal to include three new *Sharpe* titles (Baker 12). Harper-Collins' investment in Cornwell, and the *Sharpe* brand in particular, extended to covering a funding shortfall for the TV production of *Sharpe's Challenge* for no return other than 'the marketing boost for Cornwell on both sides of the Atlantic' (Rickett 20). This cooperation-in-adaptation did not amount to the type of integrated synergy described by Simone Murray, of 'book publishers and film studios increasingly find[ing] themselves affiliate film divisions within overarching media conglomerates' (14), or of the type of expansion into film ventured by Random House publishers that same year, forming a joint creative and strategic partnership with Focus Features. However, it nonetheless spoke to the presumed interrelationship between viewing and reading and to the cross-platform value of a recurring character and keeping him in the public eye.

The handling of recurring characters first appearing in the 13 *Inspector Morse* novels (1975-1999) by Colin Dexter also proves illuminating in terms of adaptation, especially as it relates to the aging of key characters. As well as comprising a series of discrete investigations, each commenced and concluded in the individual novels, the series also charts Morse's journey from middle-age - 'the leaves were falling around him: mid-forties; unmarried; alone' (193) - to approaching mandatory retirement. This includes illness and, in *The Remorseful Day* (1999), his death from a heart attack, having solved his final case. Adapted to television (1987–2000), though not in Dexter's sequence and with many of the 33 episodes not derived from Dexter novels,[6] the episodes also follow the principal character, played by John Thaw, through a roughly equivalent phase in his life and conclude with his death. However, if verisimilitude, and perhaps the desire for the trajectory of the television Morse to map onto that expected by readers, meant that the lead character would age and die, he would also find ways to live on. Indeed, as discussed below, the adaptation and continuation of the recurring character is the principal apparatus by which new Morse-related works, radically expanding what Mark Lawson describes as the 'Morse franchise', were devised and proffered to audiences as simultaneously fresh and familiar.

Describing adaptation as 'a *material* phenomenon produced by a system of interlinked interests and actors' (16) Murray urges us to attend to the structures, contexts, mechanisms and regimes 'within which adaptations come to be' (6). In the case of the television *Inspector Morse*, this bears analysis in terms of the individuals and frameworks through which recurring characters and other key recognizable features of the series would return. This return took the form of the sequel *Lewis* (9 seasons, 33 episodes; 2006-2015) in which Morse's former Sergeant and sidekick Robert Lewis is promoted to Detective Inspector, and the prequel series *Endeavour* (2012 – present). In the latter, an undertaking proposed to Dexter by ITV (*Broadcast*, 2011), a younger Morse played by a different actor progresses from Detective Constable to Detective Sergeant. As a prequel, *Endeavour* is both enabled and trammelled by its origins. At a minimum, viewers know that the Morse character must survive and be fitted to arrive at the entry point to the later-set *Inspector Morse* which has laid down a set of, now canonical, expectations to which it must align. Although creators and audiences alike will enjoy the 'how' of this alignment, key dimensions of the 'what' are obstinately sacrosanct. Hence, *Endeavour* 'reconstructs the past on the basis of threads in the source narrative' (Parey 1). As Parey points out, the fact that *Endeavour* has not just a single 'source narrative' but also the novels that preceded their television adaptations, makes its origins what Linda Hutcheon has termed 'multilaminated' (21). Both series conspicuously foreground textual elements that signal the continuity between the original *Inspector Morse* series and themselves. These include: the Oxford setting;[7] the recurrence of Lewis (as character and actor) in *Lewis* and the recurrence of Morse (as

character) in *Endeavour*; theme music by the same composer - Barrington Pheloung - across *Inspector Morse, Lewis*, and *Endeavour*; that all were broadcast in the UK on the channel ITV; as well as a host of inter-textual references which stitch the newer stories into the world of the old. Parey observes of Morse's return in *Endeavour* that 'the character is reconstructed along its best known and well-loved traits so as to reactivate the memory of the original series or to posit it as a popular icon to younger viewers' (7). Underlying (and generating) these textual continuities are a myriad cross-overs of personnel and commercial structures: Executive Producer and writer Ted Childs bridges *Inspector Morse* and the first series of *Lewis*; British production company Mammoth Screen, in particular Executive Producers Damien Timmer and Michele Buck, span both *Lewis* and *Endeavour*; while U.S. executive producer Rebecca Eaton, whose role at Masterpiece Theatre has involved bringing innumerable programmes with a distinctly British character to American audiences, connects *Inspector Morse* and *Endeavour.* Writer Russell Lewis forms another significant connection between the three shows, writing episodes of both *Inspector Morse* and *Lewis*, as well as devising *Endeavour* and writing all its episodes. Finally, though this list is by no means exhaustive, Colin Dexter triangulates and lends his *imprimatur* to the whole through his presence in many roles: as original author; as the credited 'Creator' of the *Inspector Morse* and *Lewis* series; and in Hitchcockian cameo appearances across all three.

Ideas of nostalgia are fruitful in interrogating the network of recurrences, of characters and setting, that operates across the entire body of *Morse* texts. The recurrence of recognizable Oxford images in the three different series may be said to participate in what John Urry has called the 'tourist gaze', a conscious seeking and taking pleasure in an already-known image. More particularly, the original television series managed, through its unhurried pacing and especially its rendering of Oxford, to echo both narrative and stylistic aspects of a body of screen texts that were, at around that time, recognizably cohering as 'heritage film' (Higson). In 1987, its images of the distinctive Oxford skyline 'captured on film as a kind of rolling postcard' (Barker 235), the honey-coloured stone of its colleges punctuated with green quadrangles, and a prominent place for classical music would all have educed memories of Granada's *Brideshead Revisited.* Then still relatively recent, the celebrated 1981 television adaptation was an important early text in the heritage cycle particularly famous for its visual splendours. As John Caughie observed the year before *Inspector Morse* was adapted to television, this 'elegiac' aesthetic, spanning the small and big screen, was already identifiable as a potent export; 'At a time when Britain has difficulty selling much else, it has been remarkably successful at selling its past' (7). *Inspector Morse* may also be seen to share with many heritage texts that dichotomy in which an often-melancholy narrative trajectory plays out in a beautiful setting. Its Oxford may be seductively photogenic, but, like many stately homes in heritage adaptations, it

conceals enmities, unhappiness, and division; not least the 'town and gown' divide Morse is so often required to bridge. *Lewis* participates in nostalgic pleasures in much the same way as *Inspector Morse*, but compounded with an additional character-oriented nostalgia for the departed Morse, a poignancy in a minor key, with his former sidekick intermittently reminded of his one-time mentor. *Endeavour*, as a period piece, uses viewers' sense of the past differently. Its rendering of iconic Oxford settings can still conjure the same leisured atemporality as its predecessors, though the more downbeat mise-en-scène of many of its 1960s interiors contrasts with the monied décor typical of heritage texts.

Adapted to the screen as feature-length TV dramas like the television texts of the *Morse* franchise, the hugely successful but relatively under-studied *Midsomer Murders* (1997 -) also echoes the theme of the picture postcard community riven with secret antagonisms, but deliberately teeters on the edge of parody. Where *Inspector Morse* combined wistful realism with a higher-than-plausible murder rate in Oxford, *Midsomer Murders* throws credibility to the wind with a steady cascade of murders across its 20 series and 120 episodes, all taking place in a small rural community. Described by *Variety* as 'Britain's biggest drama export' (Barraclough), its tongue-in-cheek evocation of the 'old cozy mystery genre' (Plummer) has marked it from the outset as existing in a referential relationship to predecessor texts. Originally adapted from Caroline Graham's 7 novels (1988 – 2004), the television series has long since outstripped its source stories, though it retains the foundational device of the quaint and picturesque storyworld, itself suggestive of St. Mary Mead of the Miss Marple stories and productive of equivalent nostalgic sentiment. Tiffany Bergin invokes Jonathan Simon's concept of 'wilful nostalgia' in explaining the international success of *Midsomer Murders.* In her formulation, 'global fans' (90) who have no personal or ancestral link to England nonetheless experience nostalgia because of the series' sustained evocation of a setting that is familiar to them through exposure to what she terms a 'salient cultural meme' (91), namely the rural English locales of earlier Golden Age crime writing by Christie, Dorothy Sayers and Margery Allingham. For the purposes of the present study, the significance of Bergin's account is not simply that *Midsomer Murders* successfully plays upon the nostalgia of others for earlier English cultural products, but that those products should also feature recurring characters and so often have been encountered by consumers through adaptations. If it is credible to assume that nostalgia for a type of storyworld explains the extraordinary international success of *Midsomer Murders*, it seems reasonable to posit the equally foregrounded presence of a recurring central character as another key constituent of that nostalgia. Just as Golden Age crime writing was defined not only by its chocolate box villages and grand country houses but by the recurring presence of a Miss Marple, Lord Peter Wimsey, or

Albert Campion, so the newer series is defined by the role of Chief Inspector Barnaby whose investigations, like theirs, unerringly involve an itinerary through such a storyworld.

The character was originally DCI Tom Barnaby, played by John Nettles. The series' makers managed the actor's retirement in 2011 by replacing the role with DCI John Barnaby, his younger cousin, played by Neil Dudgeon. Replacing Nettles in the 14th series with an actor nearly twenty years his junior effectively re-set the clock in terms of having the series' lead be an actor in middle age whose physical appearance would remain for several more years broadly credible as that of a serving police officer. In keeping with the self-aware comic thread that runs through the series, the similarity of names and roles effectively telegraphed to audiences that, like the stream of murders, they should expect more of the same. The very specific substitution was also necessary for the many countries, including Germany in which the series has 'continued to top the ratings' (Meza), where it is titled not *Midsomer Murders* but *Inspector Barnaby*; that is, where it is positioned and known as an eponymously-titled recurring character serial.

The transparent conventionality of the Barnaby/Barnaby handover, framed for and accepted by viewers as a device necessary for the drama's continuance, analogous to the visible switching of sets in a stage play, was facilitated by *Midsomer Murders'* long-standing tradition of privileging humorous play with genre conventions over realism. An awareness of the implausibility that accrues with recurrence has been at the heart of this process, encompassing both places and people, storyworld and character, from the outset. But especially as the tally of episodes has mounted, the unlikeliness that the amorphously bounded terrain of Midsomer County should contain so many fine residences, tied cottages, dysfunctional gentry families, resentful labourers, secret-harbouring spinsters, colourful eccentrics, nouveau riche drivers of sports cars, clubs and societies of every conceivable variety, and potential murderers, became more of an 'in joke'. Indeed, one of the series' principal pleasures is the introduction in each new episode of yet another situation that will be both new and familiar: another troubled aristocratic family well-known in the area for generations (but hitherto not encountered by viewers); another deep-rooted grudge or feud; another Midsomer-hyphenated village or hamlet (which, again, viewers have never heard of until it is nonchalantly mentioned as the exposition requires). The recurrence of DCI Barnaby, including and most fully exemplified by the unabashed quality of the actor/character substitution, is of a piece with the series' humorous and self-referential handling of place. It is a never-quite-acknowledged absurdity that there should be so many local murders for him to investigate; an absurdity itself borrowed from the stories' loosely-defined hypotexts - Golden Age crime-writing - and more broadly familiar as a genre trait of the murder mystery genre. However, it is notable that the series also elects to not entirely part company with realism and does so by keeping the Nettles/Dudgeon performances, like those of subsidiary

recurring cast members, relatively under-stated; certainly as compared with the 'guest' performances, which several sources observe (*inter alia* Barraclough, Zahlmann) are typically delivered with theatrical relish.

Midsomer Murders exaggerates and exploits for comic effect the sense of improbability that inheres with many instances of recurring characters. For example, although there is never a tongue-in-cheek quality to Jack Reacher's adventures in Lee Child's novels, considered as a whole the long odds of his appearance at so many situations requiring a proficient vigilante necessarily stretch with each iteration. However, by the norms of their genre and the series' own particularities, this is not the dimension of reader experience where adequacy to the real is a predominant concern. It is rather in the representation of Reacher's investigative and violent skills, of the detailed rendering of matters military and criminal, that a credibility-claiming exactitude prevails. The desire of consumers repeatedly to re-experience a character or characters engaged in narratives consonant with the formula that led to their original success commonly exists in a tension with the claim to realism, of any variety, that a series may make; whether that claim be vested in the detail of the techno-thriller, the psychological emphasis of particular investigative narratives, or the period reconstruction of historical adventures. Whatever the singular focus of a recurring character series, and most are created by arrogating a specialised and hitherto unoccupied intersection of place/period/occupation, the often-detailed and research-informed evocation of the elements that make the series distinctive pulls against the mounting unlikeliness of recurrence. Whatever the combination of generic domain, milieu, and authorial idiosyncrasy, consumers are typically cued to invest belief in the elements that comprise its singularity and, to varying degrees, suspend disbelief in respect of repetition.

Questions of realism, especially insofar as they relate to the novel, are clearly pertinent here. Long considered as a form especially fitted for an engagement with the real, the novel has done so in an evolving roster of ways. In the eighteenth century most writers sought to 'state, qualify, or defend the reality of their writings' (Warner 267) through devices such as presenting the story as a found text or posing as its editor. In the nineteenth century such preliminaries were largely superseded in the fusion of style and subject matter by which 'realistic fictions' addressed historical, social, political and economic issues as experienced by their characters. Into the twentieth century it became more common for the novel to explore and problematize reality not just as it might be rendered on an 'outer' social canvass, sometimes sweeping and sometimes quotidian, but also as constituted in the inner world of a character's consciousness. Crystalizing in the nineteenth century and becoming a dominant narrative mode in the twentieth, recurring character fiction would share, adopt and adapt these evolving modes of the wider novel as well as of storytelling across other media. Often this has

involved engagement with variably-constituted notions of realism, as in, for example, the police procedural or the medical drama. Equally, recurring characters have also prevailed in modes and genres where realism is largely eschewed. Some have done both. In the case of the serially-reinvented Batman and his affiliate characters, they have ranged across not only a variety of forms – including comics, television and film – but also a spectrum of styles and modes, some inflected with realist traits and other not, including: camp pantomime, dark gothic fantasy, futuristic dystopian brutalism, period psychological thriller, and – in Lego form – upbeat comedy animation.

At the heart of the issue here is the dynamic between realism and genre. Paul Cobley contends that 'genre is not a set of textual features that can be enumerated; rather it is an expectation' (41). Steve Neale also describes how genres comprise 'systems of expectation and hypothesis [..which..] partly embody various regimes of verisimilitude – various systems and forms of plausibility, motivation and belief' (32). Expanding Todorov's figuration of verisimilitude as split between (appositely, for the present argument) the generic and the social/cultural, Jonathan Culler proposed five types of verisimilitude, of *vraisemblance*, of which the first is 'the socially given text, that which is taken as the "real world"', the third is the 'texts or conventions of a genre', and the last is the 'complex *vraisemblance* of specific intertextualities, where one work takes another as its basis or point of departure and must be assimilated in relation to it' (140). There is invariably a tension between the extent to which texts conform to prevailing norms for representing the 'real' world and to the rules or expectations of a given genre. In the case of recurring character narratives, and their adaptations, a version of Culler's final *vraisemblance* will also be operative, as readers and viewers reconcile a text's social and cultural verisimilitude not only with the norms of the wider genre in which it exists but with the more specific presumptions generated by predecessor texts of the same series.

Whilst the preponderance of recurring character series as a popular narrative mode doubtless makes the development of such a series a goal for creators, it is also the case that the sustained success and other variables necessary for a long-term endurance encompassing many instalments, sometimes spanning decades, cannot be assured. Hence, the landscape of popular genre writing (and of equivalent screen texts) is littered with one-off outings that seem to have been written with an eye to a never-delivered continuance, shorter 'runs' of recurring characters where authors and/or readers have exhausted their enthusiasm for a creation, and – at the other end of the spectrum – celebrated examples of recurring character series where the initial text or texts manifest choices that are difficult to square with the eventual totality of the series. Patrick O'Brian's Aubrey/Maturin series (1969 – 2004) of maritime adventures set during the Napoleonic wars are an instructive example of the latter. Widely enjoyed for their central friendship between Jack Aubrey and Stephen Maturin, it is notable that the first book in the series, *Master and Commander*, also hinges on the

sustained presence of a third character, James Dillon, and on the triangular dynamic of their relationships. Hence, although the series is generally figured as a 'two-hander', this was far from clear at the outset. Similarly, it is notable that the series consumed historical time at a prodigious rate between the initial instalments, often with gaps of several years of history between novels. This obliged several of the later Aubrey/Maturin works to operate in a deliberately unspecified temporality in order to make space for their events, leading O'Brian to flag in his author's note to *The Far Side of the World*:

> Historical time has not yet run out for these tales [But…] it is possible that in the near future the author (if his readers will bear with him) may be led to make use of hypothetical years, rather like those hypothetical moons used in the calculation of Easter: an 1812a as it were or even an 1812b. (x)

O'Brian is faced with a seemingly unresolvable contradiction between his desire to prolong the Aubrey/Maturin series and the historical fact of the duration of the conflict in which they are set. Drawing on Culler's framework, we may say that he reconciles this by acknowledging that he must break with a fundamental aspect of first level *vraisemblance* - stepping outside 'real world' time – but simultaneously assures us that he will 'continue to respect historical accuracy' (x); that is, that he will remain congruent to those other *vraisemblances* associated with the genre expectations of historical adventure and the more 'specific intertextualities' of his series.

By contrast with many examples of recurring character fiction, a material acknowledgement within texts that their pattern of recurrence and repetition stretched credibility entered the Bond film series relatively early on, peaking during the tenure of Roger Moore. Through intertextual references and a finely-balanced (self)parody, the films came to frame viewers' engagement with them on the basis of an escalating incredibility, priming audiences to cheer a hero who would not only save the world but do so again and again. Equally, the commencements of new screen Bonds have also provided opportunities to re-boot the tone of the series, including the extent of their comic self-awareness and their temporal continuity with predecessor Bonds. Daniel Craig's stint, commencing with *Casino Royale*, largely jettisoned parody in favour of bruising realism and an actor/Bond narrative arc in which he is initially positioned as a newly-promoted 00 agent, experiences and surmounts a crisis of aging and fitness in *Skyfall*, and is retired in *No Time to Die*. Although there is little doubt that Bond will return, the Craig years have explored in miniature the trajectory of senescence that the wider Eon franchise has worked to resist.

As the examples of this study have charted, recurring characters are a staple feature of popular genre fiction, where a protagonist will navigate often homogenous plotlines across a mounting tally of instalments. Where characters return to familiar narrative situations and formulae, there is variation in the extent to which they age and experience major life events, including death. But not

all recurring character genre stories necessarily involve the multiple repetition of similar instalments. Where the world-building impulse prevails, as for example in the high fantasy of Tolkein and *Game of Thrones,* or in the portrayal of the narco-economy in *Breaking Bad* (2008 - 2013), the narrative mode is essentially a cumulative rendering where themes and storylines span multiple volumes and series, rather than a perpetual encore in which the events of preceding elements have little or no bearing on what will follow. A corollary or affordance of this mode is that characters can experience and manifest significant change in the course of the extended narrative. The final season of *Game of Thrones* provided one of the most dramatic, and controversial, examples of such change in the transition of Daenerys Targaryen to a vengeful and power-hungry villain. In Culler's terms, we may observe that those viewers who found Daenerys' transition shocking and/or insufficiently foreshadowed felt a break with fifth level *vraisemblance* – the *sui generis* verisimilitude established by previous *Game of Thrones* instalments – and that this reception was likely abetted by the knowledge that the final series, though influenced by creator George R R Martin, was not specifically adapted from one of his novels.

In the Aubrey/Maturin novels one of many recurring elements is when the two principal characters play, respectively, the violin and cello together in the ship's cabin. Relatively early in the series Maturin, an intelligence agent, is captured and tortured, with lasting harm done to his hands. Rescued by Aubrey, he is able eventually to resume his surgical duties and cello, though it is clear that his capacity for the very finest musical nuances is limited. Nonetheless, the duo play companionably as more-than-competent amateurs for many years, voyages, and books. Towards the end of the series Maturin visits Aubrey at his home, where he finds him playing his violin, alone, in the garden. Believing himself unobserved, Aubrey plays with a degree of skill and sensitivity that neither Maturin, *nor readers*, had known he possessed. Mindful of his friend's limitations, Aubrey, known more for his bluff heartiness than acute interpersonal sensitivity, has deliberately concealed the extent of his ability better to preserve the essential parity that makes possible the musical interludes which are, in turn, an important aspect of their relationship. It is a deeply moving statement on the importance, and mechanics, of friendship. More importantly, it only achieves its full resonance because of all that has preceded it. Its effect derives precisely from the extent to which it hinges upon the reader's familiarity with an established trope, cemented across countless scenes in many novels.

If recurring characters are common in genre fiction, they are rare in literary fiction. In its few examples, recurrence tends to involve a return to a key character or characters at different phases of their lives in a variation on the *Bildungsroman* venturing into, and beyond, middle age. These include Anthony Powell's twelve volume cycle *A Dance to the Music of Time* (1951-1975), John Updike's four

Rabbit novels (1960-1990) and novella (2001), and Erica Jong's novels featuring Isadora Wing (1973-2015). Again, the distinction charted earlier in this study in respect of Cooper and Balzac may be seen to persist, between the protagonist-centred series and the overarching story-world. Powell's work, though connected by narrator Nick Jenkins, is more focused upon the social and historical panorama his reminiscences cover than in revealing a central character, while Updike's stories do precisely hinge upon our developing knowledge of and feelings for Harry "Rabbit" Angstrom. Overwhelmingly however literary fiction has tended to eschew recurring characters in favour of the creation of fresh storyworlds and characters with each new text. If familiarity may be identified as the key affordance of much recurring character fiction; an easeful return to the already-known and to expected pleasures (and compounded by the inherent familiarity of genre, in which recurring character narratives invariably participate) then literary fiction is typically defined by the opposite. That is, by a sense of creative and interpretive challenge, albeit in greatly varying degrees. And, of course, it is defined by the absence of a generic affiliation, save the extent to which literary fiction, its cachet and presuppositions, may be said to constitute a genre of sorts.

Taking 'difficulty' as a criterion, explicitly posited or otherwise, in the evaluation of works and the experiences to which they give rise, goes a long way to explaining the abiding appraisal of genre narratives and their recurring characters as the subordinate manifestations of literature's potentiality. If a cultural artefact is defined by the interpretive challenge it sets its consumer - for example, T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland* (1922), Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* (1913), or *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961) - then the promise of familiarity, recognition, and return offered by the recurring character could not be more starkly different. Robert Stam describes a 'myth of facility' (7) in analysing how cinema in general and cinematic adaptations in particular have been regarded as 'suspectly easy' and 'suspectly pleasurable' experiences, and it seems probable that, *mutatis mutandis*, the same prejudice has applied to recurring characters. The notion of return connects the ideas of recurrence, nostalgia, familiarity, genre, and adaptation that have occupied much of this paper. Each facet signifies a type of resumption, and it is notable that many of the texts and series considered here participate in multiple facets, 'returning' at many levels and offering a *Mise en abyme* of familiarity. Indeed, the mutual imbrication of some of these returns, for example the intertwining of recurring characters and genres, is such that each can readily furnish the paradigmatic exemplars of the other. Certainly, a discussion of recurring characters without reference to genre would be difficult. Whilst the reverse is less so, it is notable that although an explanation of genre without reference to recurring characters is feasible, an embargo upon a device at least adjacent to recurrence – archetypes, 'stock' characters – would render it similarly untenable.

Venturing further back into canonical literature, it may be observed that the recurrence of a character did not necessarily suggest that they transitioned unaltered, or even retaining recognizable essentials, between works. Brian Richardson notes that the Clarissa Dalloway of *The Voyage Out* (1915) seems a different personality to the woman who appears in the eponymous novel of 1925, and that the Charlie Marlow first appearing in Conrad's *Youth* (1898) is not the same as in *Chance* (1914) (528). Importantly, these changes are not proffered to the reader as psychologically credible shifts arising from the characters' intervening experiences, nor are they otherwise explained. They simply feel jarringly different. If we know the earlier works, these returning characters are now unfamiliar. This may be contrasted with how Child describes readers' expectations of his Jack Reacher novels; "They want the same guy every year".[8]

It is apparent that when characters recur they alter the terms of our engagement both with them and with the stories in which they appear. Carl Grabo observed in 1928 that in the novel 'when the story shifts from one sub-plot to another, the characters abandoned pursue an unrecorded existence' (215). Erica Haugtvedt contends that this phenomenon is even more pronounced in the serial narrative because 'seriality amplifies the speculative activity inherent in any construction of a character by instantiating regular publication gaps during which audiences interpret and speculate' (413). If, in addition to the authorially-cued 'construction' of *fabula* from *syuzhet*, readers are prone to construct more freely, to imagine the continued existence of a character when they are off the page, or between the instalments of a serialised narrative, then this effect is magnified when the character(s) in question recur across multiple stories and many years. Whilst it may be possible to regard a character as a piece of textuality no different to other materials that appear within the covers of a book - no more substantive than the semi-colons, the dedication, or its ISBN number - this is surely perverse. Daniel Hack observes that, with the lessening of post-structuralism's grip, there has indeed been a renewed interest in characters' 'historicity and ontology' and that readers' investment in characters is 'being taken seriously as a complex historical and cognitive phenomenon with multiple, contingent psychological affordances and ideological effects' (419). Whilst it may be easy to underestimate the potential complexity of recurring characters and of consumers' engagement with them, regarding them as the adult variant of the child's desire to be read the same story over and again, this would fail to encompass the affordances that such storytelling offers. While popular recurring character narratives may lack the hermeneutic challenge of many of the landmarks of high culture, the particular nature of such series, and especially the affordances that familiarity may facilitate, can indeed provide (though by no means guarantee) profound effects.

Conclusion

This paper has examined recurring character storytelling as the most prodigiously successful fictive mode of the last two hundred years, with its iterations, including many adaptations, supplying the dominant popular works across the entire spectrum of media and genres. James Fenimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales* and Honoré de Balzac's *La Comédie humaine* have been posited as key and influential early examples of the use of recurring characters in the early/mid nineteenth century novel. In particular those works have been considered in terms of the extent to which they set up the two overarching trends within recurring character storytelling: the series centred on a principal protagonist, and the sprawling storyworld. The foundations of recurring character storytelling have been identified in a range of economic, cultural and social determinants including: mass literacy and the evolution of popular genres; forms of serial publication, especially magazines, that first systematized interval-based narratives as the norm for public consumption and later established the pattern of characters returning for complete stories in individual issues; and in the development and enforcement of copyright law which made it financially worthwhile - and ultimately the most remunerative recipe - for writers to return to their characters in new works. The age, and aging, of recurring characters has been pursued as a necessary consideration for the makers and adapters of the series in which they feature. Several popular recurring character series, including James Bond, *Sharpe,* the *Morse* franchise, and *Midsomer Murders* have been examined, using character age/aging as an entry point to illuminate how adaptations handle chronology and related issues when engaging with such series. Adaptation has, in line with contemporary definitions and usages, been construed both traditionally and broadly, encompassing page-to-screen crossings as well as continuation fiction, novelization, and the creation of allied texts within the original medium. Recurring character storytelling has been scrutinized as a phenomenon prevalent in, indeed often coterminous with, popular genres, but largely absent from valorized literary fiction. The familiarity experienced with recurring character stories, itself tied to their invariable alliance with genre fiction, has been posited as an explanation for why such series are often not critically well-regarded. Equally, it has been contended that they can also facilitate significant literary (and other) effects.

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[1] One of the earliest examples of 'continuation' writing might be The *Telegony,* often attributed to Cinaethon of Sparta, an epic that takes up events after those of The *Odyssey*.

[2] With the important caveat that for the final TV season of *Game of Thrones* the story material 'overtook' its source, the concluding novel being uncompleted.

[3] See Faludi (1999) and Strong (2012).

[4] Several sources agree that *The Pathfinder* was not originally conceived as a 'vehicle' for Leatherstocking. Rather, he was written into a work that had been in gestation since 1831. See Hartshorn (2005), Murray (2016. 495), and Franklin (2007. 204).

[5] In Greek Attic theatre a tetralogy was a group of three tragedies followed by a satyr play. These would be written by a single author and played at one sitting (Rehm 16).

[6] Though Dexter did also contribute original scripts, before turning the series over to other writers.

[7] Reijnders observes that several television detective series have a decidedly 'topophilic character' (165).

[8] BBC1 Breakfast interview, 15th November 2019.