Understanding the Literary Theme Park:
Dickens World as Adaptation

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Abstract:
How to make sense of Dickens World, an "indoor visitor attraction" which resists the conventions defining similar enterprises? Though it promises to "take visitors on a journey of Dickens lifetime," transporting them "to Dickensian England," it is not precisely a Disney-style theme park, a site of literary tourism, or a site of historical significance. Bringing to life the worlds of Dickens's novels – wherein physical environments, events, and characters are inextricable – depends upon a process of adaptation analogous, we argue, to cinematic or literary adaptation. This article considers Dickens World as a case study in adaptation; we suggest that its attractions demonstrate fundamental adaptive concerns: structure, nostalgia, spectacle, narrative, and commodification. Approaching Dickens World as the spectacularisation of the dynamics of literary encounter, the resulting analysis expands the boundaries of adaptation theory while delineating the aspects of Dickens's work which make its adaptation compelling but ultimately – as Dickens World shows – challenging.

Keywords: adaptation, commodification, Charles Dickens, Dickens World, literary tourism, narrative, nostalgia, spectacle, theme parks, Victoriana.

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> Dickens World will take visitors on a journey of Dickens's lifetime as they step back in time to Dickensian England […], transporting visitors from the depths of London's sewers through atmospheric streets, courtyards, markets and shops […]. Visitors will feel as though they have returned to one of the most exciting periods of British History to see 'The Best and Worst of Times' as they immerse themselves in the imposing architecture and street scenes […]. ('Great Expectations for Dickens World', Dickens World website 2007)

With a global recession in full swing, it should come as no surprise that tourism would be hard hit. A brief article in the *Kent News* announcing that Dickens World, a theme park based in Chatham, England, was cutting staff and operating hours because of financial strain might be seen as one among many hundreds of similar stories. Indeed, Dickens World representatives framed the cuts in light of broader economic trends: managing director Kevin Christie was quoted as saying: "The plan is a reaction to the recession. We have to prepare ourselves for going forwards."[1] While

Dickens World's fiscal woes reflect to some degree the commercial viability of literary theme parks – an issue relevant to the aborted plans for a Dracula-themed park in Romania as well as the recently opened "Wizarding World of Harry Potter" park in central Florida – Dickens World faces other challenges arising more directly from its particular approach to literature-themed entertainment. In the present essay we consider Dickens World not as a financially struggling tourist enterprise but as a case study in immersive literary entertainments, an opportunity to consider how adaptation theory might be applied beyond strictly literary or cinematic boundaries.[2] Though the discourse of adaptation might seem at first glance to have little application to the literary theme park, recent work in adaptation theory has expanded the conceptual boundaries of the term *adaptation*, rendering it suitable for application to a broad spectrum of phenomena. Moreover, as Dickens World is neither an historical structure dating to the nineteenth century, nor a location associated directly with Dickens, nor a site invoked by any of Dickens's novels, it challenges the standard model of literary tourism as laid out by Nicola Watson (Watson 2006: 2-5). Our approach seeks to bring these two realms together by situating Dickens World at the nexus of adaptation and literary tourism, as we look to adaptation theory to provide a conceptual framework for understanding the theme park not as a mere commercial enterprise but as a site of literary encounter, a medium for cultural experience (see MacCannell 1976: 23-29).

Dickens World bills itself as a fully realised environment that provides not merely entertainment but an experience, "a journey […] to Dickensian England." The park's promotional materials promise an immersion in the world of Dickens, a promise that is both ambitious and ambiguous, as the world of Dickens could refer to the fictive worlds he constructed, the real world he inhabited, the Victorian world of our collective imagination, or even the modern world as it is inflected by Dickens's creations. In Dickens World, in other words, a body of literature, its author, and his popular cultural associations are commercialised, commodified, spectacularised, translated and otherwise adapted. Of course, Dickens's work has long been adapted to accommodate the vicissitudes of an evolving society and public. His novels were rapidly adapted to the stage by playwrights eager to squeeze their own profits from Dickens's large readership, and Dickens himself embarked upon a series of reading tours that capitalised on public demand for more dynamic renderings of his texts.

Dickens World thus follows a tradition of commercially motivated adaptations of Dickens. That tradition is so far-reaching that even the word *Dickens* has evolved; even in the most precise critical scholarship, it is often used as a portmanteau term, as a noun referring to the man himself, as an adjective referring to one of his works, or as a generic term identifying anything related to nineteenth-century England (Marsh 2001: 207).

Just as the terms *Dickens* and *Dickensian* have grown to encompass ever larger referents,[3] so too has the term *adaptation* become increasingly elastic, as critics render it suitable for application to a wide variety of intellectual inquiries. Freed from qualitative comparisons of textual original and cinematic imitator, the field's current methodologies might best be described as intertextual investigations, which destabilise the very concept of the originary text and trace a complex network of linguistic, generic, historic, and cultural exchanges within the adaptation (Aragay 2005: 11-31; Whelehan 1999: 3-19; Leitch 2007: 93-126).[4] Among the various implications of the field's realignment along this more dynamic axis is the expansive redefinition of its central term, *adaptation*, one which complicates traditional concepts of fidelity by calling into question the notion that direct fidelity to an original text is possible or even desirable. In *The Culture of the Copy*, for example, Hillel Schwartz identifies the conflicting impulses between novelty and reproducibility in pornography, between plagiarism and paraphrase in scholarship, and between enhancement and distortion in cinematic colourisation (Schwartz 1998: 307-318).[5] On a less theoretically abstract level, Thomas Leitch lists the assumption that "Fidelity is the most appropriate criterion to use in analysing adaptations" as the eighth of his 'Twelve Fallacies in Contemporary Adaptation Theory' (Leitch 2003: 161).[6]

Once the fidelity model is abandoned, *adaptation* becomes a far more commodious term. Julie Sanders labels adaptation "a transpositional practice, casting a specific genre into another generic mode, an act of re-vision itself" (Sanders 2006: 18). While Sanders is careful to distinguish between adaptation and appropriation, Dudley Andrew advances an even more embracing definition, claiming that "discourse about adaptation is potentially as far-reaching as you like"; though Andrew describes the process of adaptation as "the matching of the cinematic sign system to prior achievements in some other system," specifically invoking cinema, his discussion suggests the possibility of disengaging the process of adaptation

from the fiction-to-film paradigm, so that adaptation might signify any appropriation of meaning from a pre-existing discursive object or cultural form (Andrew 2000: 28-29). Francesco Casetti also employs this broadly conceptual approach, defining adaptation as "the reappearance, in another discursive field, of an element (a plot, a theme, a character, etc.) that has previously appeared elsewhere" (Casetti 2004: 82). Hence, *adaptation* – like *Dickens* – is a term that has been continuously adapted, and it can designate a wide variety of acts of transfer, translation, and revision.

While Dickens World may appear to have little in common with more conventionally recognised examples of adaptation like Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs* (1997) or David Lean's cinematic oeuvre, it engages with the fundamental exigencies of the adaptive drive, making it an intriguing case study for adaptation theory and practice. Critics of adaptation, such as Leitch, Andrew, James Naremore, and Kamilla Elliott, among others, have provided not only a language with which to describe the mechanics of the park's various attractions, but also a conceptual framework with which to make sense of the underlying urge to commercialise and commodify a culturally iconic author, in part by highlighting the nostalgic longing that creates a public for such a project.[7] Moreover, because the highly visual Dickens World focuses on an author and his literary progeny, adaptation theory – born from the marriage of film studies and literary criticism – is uniquely relevant to the purpose. Finally, Dickens World has undergone a number of changes since its opening, adding a weekly comedy night club event and renting out various component venues for weddings, birthdays, and business meetings; considering Dickens World in terms of the adaptive drive provides a way of understanding and describing the ongoing evolution of the site, as Dickens World adapts itself to meet the public's desire for new forms of Dickensian experience and (perhaps more importantly) to meet the fiduciary demands of a contracting economy. Viewed through this lens, Dickens World not only illustrates the various possibilities for adapting fiction to real-world experience, but it also highlights the problematic ways in which readers and critics seek to access the historical past through literary texts. To what extent can we reconnect with the nineteenth century through the pages of a novel? Can a theme park promising an immersive interactive experience move us closer to that history? If the engine of desire driving the entire enterprise is a nostalgic longing for the past, what *is* that past and to what extent is it merely an

imagined projection of the present time?[8] All of these questions reveal what is at stake when one sets out to adapt Dickens, whether as narrative, film, or theme park.[9]

No discussion of theme parks, especially regarding their relations to narrative, can ignore the overwhelming influence of Walt Disney. If Dickens, in all his many guises, was a formative component in creating Dickens World – both in the minds of the visitors and for the designers and producers – Disney looms just as large (see John 2008: 15-17). Having combined the Coney Island-style amusement park with a World's Fair-style cultural experience, Disney further solidified the 'theme' in 'theme park'. And while Disney's themes are broader than those of Dickens World, the traces of Disney's innovations are inescapable in Chatham: Disney created rides depicting the narratives of well-known and well-loved books (Peter Pan's Flight); he created other attractions which allow visitors to explore the milieu of fictional characters without enacting a specified narrative (Tom Sawyer's Island); he developed passive dark rides to offer pure spectacle in the place of a story (It's a Small World); and his parks perfected the integration of restaurants and souvenir shops into any ride's theme. Unable to escape the shadow cast by the achievements of Disney's parks, Dickens World nevertheless seems to rail against the crass commercialisation and naïve idealisation that Disney and "Disneyfication" have come to connote (Huntley 2007: 12; Clavé 2007: 177-83).[10] While Dickens World embraces certain aspects of the Disney regime – modernisation, interpretation, and historical recreation – it also chafes against other aspects, making facile comparisons to Disney insufficient for understanding Dickens World's particular approach to adapting Dickens to the theme park environment.

The tension with Disneyfication is not the only way in which Dickens World resists the paradigms through which we understand theme parks.[11] Scholarly treatments of traditional theme parks, which often focus either on their functions as sites of tourism or as evidence of a desire for nostalgia, fail to account for Dickens World's uniquely literary ambitions. In *Destination Culture*, for example, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett makes a clear distinction between the two kinds of tourist attractions she analyses: there are the "in situ" displays, which present a "mimetic recreation" *in which* the visitor/tourist is immersed, and there are the "in context" displays, which organise and present information *to* the visitor/tourist (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 3). Dickens World fits into neither of these categories. Nor

does it fit exactly into any of the four market-based categories of theme parks that Anton Clavé describes (Clavé 2007: 28-30).[12] Moreover, Dickens World's idiosyncrasies seem to be, at least in part, intentionally divergent from the theme-park norm, so as to locate the attraction in the seemingly more educational and less commercial tradition of heritage or literary tourism. The promotional blurb which opens this essay, with its description of transportation to "one of the most exciting periods of British History", demonstrates a desire to achieve authenticity instead of fantasy – even the capitalised *H* underscores the seriousness of the enterprise.

It is precisely through such moments of resistance – the ambivalence towards typical theme-park contrivances, the slippages between intention and execution, the visitors' disappointed expectations – that Dickens World displays not only the difficulties faced by its designers and engineers, but the difficulties inherent in any adaptation.[13] Dickens World's refusal to engage with typical theme park conventions places at the forefront of its enterprise the elements of the literary experience with which it *willingly* engages. To that end, this essay considers Dickens World as a case study, examining the way in which its primary attractions illuminate the fundamental concerns of adaptation: structure, nostalgia, spectacle, narrative, and commodification. Undoubtedly, these concepts inform the design and execution of *all* of the park's attractions; in each section that follows, we explore one of these concepts in light of the attraction we feel best exemplifies that concept.

1.   Structure/Scene: Creating the Experience

Novel-to-film adaptations must transpose the purely textual into a cinematic vocabulary. Negotiating a different set of generic demands, Dickens World's challenge was how to approximate in a physical environment those aspects of the author's life, times, and works the designers privileged; the theme park's conceptual choices are thus made evident in its very structure, as the space plan and design set the tone for the visitor experience. The spatial heart of Dickens World is the two-tiered central court, from which all the other attractions are both visible and accessible. Encircled by the *Great Expectations* Boat Ride, this open court – officially designated as a street space – is the structural centre of the site, and as such assumes a multitude of functions and meanings. This is the space to which visitors first descend upon entering, and so it serves as a

place of introduction, not only to the individual attractions but to the larger Dickens World experience. It is a place where visitors define that experience, where they 'plot' their movement through Dickens World. This very simple structure – an empty space, a few actors, and a small selection of props – curiously conveys an understanding of the relationship between reader and text, by reenacting one of the fundamental challenges of reading: the willing immersion in a fictive world.[14]

Within Dickens World, visitors are not led from one attraction to the next; with their individual paths through the site unscripted, visitors are free to wander as they define their individual experience of the park. By way of contrast, Alan Bryman notes that "the layouts of the Disney theme parks are designed to channel the movement of visitors in certain directions," and the rides are carefully choreographed so that "each person sees the same as everyone else, so that the experience of any theme park attractions is controlled and thereby standardized" (Bryman 2004: 134). It is worth noting that Disney's thoroughly standardised visitor experience is, for many, a source of real pleasure (MacCannell 1968: 55). In a recent review of Disney's parks for *Slate*, an otherwise cynical travel writer concluded with some awe that "Disney creates fully realized narratives" (Stevenson 2008). But Dickens World actively rejects the Disney model of fully scripted experience, its promotional material conceiving the courtyard as an open space "which allow[s] visitors to *wander* freely around the Dickens World attraction, soaking up the atmosphere and *exploring* the streets, alleys, courtyards, dockside, shops and a themed restaurant" ('Great Expectations' 2007, added emphasis). This description, with its focus on the mobility and independent decision-making of the visitor, suggests a world of bountiful possibility. Unlike Disneyworld, in Dickens World there is no master storyline to unite the various attractions into a single, coherent tale. Though such freedom is an intrinsically anti-Victorian modality – the antithesis of the nineteenth-century desire for the arrangement public spaces, for the administration of movement, and for the mapping of transport networks – this lack of direction nevertheless gives visitors agency and a modern, democratic sense of control over their own experience (Mitrasinovic 2006: 47; MacCannell 1976: 39-56): as in Tony Bennett's concept of the Exhibitionary Complex, each visitor chooses his or her own path through the attractions (Bennett 2004: 119). The visitor's experience, in other words, is unplotted and undirected, and though visitors are neither characters nor

readers, there is a way in which this open space reifies one tantalising aspect of the reading experience. Dickens World conceives of the modern version of Dickensian immersion as dependent upon the agency of the willing reader to construct meaning.

The inertial nature of the space marks it as alien to the resonant energies that, as Garrett Stewart has argued, animate Dickens's writing: "Dickens's prose, from the level of syllable and word to sentence and paragraph," is marked by kinesthesis (G. Stewart 2003: 122). Stewart identifies this as the "filmic" quality of Dickens's work, which he considers in opposition to those features more properly called "cinematic", i.e. concrete images and descriptive passages. According to this model, what defines Dickens's work and marks it as a unique form of artistry is not merely pictorial effect but the innately animate qualities of the prose itself. Deep beneath the level of plot, in other words, there is another layer of dynamic movement, resident in syntax, phrasing, and syllabic sound.

Capturing the kinesthetic energy that defines Dickens's prose and translating it into an experiential encounter is no easy task. As a built set, the Dickens World Streetscape is cinematically static, a backdrop that conveys not motion but atmosphere. Agency shifts to the visitor, who must fill this empty canvas with Dickensian energy. In other words, the effectiveness of the adaptation – the realisation of the qualities that define Dickens's prose – requires the active participation of the visitor, who becomes the animating agent in this encounter. A group of costumed actors employed by Dickens World circulates through the central courtyard, engaging with visitors and encouraging their participation in this interactive experience. Pickpockets, flower girls, and other usual denizens of the nineteenth-century street help visitors perform an *unscripted* version of 'Victorian urban life'. Despite Dean MacCannell's observation that "[t]ourists are not made personally responsible for anything that happens in the establishment they visit" (MacCannell 1976: 102), the experience of the Dickens World streetscape is created largely by the visitors themselves, and its success depends on each visitor's willingness to engage with the scene.

In addition to offering narrative possibility and scenic engagement, the courtyard manifests the nostalgic desires that lie at the heart of Dickens World. Though visitors may be initially disoriented by the rendering of the Victorian street as a site of stasis, the paradoxical essence of the nostalgic impulse in fact unites the static with the dynamic. It represents, in other

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words, a longing for movement into stasis, a return to a moment forever fixed in time (Green-Lewis 2000: 43-45). All roads in Dickens World lead back to this central court, so that, in its very structure, Dickens World re-enacts this conceptual problematic of nostalgic desire, creating movement that represents not progress but eternal return.

2.   Nostalgia: Recalling the Past

While nostalgic desire is inscribed or invoked by most of Dickens World, the complicated pleasures of nostalgia are perhaps best explored in Dotheboys Schoolhouse, where visitors are plunged into a past for which they will likely be far from nostalgic. On offer in Dotheboys is an "authentic experience" of humiliation and harshness under the guise of pedagogy: a single-room schoolhouse featuring rows of hard, wooden desks, a task-master of a teacher who hurls insults at entering guests, and – most importantly – a test. By representing the experience of what youth might have been like within a Victorian environment, Dotheboys Schoolhouse at once recalls a harsher educational regime similar to what some older generation visitors may remember from their own schooldays but wish to forget, while also recalling a past visitors could never have known. The spartan décor and hard wooden desks alone are not enough to help visitors imaginatively recreate a past that is outside their personal experience. These nostalgic intersections are further gnarled by the content of the quiz: the trivia of Dickens's life and writing. Dotheboys calls into question the nature of our nostalgia: do we long for the days of *our* past, or do we long for a past that we never knew, and that may have never existed? (see Green-Lewis 2000; Lowenthal 1985: 4-26).

This ambivalence is evident in the rows of desks that line the schoolroom, where the slates one might expect in an historical recreation are replaced by touch-sensitive video screens, which visitors use to access and answer the quiz about Dickens and his work. Aside from reminding visitors of their own early encounters with Dickens as part of a mandated school curriculum, these screens present a problematic at work throughout the theme park: how can one use the latest technology to evoke an earlier time period? Can modernity not only capture but convey the past? (see Lowenthal 1985: 104) Instead of having a computerised slate, or some electronic version of a quill pen that would be unquestionably anachronistic (if not historically accurate), there is a computerised version of *Snakes and*

Ladders, a board game played in Victorian Britain and still played today, a game that many visitors will remember from their own childhoods. On the screens, the familiar past of the visitors, the historical past of the nineteenth century, and the modern technological moment converge. If, as Susan Willis describes, one of the great pleasures of historical theme parks is that they satisfy visitors' "curiosity about and attraction to societies where the production and exchange of useful objects was the tangible basis for the way people defined themselves in community with others," and if such theme parks "allow the visitor fully to imagine what it might have been like to live in a culture where use values more directly shaped lives and relationships than they appear to do in [modern-day] capitalism" (Willis 1991: 12), the inclusion of high-tech touch screen video devices in the school house certainly interferes with Dickens World's goal of recapturing the past. Its enactment of the nineteenth-century relationship between schoolmaster and student's work is undermined by the mediating glow of the modern video touchscreen that _in_-authenticates the very historical moment whose recreation it makes possible.

Dotheboys Schoolhouse chooses _not_ to reanimate Dickens's own school experiences. This absence is surprising: given the rich descriptions offered in Forster's _Life_ of the Wellington House Academy, the possibilities for lively recreations are extensive. Nor does Dotheboys Schoolhouse feature many hallmarks of the school experiences detailed in Dickens's novels. The name itself is drawn from _Nicholas Nickleby_, and adorning the walls are strict sayings, including "Speak when spoken to," but these choices are purely decorative. Indeed, violating the injunctions and speaking back to the schoolmaster – displaying a distinctly postmodern resistance to figures of authority – may yield more pleasure than adopting the silent and obedient demeanour of the 'ideal' Victorian schoolchild. Even the grim depiction of Dotheboys in _Nickleby_ raises questions about its appropriateness for adaptation to a theme-park attraction. Nickleby's first thought upon meeting his students is that they seem overwhelmingly sad: "There was none of the noise and clamour of a schoolroom; none of its boisterous play, or hearty mirth. The children sat crouching and shivering together, and seemed to lack the spirit to move about" (Dickens 2007: Chapter 8). Surely Dickens World's visitors are not meant to replicate the experience of _those_ children. Though in one sense, perhaps they are. Within the enclosed environment of Dickens World, the terrors of the schoolhouse

offer a medium for an exercise in masochistic pleasure, a physical site to engage the education-based *sinthome* (see Zizek 1989: 74-79). Further, in the current age where pedagogical models favour encouragement and the cultivation of self-esteem to discipline, the austere Victorian schoolhouse presents a quaint anachronism: school as it was before we knew better. The adaptation thus reminds the contemporary viewer of the progress made since the period of the original.

Upon first entering Dotheboys Schoolhouse, visitors may imagine themselves to be entering a close representation of a specific school in a specific novel. Yet because the iconography of the Victorian schoolhouse is so well-established in the collective imagination, and because *within* the schoolhouse there are no *Nickleby*-specific references, the attraction recalls every schoolhouse from Dickens's life and work and could even be taken for a generic Victorian school. It collapses the boundaries between textual representations, autobiographical stories, and historical exactitude, calling upon the visitors' "familiarity with certain tourist stereotypes" to evoke 'Victorian England' in the same way that – for example – an advertisement for Italian pasta evokes, according to Barthes, "*Italianicity*" merely through the use of red, green, and yellow colors and Italian-sounding names (Barthes 1978: 34). This claim could be made about many of the attractions at Dickens World, but what sets the schoolhouse apart is that it offers visitors access to their own individual experiences of school, though recast within the light of Victoriana. While the park's other attractions depend upon a desire to return to a reality that visitors have only experienced via literature or history, Dotheboys Schoolhouse presents a vision which comprises nostalgia for a literary, a historical, *and* a personal past.[15]

3.   Spectacle: Phantoms and Phantasmagoria

Dotheboys Schoolhouse allows visitors to engage their nostalgic desire by surrounding them in an environment filled with generic markers of schooldays past. Dickens World's Haunted House, on the other hand, reifies Dickens's texts through images, not environment, and like any visual adaptation, risks alienating viewers through the specificity those images require. It seems that Dickens World designers toyed with differing levels of specificity, even in the attraction's title. Early promotional materials identified the Haunted House as *Ebenezer Scrooge's* Haunted House, indicating a specific textual referent in the attraction's original design. But

somewhere between initial advertising and grand opening, Ebenezer Scrooge's Haunted House became the Haunted House of 1859, perhaps a reference to Dickens's Christmas story, 'The Haunted House', published in same year. Given the relative obscurity of this story and the lack of quotation marks or italics in the name of the attraction, the intent of this new title remains somewhat ambiguous: is this 'The Haunted House' (1859) or 'The Haunted House of 1859'? In other words, is this the haunted house from that story, or is it a more generic mid-Victorian haunted house? Are visitors to expect a form of temporal transport, an enactment of a specific Dickensian narrative, or a more generic spiritual encounter? The confusion is not resolved within the structure, which lacks specific references either to the date or to the story: there are no mirrors conveying ghostly reflections, no imagined 'Oriental' decadence, no persistently ringing bells, spectral owls, or skeletal bedfellows. Nor does the Haunted House echo with the clanking chains of Jacob Marley's ghost, no doubt disappointing some visitors' expectations.[16]

In the hands of Disney one might expect Marley to take visitors by the hand and escort them through the ghost-filled skies of London or through a maze of self-projecting mirrors, an insertion of the viewer into the story that is approximated by Robert Zemeckis's 2009 3-D, CGI film adaptation of the story. To desire such a lavishly animate and immersive experience is not to insist on an imitative Disneyfication, for in point of fact such vibrant and powerful effects are already present in Dickens's writing. The rich potential of a Dickensian haunted house is not, in fact, Disneyfied Dickens (a reincarnation of the famous Haunted Mansion) but Dickensian Dickens, in all its delightfully haunting overabundance.

The Haunted House, however, is neither a Disneyesque nor a Dickensian immersion in ghostly delights; it is a passive observation of a series of films, only one of which might be legitimately described as a ghost story. It offers, in other words, not experience but spectacle. The first scene in a sequence of four, unfolds in a sparsely appointed room overlooked by a large window, through which groups of visitors view the action. In the room beyond the window, Scrooge appears as a hologram standing before a low wooden bed. A disembodied voice reads an abbreviated version of *A Christmas Carol.* In quick succession, the sprits of Christmas Past, Present, and Future arrive and work their transformative magic without the bother of taking Scrooge beyond the comfortable confines of his bed. Although this is

a film and thus theoretically freed from the restrictions of space and time, this highly-abridged recreation compresses the world of *A Christmas Carol* so that it fits neatly within the constructed set beyond the viewing window. At the end of the vignette, Scrooge declares that he has learned a lesson – the ghosts have done their duty and order is restored. Such resolution, while pleasant at the end of the novel, ensures that visitors – like Scrooge himself – leave the scene *less* haunted than they were upon arriving. This brief voyeuristic encounter stands as an example of a minimalist approach to film adaptation: *A Christmas Carol* is stripped bare of its social critique and historical and cultural images so as to highlight its central ghost story. Of course, this is a very particular interpretive move, and it reminds us that every adaptation is an exercise in revision (see Andrew 2000: 29; Aragay 2005: 26-27).[17]

That revisionism continues in the third vignette, which vaguely recalls the popular nineteenth-century parlour entertainment of the *tableaux vivants*.[18] Here, visitors are shown a series of costumed characters, who stand silently while an unidentified voice – presumably meant to be that of Dickens – describes them. Of the characters represented, only Little Nell is arguably 'dead' within the pages of Dickens's fiction, while the other figures represent a fairly lively array from Peggoty to Captain Cuttle (whose hook hand makes him the most instantly recognisable character on display). This, then, is a haunting not of ghosts but of images, the apparitions being not the mortally departed but the technologically projected.

Common to all the vignettes is the reading of Dickens's prose. The Haunted House thus celebrates the author's linguistic craftsmanship, a gesture of textual fidelity which is visually re-inscribed in the most compelling and effective scene within the attraction: the metamorphosing chair introduced in an early tale from *The Pickwick Papers* (1837).[19] Visitors hear Dickens's words describing the transformation of an armchair into the figure of a gentleman, and they observe this alteration by means of a visual projection onto an actual chair. Though brief in duration, this illusion is highly effective, and approximates, more closely than any other of Dickens World's attractions, the animate qualities of Dickens's prose and his mastery of personification.

Moreover, if one were to replace the modern fear of the phantom with the Victorian fascination for phantasmagoria, a fresh set of pleasures arises from this ambiguously titled attraction. From magic lantern shows to

backlit dioramas, the world of nineteenth-century popular entertainment hosted a wide variety of spectacles involving the projection of light (see Altick 1978: 217-19). Such a historical perspective reinvigorates an otherwise familiar technology, transforming the mundane twenty-first century video projection into an artifact of Victorian science and entertainment (see Gunning 2004). In contrast to Dotheboys Schoolhouse, the Haunted House delivers a taste of Victoriana by using technology that mimics that of the mid-nineteenth century.[20]

From a modern perspective, the attraction's central device is simply a window overlooking a built set onto which is projected a film to give the illusion of 3-D realisation. Though other theme parks have employed such projection technologies to suggest interactivity (see Sharke 2000), the physical structure of the Dickens World Haunted House resists such an illusion. Here, the imposition of the window between visitor and scene, combined with the internally focused dialogue and performance, renders the visitor not the object of the 'haunting' but only its passive spectator. Spectators do not inhabit the spectral plane, and the apparitions do not interact with the corporeal beings who are their audience. In some ways, these windows approximate a particular model of reading as a passive, closed experience: the story takes place 'over there'; the characters seem 'almost real'; and the 'reader' moves quietly past, absorbing what he or she can before moving on to the next 'text'. As with the Victorian Street (discussed above) and the *Great Expectations* Boat Ride (discussed below), the Haunted House might be understood, finally, as a spatial and experiential figuration of the reader-text relationship. Though the rendering of this relationship as predominately passive and receptive places the reader (and spectator) in the very place occupied by Scrooge – the primary effect of the attraction mimicking its own most iconic scene – this positioning of the visitor as voyeuristic observer of spectacle contrasts with the more active model of reading/experience invited by the Victorian streetscape. In other words, the essential constitutive nature of the act of reading appears to be unresolved within Dickens World, and the tension between these contrasting models of readerly responsibility are built into the structures of the attractions themselves.

4.   Narrative: Navigating the Novel

Myriad adaptations have rendered *A Christmas Carol* and *Great Expectations* culturally ubiquitous and instantly recognisable even to those who have never read the novels themselves. We encounter these novels as much, if not more, through their modern incarnations as through their original pages. Because of visitors' familiarity with adaptations of these novels, because the novel of Pip's story is one of Dickens's best known works, because of the attraction's title, and because the ride figures as a defining element of the park experience according to the promotional literature, the *Great Expectations* Boat Ride is fraught with expectations. Despite its form – a boat on tracks – that forces a teleological progression, the ride does not offer a unified, cohesive narrative. What it does offer is a deconstruction of the elements of narrative: plot, characters, and theme are all present, but all presented separately.[21] Perhaps more than any other of the attractions, this "key highlight" (Press Release) of Dickens World casts into relief the difficulties inherent in adapting the components of a textual world into a controlled environment to be physically experienced.

In addition to the interest due to familiarity, visitors' expectations are further piqued because dark ride precedents abound even within the sub-category of textually-based theme park attractions. In Disney's parks alone these include The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh, Peter Pan's adventures soaring over the rooftops, and a careening version of Mr. Toad's Wild Ride. Dependence on existent narratives, in fact, is a hallmark of Disney's success: "From 'Pirates of the Caribbean' to 'Splash Mountain,' it is precisely the plot or narrative sequence that is most often pointed to as the distinguishing characteristic of the rides at the Magic Kingdom" (Klugman 1995: 79). These rides variously allow patrons to experience the world of the novel by presenting it in life-size form as a place to explore, or they present the narrative (or part of the narrative) to guests as through scenic vignettes or animatronic reenactments. Conceptually, *Great Expectations* commits to neither approach.

It is in such conceptual choices, and in the ride's delivery of the components of narrative, that the richest difficulties, contradictions, and opportunities of the enterprise become evident. Contradictions are clear even from the early promotional materials for the ride, which seem both to encourage a visitor's desire for fidelity to a well-known and well-loved story and to discourage such longing by deliberately mixing referents. One

press release describes visitors hearing whispers about Magwitch's escape from Newgate Prison before traveling to the London rooftops via sewers and Quilps Creek [*sic*], to then "rejoin the story" on the Kent marshes ('Dickens World Sets Sail'" 2007). Even in the language of the park's proprietors, the threads of the story linking the vignettes of the ride are confused: the ride leaves the story only to "rejoin" it later. Fidelity might not be the primary concern of visitors, but even if they let go of their expectations that the ride will offer a faithful version of the titular novel, all hopes that the ride will offer *any* single, unified story are soon disappointed.

As for *Great Expectations,* plot-based elements from the novel are limited to the brief introduction of Magwitch early in the ride and his reappearance near the end. Of the scenes represented, that *appearing* most like a scene from *Great Expectations* is an empty cemetery. Yet where the novel opens with the cemetery, the ride concludes with it, thereby confusing any causal thread: there is a Magwitch, and there is a graveyard, but neither has any relation to the other. Any questions of correlation between the novel's plot and the boat ride's sequence are put to rest in the final set-piece, where boats pass through a series of jail cells, containing a mélange of villains from Dickens's works. Not only are the characters removed from their fictional milieus, they are stripped of all identifying markers, and without the amplified voice-over narration, no mannequin would be identifiable. The first is Madame Defarge from *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859). Yet she holds no knitting needles, wears no rose in her hair, sports no guillotine necklace; there are no wine stains on her apron, no knitted register hanging about her, no Gallic nose, no expression of vengeance. Through generic depictions of the cadre of villains presented in this final 'jail' vignette, the boat ride questions the very defining traits of character, thus highlighting how heavily Dickens's style depends upon them. Further, by divesting the villains of their individual distinctions, the ride – instead of accentuating unique characterisations – emphasises the unifying trait of the characters' villainy. Crime, it seems clear by the ride's end, is the only theme of this particular iteration of *Great Expectations*.

The displacement of story by theme need not doom this adaptation, or any adaptation. For while the narratological understanding of any novel may focus on the events depicted and the motivations upon which those events turn, recent scholarship on adaptation has done well to demonstrate that the core identity of a text does not reside in its story alone (see Leitch

2007: 16-19, 106-7). Imagine asking a room of readers to distill *Great Expectations* into a handful of themes: just as different readings will privilege certain plotlines over others, no single *theme* from the novel is totalising. Childhood shame, unrequited love, unfounded social aspirations – none of these is unique to *Great Expectations*, and none is sufficient to convey its narrative. The boat ride reduces the novel to a single icon – Magwitch in his criminal incarnation – and tries to extrapolate from that image the theme of crime and punishment. That the extrapolation is not wholly successful is not an indictment of the strategy, and Disney again provides a useful counterpoint. It's a Small World, one of Disneyland's original rides, lacks a narrative but succeeds on the strength of its spectacle and through its relentless commitment to the theme its title suggests. The *Great Expectations* Boat Ride, through its focus on theme, attempts a similar intervention, but succeeds instead in presenting a different way to understand the elements that comprise a Dickens novel.[22] By fragmenting narrative into its constituent components of plot, characters, and theme, the ride – like the courtyard – perhaps unintentionally highlights the role a reader plays in making meaning. In the ride, engagement with a text becomes a process of assembly; without a clear narrative authority, readers must construct their own coherent experience.

5.   Commodification: Branding the Experience

Nostalgic longing for the past and a desire to inhabit a favoured fictional world create a market for adaptations and recreations which, like all markets, is driven by money. Dickens World's exit door takes the visitor to the land of the bottom line, the retail space that serves as a not-so-subtle reminder that the park is a for-profit enterprise. What do the commodities on offer tell us about the commercialisation of the classics, the appropriation of the author, and the licensing of the literary?

The mind boggles with the possibilities for a Dickens-themed gift shop: an Oliver Twist Gruel Bowl, Mrs. Jellyby's Jellybeans, a Cratchit Family Christmas Turkey Platter, a Mrs. Bagnet Umbrella. Such items are not as farfetched or precious as they may sound. Dickens was a savvy self-promoter, and his fiction inspired merchandise including "Little Nell Cigars, Pickwick Snuff, [and] Gamp Umbrellas" (Clayton 2003: 153). Adapting the Victorian commodification of Dickens's works to a twenty-first century model could, then, require little more than updating sticker prices. But the

reality is less straightforward; "The Olde Curiosity Shoppe" and the wares it offered indicate Dickens World's complicated relationship to its source material.[23] Of three kinds of souvenirs – those that insert you into the fictional universe (costumes, etc.); those that remind you of the Victorian time period (bath salts, etc.); and those that remind you of your trip to Chatham (keyrings with a Dickens World logo, etc.) – the Shoppe surprisingly focuses on the last two. There was no Oliver Twist's gruel bowl, for example, which would belong to the fictional world created by Charles Dickens, a reified object from a novel.[24]

The choice not to sell objects from the universe of Dickens's texts appears to be an act of resistance to crass commercialisation. Though such marketing may be authentic to Dickens's own time and experience, today that kind of seamless integration of merchandise with a storyline, especially when presented as part of a tourist attraction, smacks of Disney's approach to theme park retail. There, children and adults can don mouse-ear hats; girls can become princesses and boys can become pirates by purchasing costumes: objects for sale become a means to enter the fictional, idealised world of the theme park or the stories it depicts (see Clavé 2007: 170). Dickens World's online shop now offers, among other items, two costumes for children: a "'Little Nell' Peasant Girl Costume" and "Bert the Chimney Sweep Urchin Costume". These costumes indicate customer demand for that role-playing experience required by the park's central courtyard but initially missing from the Shoppe – a desire for a more interactive and imaginative immersion in Dickens's World. This desire, however, is frustrated by the realisation that the "Bert the Chimney Sweep" costume, inspired by a character from *Mary Poppins*, is straight from the world of Disney, not Dickens. Little Nell, too, is misrepresented: the costume is described on the website as an "Elizabethan or Renaissance peasant girl costume", removing it from the Victorian era by several centuries. Exacting commitment to the original, though, never was Dickens World's aim.

Instead of commodifying the Dickensian fictional world, the Shoppe mostly allows visitors to access the Victorian period via pleasantly old-fashioned English goods (i.e. English Lavender bath salts or tea caddies) or via reading (i.e. Dickens's novels). Other items on offer were more traditional souvenirs, intended to remind visitors not of an English past, but of their own immediate past: their trip to Dickens World, via pens, baseballs caps, coin purses and backpacks, all delightfully modern and bearing the

Dickens World logo (see John 2008: 14). Although there is nothing authentically 'Dickensian' inherent in such trinkets, the souvenirs are stamped with authorial approval in the form of the park's logo: the phrase "Dickens World" rendered in a script which mimics Dickens's signature. Printed as though in Dickens's own hand, the logo 'authenticates' the merchandise. 'Dickens' becomes a brand, and the goods on offer assume a kinship with the novels that bear the author's name.

That the Olde Curiosity Shoppe straddles the anachronistic and hyper-modern worlds can be seen its location, adjacent to but outside of the darkly Victorian interior of the park. Surrounded by windows, it serves as a transitional space between the dank interior of Dickens World and the sleekly modern outlet mall and Cineplex beyond. Dickens World highlights its proximity to both in its promotional literature, and both are signs of the modernisation of the once-obsolete Chatham Dockyards. Such closeness to an outlet mall amplifies the commercialisation and branding of the Dickens World enterprise. Situated so closely to both a Marks and Spencer and a Cadbury's outlet, Dickens seems, in this light, to be one more commodification of Britishness, though what exactly 'Dickens' stands for remains, finally, unclear.

To be sure, there is always a tension between the desire to adapt and the drive towards commodification: commercial viability underpins decisions to revive material that a public already knows, and Dickens World *is* a for-profit enterprise. Ultimately, however, the Shoppe highlights visitors' material desires that transcend the parent company's profit-seeking: the wish to commodify our memories. Inspired in part by Disney's model, this desire is nevertheless a truly Victorian impulse (see Lowenthal 1985: 104). The rise of the middle class, the invention of the department store, and achievements in the mass production of goods were all Victorian innovations, yet the Shoppe at Dickens World resisted these historical precedents: adapting to consumers' modern sensibilities and sensitivities requires resisting, at least in part, that authentic Victorian experience. Merchandising decisions are also a final reminder of the difficulty posed by the will to nostalgia that permeates Dickens World; it seems that the theme park designers are unsure whether visitors wish to fulfil in souvenir form their "necessarily insatiable demands of nostalgia" for Dickens's world, or their immediate remembrance of Dickens World (S. Stewart 1984: 135).

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6.   Re-vision: Adapting Dickens

        Dickens World offers a twenty-first century Dickens: decorative notions of the 'Dickensian' and 'Victorian'; unattainable expectations of authenticity, comprehensiveness, and excitement; literature's restriction to the schoolroom and shopping centre; reading as a passive experience. But it also shows the promise and variety of developing technologies of adaptation.[25] If the Great Expectations Boat Ride deconstructs the elements of narrative, the 4-D computer animated film in Pegotty's Boat House assembles a narrative thread from historical and biographical episodes. The Haunted House and Victorian Street offer the experience of the cinematic as both image and structure: technologies of film pervade the Haunted House, and the Street presents visitors a sound stage from which they define their own plot. From narrative to film, commodities to scenic spectacles, Dickens World invokes a diverse array of adaptive techniques, though it often does so discreetly, indirectly, and – somewhat ironically – through their apparent absence.

        The exigencies which drive the attractions of Dickens World are those which drive all adaptations: structure, spectacle, nostalgia, narrative, and commodification. Dickens World offers a unique perspective on the act of reading, the nature of narrative, and the varied layers of readerly desire and textual pleasure. Moreover, the theme park is only one of many new delivery systems for literary content, and as the technological possibilities for engaging with text multiply, so too must our critical apparatus expand. Books on Kindle, iPhone applications for novel reading, and YouTube video 'trailers' for new print publications are only three examples of the new ways that readers (and viewers) will engage with Victorian texts. As new and emerging forms of adaptation continue to challenge the limits of the text-to-film paradigm, adaptation theory will need to accommodate these new methods of literary engagement. While adaptation theory has illuminated the forces at work within the literary theme park – revealing the park's immersive realisation of the processes of reading – we believe that Dickens World, in turn, highlights not only the expanding frontiers of adaptation but also the potential for new applications of existing theoretical models, which can account for evolving forms of literary transfer.

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Notes

1. 'Dickensian Theme Park Faces Hard Times', *Kent News*, 49 April 2009, accessed 18 August 2009, http://www.kentnews.co.uk/kent-news/Dickensian-theme-park-faces-Hard-Times-newsinkent23890.aspx?news=local.
2. This essay was completed during our residence at an NEH summer seminar, 'Adaptation and Revision: The Example of *Great Expectations*', held in July 2007 at the University of California, Santa Cruz. We would like to thank our institutional host, the Dickens Project, as well as our seminar leaders, Hilary Schor and Paul Saint-Amour, for their support and direction. Although this piece took shape under their tutelage, its form and content are entirely our own. Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this essay do not necessarily reflect those of the National Endowment for the Humanities. We are also indebted to Alison Booth for her help in shaping the article.
3. In his discussion of twentieth-century film and television adaptations of *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*, Jeffrey Sconce advances the term 'Dickensian' as a mark of fidelity to the spirit rather than the letter of the originary text (Sconce 2003: 180).
4. In her introduction to *Books in Motion*, Mireia Aragay provides a concise and coherent review of the evolving trends in adaptation scholarship (2005: 11-34).
5. Dickens World exemplifies the sorts of contradictions Schwartz discusses, encouraging on the one hand its visitors' desire for textual fidelity, by trumpeting its attractions' power to bring books to life, while at the same time confounding the desire for textual immersion through its stubborn refusal to enact any single narrative in full.
6. Though the critical literature on adaptations has begun to jettison fidelity-based qualitative assessments, popular audiences often insist that adaptations remain closely faithful to the plots and characters of beloved originary fictions. Joss Marsh, for example, notes the "unease" caused by the ending of David Lean's *Great Expectations*, which featured a "radical divergence" from the novel (Marsh 2001: 215).
7. While our analysis of Dickens World draws broadly from the conceptual models employed by these and other critics of adaptation, we have chosen not to adopt the terminology of any single critical framework. In part, this decision reflects the differences among the various taxonomies scholars use to characterise different adaptive processes: Leitch enumerates ten types of intertextual relationships between adaptation and originary text (Leitch 2007:

123-125), while others define only six or three (Elliott 2009: 133-183; Andrew 2000: 29). These discrepancies are complicated by the use of different terms to describe similar adaptive relationships, as, for example, in the case of "adjustment" and "borrowing" ((Leitch 2007: 123; Andrew 2000: 29); "metacommentary" and "intersecting" (Leitch 2007: 124; Andrew 2000: 29); and "neoclassic imitation" and "de(re)composition" (Leitch 2007: 124; Elliott 2009: 157).

8.   In *The Past is a Foreign Country*, David Lowenthal provides an insightful exploration not only of the desire for trans-historical connection but also the processes and technologies involved in remembering the past: "today's perspective makes us more likely to misinterpret the past as remoteness multiplies its anachronisms" (Lowenthal 1985: 217). As he points out, the nostalgia for a lost past was a characteristically Victorian response to the chaos of modernity (Lowenthal 1985: 104).

9.   Angela Ndalianis includes theme parks among new entertainment outlets which seek to combine the strategies of narrative and spectacle: "Entertainment forms such as computer games, comic books, theme parks, and television shows have become complexly interwoven, reflecting the interests of multinational conglomerates that have investments in numerous media companies. One media form serially extends its own narrative spaces and spectacles and those of other media as well. Narrative spaces weave and extend into and from one another, so much so that, at times, it is difficult to discuss one form of popular culture without referring to another" (Ndalianis 2005: 32-33).

10. While many critics are eager to distinguish between Disney's "popular" entertainments and Dickens's status as literary artist, Jeffrey Sconce points out that Dickens worked in popular media and was always ready to assault "the hypocrisy of aristocratic taste and refinement" (Sconce 2003: 182).

11. Tourism is the most familiar of the paradigms employed in discussions of theme parks, an approach that informs Juliet John's review of the park in *The Dickensian* (see John 2009: 5-21). However, her review's attention to her children's experience of Dickens World assumes that the park is designed for a popular audience with a casual interest in Dickens rather than for serious Dickens scholars (see John 2009: 7, 18). For a review of the park from the perspective of the academic tourist, see our 'It Was the Worst of Times: A Visit to Dickens World' (Gould and Mitchell 2010: 285-90).

12.   These include "destination" parks, "regional" parks, "local" parks, and "niche" parks. Dickens World comes closest to the "niche" park, though its

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cost alone suggests it would be an outlier in this category, as Clavé notes most niche parks cost "some €10 million" (Clavé 2007: 28-31; 31).

13. John discusses the multiple levels of ambivalence and uncertainty that pervade early reviews of Dickens World (see John 2008: 6-9).

14. While the meticulous details of the set piece and the costumed actors, who perform their roles for the park's visitors, rather firmly align the courtyard with a theatrical space – rendering it a site of viewing rather than reading – we might interpret the literary functionality of this space differently if we consider its historical referent. David Henkin proposes that the proliferation of printed words accompanying the nineteenth-century development of the urban street spectacle fostered the development of modern public reading practices (Henkin 2004: 194-98). Though it entails some stretch of the imagination, we might see the Dickens World streetscape as an approximation of the Victorian intersection of private reading and public viewing.

15. Jean Baudrillard says that "no escape [from everyday life] is more radical than escape in time, none so thoroughgoing as escape into one's own childhood" (Baudrillard 1996: 80).

16. Writing in anticipation of the park's opening, Dana Huntley imagined that "[t]he ghost of Jacob Marley presumably clanks around Ebenezer Scrooge's haunted house" (Huntley 2007: 12).

17. In *After Dickens*, John Glavin promotes a similarly refined and narrowly focused approach to theatrical adaptation, which trades comprehensive scope and literal textual fidelity for a more "essentialist" adaptation that animates the source text's most critical, though sometimes latent, elements (Glavin 1999: 167-168).

18. Joss Marsh notes that the engraved illustrations within Dickens's novels have been tapped for inspiration by modern filmmakers and also frequently served as the blueprints for Victorian *tableaux vivants* (Marsh 2001: 209). The Haunted House of 1859 reanimates this referential connectedness, binding textual illustration, tableau, and film. In doing so, it works against one of the fundamental drives of cinema – to present the illusion of mobility to an always "immobile viewer" (Freidberg 2006: 150) – as the vignettes in the Haunted House expressly shun any illusion of movement.

19. The inspiration for the scene comes from the 'The Bagman's Story': "Tom gazed at the chair; and, suddenly as he looked at it, a most extraordinary change seemed to come over it. The carving of the back gradually assumed the lineaments and expression of an old shrivelled human face; the damask cushion became an antique, flapped waistcoat; the round knobs grew into a

couple of feet, encased in red cloth slippers; and the old chair looked like a very ugly old man, of the previous century, with his arms a-kimbo. Tom sat up in bed, and rubbed his eyes to dispel the illusion. No. The chair was an ugly old gentleman; and what was more, he was winking at Tom Smart […]. A film came over Tom Smart's eyes. The old man seemed gradually blending into the chair, the damask waistcoat to resolve into a cushion, the red slippers to shrink into little red cloth bags." (Dickens 1996: Chapter 14)

20. Jay Clayton makes a similar case for the Millennium Dome, hailing it as the embodiment of postmodern simulacra, while noting its uncanny resemblance to the definitive Victorian spectacle: the Great Exhibition (Clayton 2003: 11-13).

21. Cf: Peter Greenaway's installation *In the dark* from the Hayward Gallery's 1996 exhibition *Spellbound*, where he exploded cinema into "its basic elements: the events on which it feeds (represented by newspapers), props, seats, actors, and buzzwords" with only subtle hints at links between those elements (Stallabrass 1996: 342-343).

22. Jeremy Clarke sees the dark ride's operation as approximating the narrative mechanics of 'Travelling Abroad', a story printed in *The Uncommercial Traveler*. Clarke's approach to the ride bears consideration, though his claim that the ride sustains "a coherent narrative" is at odds with our experience of the attraction (Clarke 2009: 7).

23. Dickens World added an 'e' to both 'Old' and 'Shop'; the novel's title is *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841).

24. Fortunately, the Dickens enthusiast need not depend upon the Olde Curiosity Shoppe's limited inventory. Among the mementoes on offer at productions of *Oliver!* is a ceramic bowl inscribed with the phrase "Please, Sir, I want some more!". Online, Café Press offers a wide variety of items, from hoodies and hats to towels and totes, imprinted with images of Dickens's characters, lines from his novels, or creative Dickensian branding, while Amazon.com's customers can include a Charles Dickens action figure with their order of Dickens's novels.

25. The technologies of adaptation are distinct from the technological advances in mechanics that define modern theme-park attractions (see Sharke 2000).

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