Winnie-the-Pooh: the Pleasure in Non-Fiction Adaptation

As a child, I remember my mother reading me different tales from *Winnie-the-Pooh* every night. I would look forward to hearing the different stories of Christopher Robin, Eeyore, Tiger, Piglet and all of their other friends. This simple story of a bear and his friends made a huge impact on the children literature. Winnie started out as just a children’s book but has now expanded into movies, TV shows, toys, stuffed animals and much more. Most people don’t know the true story behind how Winnie was created. *Finding Winnie* by Lindsay Mattick, is an adaptation of the original story of *Winnie-the-pooh*. This adaptation is different than most adaptations in the sense that it is a non-fiction story explaining the history of Winnie, the bear. Although this adaptation is a non-fiction picture book, it still adds depth and a new perspective to the original story of *Winnie-the-Pooh*.

Mattick’s book tells the story of the inspiration of Winnie-the-Pooh. The book starts out with a mom telling her son, Cole, a story about a bear. The story starts 100 years ago with a man named Harry Colebourn. Harry was a veterinarian in Winnipeg, Canada. One day, Harry was called to help serve his country in a war that was going on on the other side of the country. His train stopped at a place called White River. When Harry got off of the train he saw a man sitting on a bench with a baby bear. He stopped and talked to the man with the bear and offered to buy the bear for $20. The man agreed and Harry bought the bear and named her named Winnipeg or Winnie for short. Harry starts to teach Winnie lots of tricks and with her skill set, she is given jobs to do in the military. Winnie was known as the mascot of the Second Canadian Infantry Brigade. It was winter when Harry got the order that the time had come to fight. He thought long and hard and decided that he needed to give Winnie up. Harry and Winnie went to the London Zoo where Winnie would become one of the zoo’s favorite animals. Then Cole asked his mom how she knew this story. She then went on to tell her son another story about a little boy who had a stuffed animal who he never knew what to name. The little boy went to the zoo with his dad one day and saw Winnie, the bear, in the zoo. This little boy fell in love with this bear and named his own bear Winnie too. He would take his stuffed bear on all sorts of adventures in the woods behind their home. This little boy’s name was Christopher Robin Milne, and his father was Alan Alexander Milne. This then leads to the creation of *Winnie-the-Pooh*.

In this new book of *Finding Winnie*, illustrator Sophie Blackall created a image of Winnie through her illustrations. Blackall did not stick with similar illustrations in the original story of *Winnie-the-Pooh*. She created new and beautiful images for the reader of Mattick’s picture book. Since this book is a non-fiction text, Blackall created realistic images that help the reader visualize what actually happened to Harry Colebourn. One example of how the illustrations connect to the text so clearly is the scene where harry meets the old man who has Winnie. The illustration has an oldfashioned black train in the background. Harry is standing on the platform looking at Winnie and an old man sitting on the bench. The old man is wearing boots, kahkis, flannel, hat and suspenders, and he is holding a gun. The old man looks guilty for some reason. He has a rope tied to the bench under him and then Winnie is tied to the other end of the rope. Winnie is looking up at Harry as though he is smiling. The text on this page says “Harry stopped. It’s not ever day that you see a bear cub at a train station. ‘That bear has lost it’s mother,’ he thought, ‘and that man must be the trapper who got her.’” This is a perfect example of how the illustrations create an exact representation of what the text is saying. Blackall’s pictures help the reader to see imagine this story as it actually happened.

*Finding Winnie,* is different than the typical adaptation for many reasons. This text is written in a non-fiction format. Scholars who discuss adaptation focus solely on fiction adaptations or transmedia adaptations. Scholars do not consider non-fiction adaptation as often. Also, this adaptation serves as a prequel to the urtext. Finding Winnie tells the story of Milne got the idea for the story of *Winnie-the-Pooh*. Even though this piece of literature was written after the chapter book of *Winnie-the-Pooh*, it seems as though *Finding Winnie* is acting to lead children to reading *Winnie-the-Pooh*. Finding Winnie is a picture book that would lead children to reading the chapter book of Winnie-the-Pooh. Finding Winnie is creating more interest in the urtext. It is making Winnie the Pooh fans fall back in love with this classic tale. The adaptation is successfully adding new information and pleasure to the urtext. Betty Carter, a professor emerita of children’s and young adult literature at Texas Woman’s University, said it best when she wrote that the most important part of a successful adaptation is “a book that will be read willingly from beginning to end” (Carter). Regardless of the style or form of the book, the adaptation needs to be enjoyable for the reader. Even though this adaptation would not be considered normal in the sense that it is a fictional sequel, *Finding Winnie* still brings pleasure and joy to readers.

Linda Hutcheon, one of the leading voices in adaptation, wrote the book *Theory of Adaptation*. In the beginning of this book, Hutcheon describes how the phenomenon of adaptation comes from three different and distinct points. The first point Hutcheon makes is that “an adaptation is an announcement and extensive transposition of a particular work or works” (Hutcheon 7). This means that an adaptation is a new and different interpretation of the original work. Hutcheon then goes on to describe that “telling the same story from a different point of view, for instance, can create a manifestly different interpretation” (Hutcheon 8). Hutcheon is describing that even a slight change from the original text can create a new interpretation and understanding of the original text. She makes another point that “transposition can also mean a shift in ontology from the real to the fictional, from a historical account or biography to a fictionalized narrative or drama” (Hutcheon 8).

This point can be better understood through the example of the adaptation of the book *Winnie-the-Pooh* to the film adaptation, *The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh.* Many readers feel that in order for a film adaptation to be a “good adaptation, a film had to come to terms with what was considered as the “spirit” of the book and to take into account all layers of the book’s complexity” (Marciniak 60). This point goes along with what Hutcheon is saying that the adaptation has to be a new interpretation of the originality of the urtext. In the chapter of the book, Winnie is sitting by a tree when he says

“‘that buzzing-noise means something. You don’t get a buzzing-noise like that, just buzzing and buzzing, without its meaning something. If there’s a buzzing-noise, somebody’s making a buzzing-noise, and the only reason for making a buzzing-noise that I know of is because you’re a bee… And the only reason for being a bee that I know of is making honey… And the only reason for making honey is so as I can eat it. ’”

(Milne 6). Then, Winnie starts to climb the tree. He continues to climb the tree and then he starts to sing, “It’s a very funny thought that, if Bears were Bees, / They’d build their nests at the bottom of trees./ And that being so (if the Bees were Bears),/ We shouldn’t have to climb up all these stairs.” (Milne 8). Eventually, Winnie the Pooh steps on one branch and it cracks. He starts falling down the tree and continues to hit a branch every couple feet. In the illustration that goes along with this scene, it looks as though Winnie is freefalling the whole way down to the ground. This scene in the book is very similar to one of the beginning scenes of the movie. In this scene, Winnie starts out by looking in his shelf at his honey container and sees that his pot is empty and he needs more honey. The same quote about the bees that Winnie says in the book is also said in the movie. But in the movie, the above quotes are turned into a song. The movie turns some larger or bigger quotes in the book into a song. This example goes along with the point that Hutcheon makes that new media’s create a different interpretation of the original text. In the movie version of Winnie-the-Pooh, the director of the film interpreted that more scenes should be turned into songs to create a sing-a-long feeling to the film. But this interpretation creates a more upbeat and cheerful mode to Winnie-the-Pooh. The media creates new interpretations of the characters that the reader may not have considered from reading the book.

Although Hutcheon’s points focus mainly on fiction adaptations, her points are also valid for fiction pieces as well. In the final pages in the book, Finding Winnie, Mattick starts to talk about the little boy with the stuffed bear that fell in love with Winnipeg. Mattick states, “His name was Christopher Robin Milne. Christopher Robin would visit Winnie at the zoo, and then he would take his stuffed animal on all sorts of adventures in the wood behind his home” (Mattick #). This quote explains that the fictional character of Christopher Robin in the original *Winnie-the-Pooh* book is in fact a real person. Blackwall’s illustration of Christopher Robin has the same clothes on as the picture of Christopher Robin in the opening pages of *Winnie-the-Pooh*. Realizing that Christopher Robin is a real person adds a new layer of depth to his character. In Winnie-the-Pooh, he is thought of as this fictional character that lives with Pooh, Eeyore, piglet and all their friends. But since Christopher robin is a real person, it makes him seem more human and realistic when you reread Winnie-the-Pooh. The reader now has a different interpretation of view of Christopher Robin knowing that he was a real person.

The second point that Hutcheon makes is that “the act of adoption always involves both (re-) interpretation and then (re-) creation; this has been called both appropriation and salvaging…” (Hutcheon 8). This means that adaptation is not exactly the same as the original text. The adaptation will take the original story and interpret it into the new authors own ideas and views and then use their creativity to create an adaptation. Depending on the audience, people may think that adaptations are creative and new or they are disrespectful to the original author. Adaptations are meant to add new perspectives to the original story, not just create a replication of what has already been said.

The most prominent example of recreation from the original *Winnie-the-Pooh* story is looking at the different illustrations used throughout the different adaptations of Winnie-the-Pooh. In the original chapter book of *Winnie-the-Pooh*, Winnie looks more like a teddy bear than a real life bear. Winnie stands on two legs, he is yellow with a large belly. He is not wearing any clothing. Pooh does not look like a real bear. Rabbit, however, does look like an actual bunny rabbit, he is brown, with large ears standing up and down, he hops like a normal bunny would hop. In the original book, all the drawings are in color, none are black and white. In the film version, The *Adventures of Winnie the Pooh* created by Disney, the characters look different. In the movie, Pooh always wears a red shirt that says Pooh on it. He still stand on two legs and is yellow, but he now has a red shirt. Rabbit, however, changes drastically. He is now a yellow rabbit with a white belly. He has a bright pink nose and bright pink ears. He also walks on two legs instead of hoping like a bunny. In these two different adaptations, the filmmakers and illustrator recreated the reader’s idea of the characters. The change to the characters appearance changes the way the viewer may think about a character. This is an adaptation of the visualization going on for the reader.

This point is also valid in the adaptation from *Winnie-the-Pooh* to *Finding Winnie.* The illustrations by Blackall in *Finding Winnie* are much different than the illustrations from the original book. Since Finding Winnie is a non-fiction piece of literature, Blackall illustrates Winnie as a real bear. Winnie walks on four legs, he is dark brown with fur, and he doesn’t wear clothes. Although there are scenes where Winnie stands on two legs, the text explains, “Harry taught her to stand up straight and hold her head high and turn this way and that, just so!” (Mattick #). Winnie in this book is viewed more as a real life brown bear than a teddy bear. Winnie’s new image creates makes the reader think about how the teddy bear figure in *Winnie-the-Pooh* comes from the image of the real life bear, Winnipeg. The readers may now think of Winnie with a different opinion when reading *Winnie-the-Pooh*.

Hutcheon’s final point on adaptation focuses on how adaptations are a form of intertextuality. She says that “we experience adaptations as palimpsests through out memory of other works that resonate through repetition with variation” (Hutcheon 8). This quote is explaining that adaptations can be considered a type of inertextuality because these stories use points from the original text along with points from other novels as well. The author of the adaptation has the ability to use their creativity to use their own thoughts and ideas along with ideas of other stories to create a new and interesting piece.

The original story of Winnie-the-Pooh created a baseline for new and creative adaptations. There are many adaptations that stem from characters in *Winnie-the-Pooh.* There is a book, *Winnie the Pooh: Piglet the Brave*, which focuses mainly on Piglet. This book is about how Piglet is afraid of so many things. He is afraid of the dark, of storms, and so much more. In this story, Piglet is stuck in a storm and has to find the courage to find safety. This specific adaptation makes Piglet the hero instead of Winnie the Pooh. This whole book is focused on Piglet become braver and stronger. In the original story, Piglet is still afraid of most things in the books, but the stories are never focused completely around Piglet. This adaptation keeps the same characterization of Piglet as the original text. This book gives the reader more information about to piglet and adds to his character.

Finding Winnie does similar character changes to Winnie as the previous adaptation did to Piglet. From the beginning of the book, Winnie is described as “having something special” (Mattick #). Winnie is taught tricks that a normal bear may not be able to do. He is given jobs to do in the military. Winnie is a special bear. This is also true to Winnie in *Winnie-the-Pooh*. Winnie is known for being a very kind and friendly bear. In one chapter, Winnie is walking around and he sees a large hole. He says, “ ‘ Aha!’ said Pooh. ‘If I know anything about anything, that hole means Rabbit,’ he said, ‘ and Rabbit Means Company…’” (Milne 24). Winnie loves to be with his friends and anyone he can talk to and eat with. Finding Winnie shows the reader that even as a real bear, Winnie was still friendly and loving. Even before Winnie turned into a stuffed bear, he still had the same personality. Mattick creates reasoning for the personality that is so well known in the books of *Winnie-the-Pooh*.

Author Cathlena Martin opens another span for thinking about *Finding Winnie*. In the beginning of her argument, Martin states that adaptations are not just intertextuality. Adaptations are more like combing the original story and the creativity of the new author. In her scholarly piece, Martin focuses on the children’s book of *Charolette’s Web*. Since the original story of *Charlotte’s Web,* there have been adaptations in book form as well as different forms of media too; including games, movies, toys, etc. All of these different adaptations have the same plot and main idea as the original *Charlotte’s Web* story. Martin writes that “a new media version of a text expands the text’s boundaries, generating an additional primary text within that story’s scope” (Martin …). This means that the new media versions of the original text of *Charlotte’s Web* grow beyond just being a children’s picture book. Now, children will remember this story as a book, a movie, and his or her favorite childhood toy.

Creating new forms of media for a piece of literature allows the readers to remember the piece more. In *Finding Winnie*, Mattick is appealing to a new audience with her new adaptation. This children’s book is appealing to adults and teenagers as well as children. This is a true story about a man who found bought a bear, and that bear changed his life. Towards the end of the book when Harry has to let Winnie go, he tells Winnie “‘There is something you must always remember,’ Harry said. ‘It’s the most important thing, really. Even if we’re apart, I’ll always love you. You’ll always be my Bear.’” (Mallick #). This story pulls at your heartstrings. It makes the reader feel sympathy for Harry. This story isn’t just a fictional piece for children to enjoy. Finding Winnie adds a realistic side to the tale of Winnie-the-Pooh. This new adaptation in a new form of media, non-fiction, expands the original boundaries of Winnie-the-Pooh. Finding Winnie helps the classic tale of Winnie-the-Pooh become more memorable.

The main point to focus on when it come to adaptation is the idea of pleasure. The author of an adaptation needs to keep the readers in mind. The author must think of what would make his or her audience happy and what they would hate. Authors of adaptations do not have to stick with the specific idea and plot of the original book, but they keep some of the original aspects of the story the same. Adaptations are meant to have readers think in a new perspective. The adaptation should create a new layer of depth or ideas to the urtext.

Most scholars writing about the keys to a successful adaptation do not focus on non-fiction adaptations. The majority of them are thinking solely of fiction. These points are valid and give specific reasons as to why these adaptations are successful. But all of the above points explain what makes a successful non-fiction adaptation as well. *Finding Winnie* is a non-fiction piece of literature that adds new depth and information to the well-known story of *Winnie-the-Pooh*. Mattick’s novel creates a new perspective for readers. She gives the real life account of the story behind the well-known and beloved bear, Winnie the Pooh.

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