Television and Serial Adaptation

As American television continues to garner considerable esteem, rivaling the seventh art in its “cinematic” aesthetics and the complexity of its narratives, one aspect of its development has been relatively unexamined. While film has long acknowledged its tendency to adapt, an ability that contributed to its status as narrative art (capable of translating canonical texts onto the screen), television adaptations have seemingly been relegated to the miniseries or classic serial. From remakes and reboots to transmedia storytelling, loose adaptations or adaptations which last but a single episode, the recycling of pre-existing narrative is a practice that is just as common in television as in film, and this text seeks to rectify that oversight, examining series from M*A*S*H to Game of Thrones, Pride and Prejudice to Castle.

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Part I

Building Blocks
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Given the current popularity of adaptation studies, and the public acclaim for a new “golden age” in television, it seems odd that there should not be a more extended analysis of where the two might meet. Indeed, both adaptation and television are taxed with similar grievous faults, being more commercial than their “purer” brethren—the cinema in general for television, and the art film in particular for film adaptations—or being too tightly tethered to their texts (whether it be the adaptation’s source text or the reign of the writer/producer in television) to take full advantage of their visual media. The hybrid nature of adaptation, the difficulty adaptation scholars have had in defining what constitutes an adaptation, an allusion, or a simple use of intertextuality, is similar to the heterogeneous nature of television, which was always the repository for film, news, variety shows, or talk shows in addition to the panorama of different types of television fiction we’ll be discussing here. The intersection of these two areas of study, then, center around some of the same issues, which may be either compounded or transformed when television broadcasts adaptations, providing new challenges and surprising innovations for those whose interests lie in either of these disciplines.

The relative lack of academic focus on the topic is perhaps all the more surprising given that television’s early dependence on previous forms of narrative is well-known. Like the birth of film, which poached stories, writers, and directors from literature and theater, early television was characterized by its adaptation of radio dramas in particular. In this, television followed in the footsteps of all young media, which tend to smooth the transition of the new technology by using previous narrative forms to showcase their innovations without ruffling the feathers of novice users:

The introduction of a mass communication medium normally occurs when an economically viable commercial application is found for a new technology. A third element necessary to the launch, content (i.e., something to communicate), is often treated as something of an afterthought in the process. As a result, adaptations of popular works and of entire genres from previous media tend to dominate
the introductory period of a new medium, even as they mutate under the developing conditions. Such was the case in the rise of the television sitcom from the ashes of network radio.2

It seems clear, then, that adaptation has always been an issue in the television landscape, but perhaps never more so than now. The new golden age of television3 has an unprecedented voracity for content, given the multiplication of sources for television fiction, be it broadcast networks, cable channels, satellite television, or non-broadcast sources like Netflix, Amazon, or web series on YouTube or elsewhere. As a result, the number of adaptations from various media onto the small screen has multiplied, with TV studios seeking tried and true formulas from other media, be it film, literature, graphic novels, websites, etc. In her 2003 work Storytelling in Film and Television, Kristin Thompson lists adaptations from film to TV between the years 1980 and 1998, and names 71 series overall,4 which sounds impressive in and of itself. However, at the time of writing, the Internet Movie Data Base lists 81 television series based on a play,5 177 series based on a film,6 347 based on a comic,7 and a whopping 1044 series based on a novel;8 of these 439 have appeared since 2000, when Thompson’s statistics end.9 Clearly, a phenomenon that was already significant when Thompson wrote has now reached epic proportions.

Though we’ve argued that this is nothing new to television, what is novel about recent adaptations is not just their omnipresence, but also their reception. There has arguably never been such an emphasis placed on the process of adaptation in television. The improved availability of foreign television in the United States has increased familiarity with the original inspiration for American adaptations like The Office (NBC, 2005–2013), The Killing (AMC, 2011–2013, Netflix, 2014), or The Bridge (FX, 2013–2014), making the relationship between source text and adaptation more visible (and more easily subject to criticism). Indeed, one could argue that this is but one aspect of a more general phenomenon, the “forensic fandom” that Jason Mittell studied in relation to the series Lost10 (ABC, 2004–2010), which delights in digging into the hidden meanings of text.11 Finding similarities and differences between source text and television adaptation and teasing out underlying meanings in the choices showrunners make to keep or discard elements of the original narrative thus becomes another way to interact with the fiction. Indeed, the lure of this adaptation-based “forensic fandom” is so strong that the website The AV Club has two different types of episode reviews for Game of Thrones (HBO, 2011–), one for fans who have read the novels on which the series is based, and one for those who prefer to watch only the series: the show has contributed largely to the debate on the prevalence of spoilers, as book readers argue about sharing their knowledge of plot points from long-published novels.12 Likewise,
the new emphasis on “quality television” inaugurated by Robert J. Thompson, and the creation of the showrunner as the auteur of new quality shows, has heightened the attention paid to the complexity of narrative as never before. Adaptations, therefore, become the locus of all kinds of debates on new television: the question of the author/auteur, the complexity of serial storytelling and narrative, the specificity of the serial form as compared to its source material, for example. Each of the following chapters will explore one of these issues raised by small-screen adaptation, taking its cue from adaptation critics like Thomas Leitch, Christine Geraghty, or Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan, all of whom use case studies judiciously to illustrate the multifaceted nature of adaptation.

Adaptation studies have come into their own since Bluestone’s first book-length study on the subject. Though early studies largely focused on film’s inability to be faithful to its source, given the innate limitations of the medium that many dated back to Lessing’s distinctions between poetry and painting, more recent works have sought to define and study adaptations as such, trying to pinpoint what constitutes the nature and the value of an adaptation without placing it in a hierarchical (and necessarily subordinate) relationship with its source material. This desire to question the established cultural value of the source text smacks of postmodernism, of course, with its tendency to eschew the strict distinctions between high and low culture, though Kamilla Elliot notes in her seminal work *The Novel/Film Debate*, adaptation is fundamentally a delicate balance of theoretical stances:

Adaptation lies between the rock of a post-Saussurian insistence that form does not and cannot separate from content and the hard place of poststructuralism’s debunking of content, of original and local signifieds alike. If words and images do not and cannot translate, and if form does not and cannot separate from content (whether because of their mandated insoluble bond or because content is simply an illusion), then what remains to pass between a novel and film in adaptation?

With some rare exceptions, where scholars have returned to the fidelity argument, adaptation studies have recently tended toward definition (and redefinition) of its ambiguous central term, and reconsideration of adaptations in relation to not only its source material, but the various elements influencing its creation, as per Philippe Marion and André Gaudreault’s theory of transécriture.

Though many of these studies offer valuable insight, the application of adaptation studies to television has been fairly rare, an oversight that this work hopes to help correct. To do so, however, it seems crucial to note the specificity of the television adaptation, especially as
compared to its more widely studied cinematic kin. To do so, I’d like to examine two somewhat problematic adaptations to television, *12 Monkeys* (SyFy, 2015–) and *Caprica* (SyFy, 2010). These two series have much in common; not only did they air on the same channel and come from the same science-fiction genre, they adapted well-known and beloved source texts\(^{21}\) (Terry Gilliam’s film *12 Monkeys* (1995), and Ron Moore and David Eick’s television series *Battlestar Galactica* (Syfy, 2003–2009), respectively) making them among the most anticipated new series upon their débuts. They are both in fact re-adaptations, as those source texts were in fact adaptations of earlier works—Chris Marker’s *La Jetée* (1962)\(^{22}\) and Glen A. Larson’s *Battlestar Galactica* series (ABC, 1978–1979), respectively. But ultimately, I chose these two series to begin this study of television adaptation because they challenge the very definition of what adaptation is, and thus force us to redefine the term for the television. Indeed, what interests me most about these two series is that they became associated with their well-known sources only after the fact—thus calling into question their status as adaptations at all. Series creators Terry Matalas and Travis Fickett wrote a script called *Splinter* about time travel that came to the attention of producer Richard Suckle, who was eager to remake the Terry Gilliam film;\(^{23}\) Remi Aubuchon intended to make a television series about artificial intelligence before being put into contact with Ron Moore and David Eick, who were interested in expanding the *Battlestar* universe. Because these shows were retooled to become adaptations—and this reinvention was made public knowledge—it seems that they are a particularly apt example to illustrate some of the particularities of adaptation applied to the art form of television. Unlike most adaptations, where adaptors almost systematically accentuate their desire to reinvent a beloved text, and their respect for the author and source text, here equal weight has been given to both the original idea and its relation to an older text; these became adaptations not because they were originally inspired by their source texts, but because they shared similar themes, similar concerns. Though of course upon broadcast their status as adaptations was predominant, given that the audience does not have access to the original screenplays, but can study the source texts at will, nonetheless the fact that their showrunners were open about this almost coincidental adaptation seems revealing; the admission thus precludes the hierarchisation of the original as the source text, at least in theory. In his article “Adaptation, the genre”, Thomas Leitch suggests that some films are perceived as adaptations even without knowledge of the source text, that markers are signaling its adaptation status independent of its origins.\(^{24}\) By examining these two series, we will see how this idea can apply to television: what constitutes a television adaptation? How does it identify itself as such, with or without knowledge of its source?
Beyond their unusual genesis, of course, readers might also question the choice of these series as adaptations rather than as remakes, reboots, or spin-offs. Addressing this issue demands that we take into account the specificity of the ongoing storytelling of television fiction; the implications of serial storytelling cannot be overstated in understanding the unique nature of the television adaptation. Long-running series in particular tend to fairly quickly outstrip their source material, leading them to almost systematically add in plotlines and characters; the division of story into seasons and episodes (and in shows on non-premium cable channels, into fairly stringently determined acts to leave room for commercial breaks) demands different structures, different beats than those commonly practiced in other media. The model for television adaptation is without a doubt an expansive one, incorporating new ideas, new models alongside the old. In keeping with this, there are forms of adaptation that have been popularized by the small screen, notably the spin-off (as is the case for Caprica), which maintains certain elements (most often characters) from a previous television fiction and places them in a new context (but with a few notable exceptions, in the same genre). The reboot, which begins a well-known story anew (often bringing it into a more contemporary setting) and the prequel, which precedes the original story, have also become very popular in the contemporary television landscape. Caprica is all three of these and was one of the first television prequels to hit the air, while 12 Monkeys is a reboot, transposing the action that in Gilliam’s film took place in the mid-1990s into the year 2015 (and 2043 post-apocalypse). The proliferation of terms intended to categorize these different forms of adaptation seem in keeping with contemporary adaptation theory and what Imelda Whelehan and Deborah Cartmell terms its “will to taxonomize.” Though these terms may allow for a more specific analysis of certain elements in these different forms of adaptation (the relationship between television prequels and their link to comic book origin stories, for example), as a first book-length study of television adaptation as a whole, I seek to demonstrate what all these forms have in common, what makes them adaptations, and what forms the adaptation can take in the television format. Indeed, as Thomas Leitch makes clear in his article on the topic, “adaptation” is a term that is perhaps impossible to define. Rather than relegate each of these forms to its own chapter, I seek instead to show how television adaptation interrogates fundamental aspects of both adaptation and serial audiovisual storytelling. “Adaptation”, as I use the term here, will be as expansive as the television format I’m examining. It could perhaps be associated with what Richard Saint-Gelais has termed “transfiction”, where “fictional elements are used in more than one text”; though Saint-Gelais himself has ruled out adaptation as a form of transfiction, his definition of
adaptation seems particularly restrictive (and perhaps contrary to the very idea of adaptation):

Is it judicious to consider adaptation as a transmedia form of transfiction? Given that an adaptation is based on a common diegetic foundation, we could be tempted to say yes. I hesitate to do so, however, precisely because of this goal of diegetic equivalence, which is incompatible with the profoundly transfictional actions of extrapolation and expansion: adaptations do not intend to continue the story, much less suggest new adventures for the protagonists. [...] One might recognize transfictional elements in these transformations; adaptation studies might find fruitful avenues of investigation. But one should keep in mind the somewhat particular nature of these transfictional operations that few readers or viewers will see as diegetic developments of the original, [but rather as ... ] (fortunate or unfortunate) deviations from this principle [of equivalence] than as a contribution to the original fiction.32

It seems that adaptation does not necessarily demand diegetic equivalence, particularly in the case of television adaptations. On the contrary, television adaptation also seems a unique opportunity to rethink one of the bêtes noires of adaptation theory, the fidelity debate.33 As the television media, with its extended duration and serial storylines, makes equivalence more or less impossible, thus it offers new opportunities for a broader understanding of what adaptation can be. In the case of Caprica and 12 Monkeys, approaching them as adaptations allows us to discern better how the exploration of their original themes (artificial intelligence and time travel) are deepened by associating them with preexisting fictional universes. By making the artificial intelligence of Caprica the Cylons, who are both the destroyers and the progenitors of humanity, the show profits from an accrued sense of the dangers and possibilities of technological innovation, and the religious themes underlying the Battlestar universe underscore the notions of identity and reality it explores (do Cylons have a soul? What is religion without the need for faith?).34 By making Splinter into an adaptation of 12 Monkeys, the bleak post-apocalyptic world of Gilliam’s film gives added weight to the urgency of time travel, while fundamental changes to the mythology of the film (notably, that time can indeed be changed) says much about television, which must remain open-ended, rather than closing down all possibilities as in the inevitability (and self-contained nature) of the feature-length film. The definition of the term “adaptation” must be expanded to accommodate the different forms of transfiction present in television, in the same way that television itself is constantly expanding to accommodate new storylines, new characters, new settings, etc.

Of course beyond its challenge to the definition of adaptation itself, one of the first aspects of the television adaptation made explicit in the
case of Caprica and 12 Monkeys is its commercial nature. These series were clearly greenlit because they became adaptations rather than original series. Their broadcasting channel, Syfy, played a particular part in this: as Battlestar Galactica’s critical acclaim had essentially put the young channel on the map, it was eager to reclaim that status with various expansions of the Battlestar universe. However, unlike the other popular television version of SF, Star Trek (NBC, 1966–1969), the choice was made not to expand the universe as a whole, describing different ships or colonies from the original series, as the many spin-offs of Star Trek did, but instead to focus on origin stories: both Caprica and later web series Battlestar Galactica: Blood and Chrome (Web series, 2012) feature a character named William Adama, one of the principal characters in Battlestar Galactica as the commander of the titular ship, played by Edward James Olmos. Blood and Chrome recounts Adama’s early days as a pilot for the Colonial Fleet, while Caprica recounts the story of his family (the character given the name William Adama ultimately turns out to be the Battlestar Galactica character’s elder half-brother, whose name he shares). Caprica, ultimately, is the origin story of the Cylons, the artificial intelligence that takes on accrued importance in the contemporary reboot as compared to the 70s original series, rather than the direct link to Battlestar Galactica that the same Adama character would have implied.

12 Monkey’s series creators have openly admitted that they originally said no when asked to helm a 12 Monkeys reboot, citing the Terry Gilliam motion picture as “a perfect film,” but were encouraged by Atlas Entertainment, which had long been seeking to adapt the film property. In both cases, it becomes obvious that television adaptation is a commercial effort, a move made to get the series produced—though, as the short-lived nature and extensive mid-season retooling of Caprica proves, not necessarily to allow it to survive. Their status as adaptations definitely ensured publicity and popular interest in the new series that would not have otherwise been afforded unknown pilots; thus for example The Gates, a television series with a similar fan base (it was a supernatural drama, with a proliferation of vampires, werewolves and witches no doubt influenced by the ongoing popularity of the Twilight franchise), opened to little fanfare in the summer, and was often only discovered by fans online, though it, too, appeared in 2010, and was broadcast on major network ABC rather than Syfy’s cable channel. Caprica, however, had its own panel at the 2009 editions of both San Diego’s Comic Con and Paley Fest and premiered its pilot episode there, creating considerable hype for the series, named by many as one of the most anticipated series of 2010.

Television adaptations are also clearly organic forms, changing as the series continues, with obvious ramifications for any attempts at fidelity to the source text. The genesis of these two series highlights the collaborative and constantly evolving nature of the television series from its very inception as a series, modulating from one central idea to another
according to input from various collaborators (producers, studios, broadcasters, cast, and crew). While Caprica and 12 Monkeys are a particularly obvious example, they only serve to emphasize an aspect of television adaptation that is widespread, if not ubiquitous. In True Blood (HBO, 2008–2014), for example, the first and second seasons remained relatively faithful to the original Sookie Stackhouse novels (Dead Until Dark and Living Dead in Dallas, respectively) upon which they were based, but they sharply diverged when it came to killing off the character of Lafayette. Though his death was the impetus for one of the second novel’s major storylines, the character as portrayed onscreen by Nelsan Ellis was such a success with both the showrunners and with the public that they decided to keep him alive, and he was one of the few remaining original characters in the series finale. The popularity of actors, the availability of shooting locations, the audience reaction to certain storylines (and the creative team’s response to that reaction) will inevitably impact the television series, perhaps as much as does the source text. Though neither this nor the commercial considerations just discussed is a real particularity of television—film is also subject to commercial concerns and the whims of circumstance when filming—the duration of television exaggerates these considerations beyond those of feature-length film.

George R.R. Martin, the author of the source text for one of the most faithful long-running television adaptations to date, Game of Thrones, has spoken of “the butterfly effect” in relation to adaptations: as in Ray Bradbury’s short story, where a time traveler steps on a butterfly while hunting dinosaurs, only to return to a dystopic future effected by his misstep, the smallest change at the outset of a story can have ever-increasing implications as the story continues. Though he has mostly discussed the issue in relation to character deaths, this is even more true of the structural changes inherent to television adaptations, which tend to prefer ensemble casts to the smaller character list of novels, for example, so as not to privilege a single actor who may or may not continue to be available throughout the series (as was the case with the previously discussed True Blood). Likewise, while only rarely do films have more than one director (or directing team)—if there is a change of directors, this generally means reshooting the film under new direction—the opposite holds true in television, where it is rare for either the directors or the creator and/or showrunner to remain unchanged for the duration of the series. Both Caprica and 12 Monkeys have changed showrunners—12 Monkeys lost one of its initial showrunners in its second season, while Caprica was retooled mid-season with new showrunners to try and reinforce the emotional aspects of the show. The change in showrunners was particularly flagrant in Caprica, where a new hand at the helm ultimately led to significant changes in character and plotline. We will be examining the problem of authorship in more detail in Chapter 4, but whether or not one ascribes to the possibility of
an “auteur” vision of television, the impact of changing directors, producers, writing teams is visible to the audience in a way that film simply cannot be, because the serial format allows us to view these changes as aired, incrementally. Whether the creators intend to simply remake the source text for television or not, the very nature of the media makes this attempt significantly more difficult than in feature films.

The fact that Caprica and 12 Monkeys are ostensibly works of science fiction also highlights another particularity of television adaptation: the complex nature of television genre. Jason Mittell has suggested that television genre is unique, and cannot be seen simply in terms of its content, but also in relation to broadcasting context (channel, hour of broadcast, duration of the individual episode, etc.).47 We have already seen the importance of the broadcasting network, Syfy, in simply getting these shows greenlit, but their generic affinity can also be associated with Syfy, which originally specialized in science fiction, before choosing to diversify with reality shows, wrestling matches, and horror films. In keeping with Mittell’s assessment of the impossibility of generic purity for television programming, these adaptations emphasize the generic hybridity of most television fiction: 12 Monkeys’ showrunners have spoken of their desire to make the show a conspiracy thriller,48 something that was explicitly rejected in the feature film, when the titular shadowy organization ended up being fairly innocuous, and the perpetrator was found to be working alone. Likewise, Caprica’s showrunners were outspoken about wanting to break with the gritty naturalistic style of Battlestar Galactica and its space battles, which set a new genre standard at the time, and chose instead to use a slicker aesthetic and an emphasis on family politics in the style of primetime soaps like Dallas (CBS, 1978–1991) or Dynasty (ABC, 1981–1989). Mittell ultimately argues that this generic hybridity can be more effective at pinpointing the particularities of the genre,49 an opinion that certainly seems to have been shared by their broadcasting channel.

The very nature of television as a domestic format, one which largely continues to be enjoyed at home rather than in a public forum like a movie theater (though no longer necessarily on a television screen) suggests yet another particularity of the television adaptation, and a possible justification for the popularity of the reboot, i.e. the proximity of television. Both because of the setting in which it is enjoyed (whether it be at home in front of the television set, or watching an individual tablet, phone, or computer) and the ritual nature of its consumption (either punctuating the weekly schedule of the viewer watching live, or the complete immersion of the new tendency to binge-watch several episodes at a stretch), television is a medium of proximity, creating familiarity in the viewer as they spend hours with the show’s characters, as the seasonal episodes (Christmas episodes, etc.) mirror the passage of time the viewer is experiencing, as shows reference current events in their dialogue and storylines (à la Law and Order’s (NBC, 1990–2010) “ripped
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from the headlines” plots, or the sitcom’s tendency to reference current events in its humor), television has become associated with a certain immediacy. André Bazin has defended the remake by saying that the realism one sought in film demanded that these fictions be remade with the latest technological advances to make them newly believable to the audience; for television, as a medium not just for fiction but also for news, with its increased proximity to its audience, this need is even more important. The updates made to their source texts (from 1995 to 2015 in 12 Monkeys, from the special effects of the 1970s Battlestar Galactica and even the green screen elements of its reboot to the entire virtual worlds of Caprica) are but one aspect of the contemporary nature of these adaptations, which must update the original premise both in terms of setting and effects, and in terms of contemporary concerns: thus Caprica, like its predecessor, examines contemporary fears about religious fanaticism and its link to terrorism, but also explores the ramifications of the then-recent innovations in streaming media and mobile access to the internet through its explorations of “V-World”, the Caprica version of Google glasses, and the danger and potential of virtual reality; likewise 12 Monkeys discusses bioterrorism, a topic even more pertinent in the wake of 9/11 and the recent avian flu and Ebola epidemics, and features an Edward Snowden character whose determination to reveal the government’s secrets leads to the release of the deadly virus—and is seen as its equivalent: “I have exposed the truth to the world, and for that I have been labeled a traitor. […] Maybe I should expose this plague to the world.” (1.07)

And most importantly, perhaps, television adaptations are concerned with their own nature, both as television shows and as adaptations. In the case of both 12 Monkeys and Caprica, the central conceit becomes a means of examining the nature of what constitutes originality and identity, allowing the shows to further their examination of themselves as they advance their respective plots. Caprica’s central conceit creates clear parallels between the show’s premise and the work of adaptation. As was mentioned earlier, the only character that carries over from Battlestar Galactica to Caprica is ultimately the Cylon robot, and the nature of identity for this robot, downloaded with a perfect replica of the personality of a young woman, Zoe Graystone, now dead in an attack by a religious extremist, is at the heart of the series’ concerns. Is avatar Zoe simply an inferior copy of her creator, a thing, or can she have a life, a soul, an identity of her own? Clearly, the series’ interest in virtual reality and artificial intelligence becomes a metafictional commentary on the responsibilities an adaptation has to its source text and the possibilities that source text offers for a new lease on life of its own. The religious language here becomes a recurrent plotline, as the struggle between monotheistic beliefs and a polytheistic society is at the center of
the chain of events that will lead to the birth of the Cylons. In *Battlestar Galactica*, this was of course also one of the major themes, but in the context of an adaptation, the condemnation of monotheism, the idea of a single god, who has all the answers (“a monotheistic religious philosophy, advocating the worship of a single, all-knowing, all-powerful God”, 1.01, or “a moral dictator called God”, 1.05), becomes reminiscent of a purist interpretation of the source text, to which the adaptation must pledge its fidelity to a superior original form. Likewise, the virtual reality created by Zoe’s father Daniel Graystone, one of the elements that was initially present in Remi Aubuchon’s pitch for a series, and that is new to the *Battlestar* universe, has the potential to be both “a moral vacuum” (1.05), an accusation familiar to all those blaming television violence for various social ills, as well as a possible expression of true artistry, as avatar Zoe uses this world at will to express feelings, and create new possibilities for herself and her fellow avatar Tamara. This, of course, can be seen as an enactment of debates on the responsibilities of television fictions (and the video games to which the series owes much of its virtual reality aesthetic). If we associate this virtual reality with the process of adaptation, the debate becomes one of imitation versus artistry: the series can indeed be reduced to a simple imitation of the original world of *Battlestar Galactica* (just as in the series, one of the most popular games in the virtual reality is *New Cap City*, where Caprica City is reproduced perfectly, but with a *film noir* aesthetic), but ultimately *Caprica* allies itself with Zoe, and her new creation rising from the foundations of the previous world of New Cap City. Towards the end of the series, Zoe comes to recognize her potential for individuality and expression when she is faced with a figure that looks like her: “You’re not her. You’re not the same. You keep walking in her footprints even after her footprints have stopped. But you didn’t have to. Even she knew that. Now are you going to lie down and pay for her sins or are you going to own yourself?” (1.12)

The representation of this virtual reality also seems an attempt to address concerns about the evils of television and its addictiveness. Character Heracles might help Tamara Adama’s avatar brave the difficulties of New Cap City, but ultimately seems lost in the real world. Josef Adama, in his efforts to find his daughter’s avatar, loses himself to the game and virtual stimulants, neglecting his real-world responsibilities to his son William Adama in his quest to find what remains of his daughter who was killed in the pilot’s terrorist attack. Those who have ever spent hours watching a marathon of a television series will, of course, recognize themselves. By the same token, *Caprica’s* actual inclusion of Caprican television programs, notably the comic news show *Backtalk with Baxter Sarno* and its inflammatory and divisive effect on the public, seems to point to the possible evils perpetrated by the small screen in this world (and by extension in ours). The fact that characters from the series
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appear on the show, and manage to find a middle ground, despite the talk show host’s provocations, points to the possible cathartic advantage of narrative fiction, which allows viewers to explore the ramifications of some of the extremes proposed by the media, without actually inflicting harm. Amanda Graystone insists on honesty in her dealings with the media, both when she first realizes her daughter was involved with the STO (Soldiers of the One), who perpetrated the terrorist attack, and later on Backtalk when she defends her daughter from criticism, and this honesty is ultimately her saving grace. The series eventually focuses on the coming together of the Graystone family, monotheist avatar Zoe and her polytheist parents, and this idea of bridging the divide between generations and different forms of belief can easily be associated with a desire to bridge the aesthetic and thematic gap between the 2003 series Battlestar Galactica and its prequel.

Likewise, the monotheistic plans for “Apotheosis”, an illusion of paradise to those who martyr themselves in terrorist attacks, can also be associated with the nature of television narrative. While “true believer” Clarice Willow offers this solution as a sure means to guarantee the popularity of the new young religion, as it offers “a religion that removes the need for faith, a religion of certainty that reflects the wonder of all we have created.” (1.10), this certainty of a happy ending is proved false not only within the narrative, where avatar Zoe ultimately destroys what is essentially a recruitment tool for possible terrorists, but also within a television narrative, where happy endings are never guaranteed (a fact that Caprica learned the hard way, as it was forced to abruptly conclude its storylines upon learning that it had been cancelled). Even its status as prequel, where the outcome is seemingly just as certain as the diegetic “apotheosis” for the believers, the fixed ending for the series significantly included some surprises, most symbolically through the true identity of the William Adama character we’ve been following, who is in fact the half-brother of the William Adama character of Battlestar Galactica, thus making the link with its predecessor even looser, a thematic adaptation of similar concerns rather than an adaptation of specific characters to a new environment, as is traditional with the television spinoff (transporting character Frasier Crane from Boston to Seattle as he moves from Cheers (NBC, 1982–1993) to Frasier (NBC, 1993–2004), for example, something I’ll be examining further in Chapter 2). It is no coincidence that though Caprica recounts the height of Colonial civilization, there is no mention of the sacred texts of polytheism, no mention of the Pythian Scrolls that set the last remaining humans of Battlestar Galactica on their quest to find Earth. Instead, we have a religion that permeates the society depicted here, but that can be reinterpreted by different societies, different cultures in many different ways, from the Taurons’ shrines to the departed and their sense of honor and community to the Capricans’ looser sense