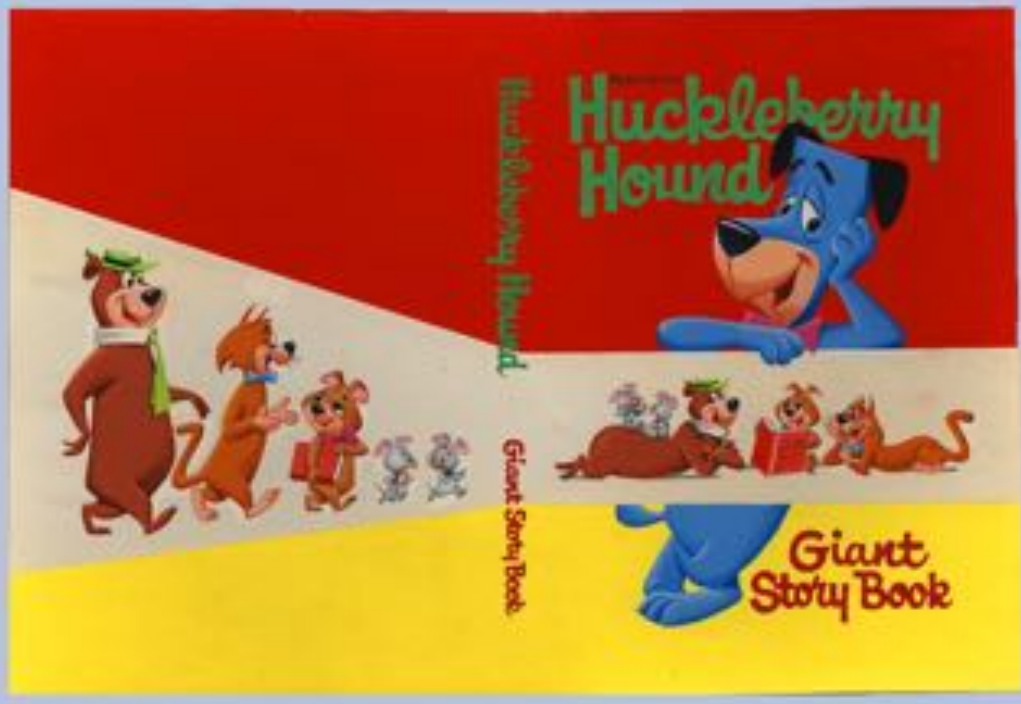
Huckleberry Hound
Huckleberry Hound
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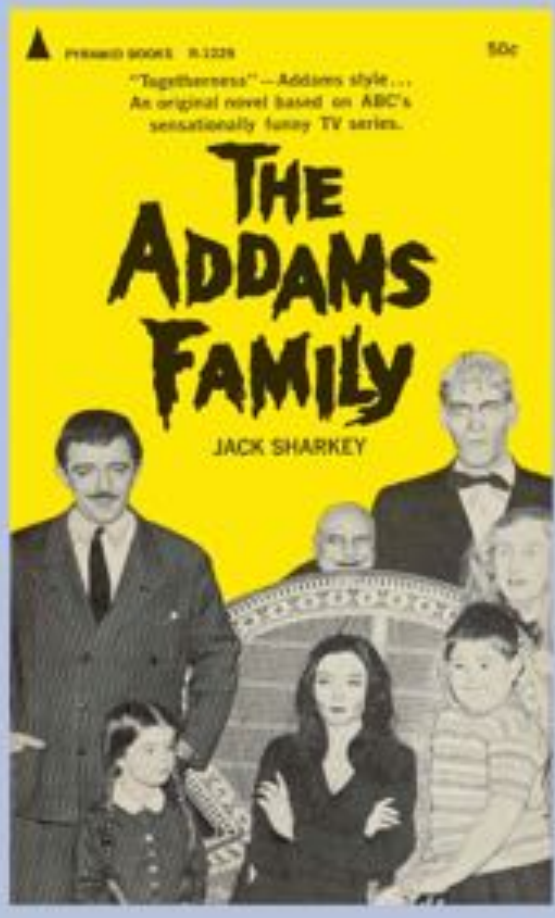
Giant Story Book


PYRAMID BOOKS R-1229
50c
"Togetherness" — Addams style . . .
An original novel based on ABC's
sensationally funny TV series.
THE ADDAMS FAMILY
JACK SHARKEY

THE TEASER

Media tie-in writing is literature. Real literature. Every now and again world literature. And that's because its history is populated with fascinating, colorful and dynamic authors of significance, renown and skill, doing their very best in the challenging arts of adaptation and creating original stories within borrowed universes. Which, when you think about it, go back millennia, almost to the beginning of codified storytelling.

We won't go back *quite* that far.

I write these words in 2022.

Our history will begin in earnest at about 1915.

My personal history with tie-ins began about half a century later…

I realized at the age of four that I'd taught myself to read. It was the late '50s, kids like me still had box-shaped record players, and I had a bunch of read-along illustrated books that came with 45rpm platters. Book on your lap, you'd play the record; the narrator (sometimes a TV celebrity of the day) would read the text, and every time the narration was punctuated with a little *boop* or other cute sound effect, you'd turn the page.

Well, on this particular day, I was sitting on my bed, legs splayed out in front of me, paging through a classic Little Golden Book—either *The Tawny Scrawny Lion* or *The Saggy Baggy Elephant*—and as far as I was aware, I was merely looking at the drawings for about the guhzillionth time—and halfway through the book, as always, Side One of the record was over.

The record player was across the room. I did not get up to flip the 45, though the needle kept audibly tracing the loop of the end groove.

Instead, I just kept flipping the pages.

Because suddenly, and I mean *suddenly,* all those lines of black characters underneath the illustrations were comprehensible as words. I was very quietly awestruck.

I looked at print on the spines of some of my other picture books on a small shelf, at other things around me with displayed text, just to be sure it wasn't a trick of rote memory.

Nope. I was actually *reading.*

Back to the title page. The book was written by Kathryn and Byron Jackson. Were they a mommy and daddy? Illustrated by Gustav Tenggren. He needed two Gs. I was even reading the names of the authors. And thinking about them.

Somehow, via book-and-record sets—and no doubt other input of which I had no conscious awareness whatsoever—my brain had made the connections, cracked the code.

And I would begin grabbing more and *more* things to read.

To feed the fire that would never go out.

***Opposite—Huckleberry Hound Giant Story Book* (1961) by Eileen Daly, cover art by Frank McSavage; and *The Addams Family* (1965) by Jack Sharkey**

I wasn't much interested in stuff without pictures right away. I was an avid animated cartoon watcher, so I continued on with books whose characters, as illustrated, evoked animation. Where possible, I'd grab (or beg for) picture books actually *about* TV cartoon characters. But aside from comics (another subject) such books were often just simple kid stories, generic juvenilia hung on the avatars; their stories never delivered the real *flavor* of my favorite toons, by which I mean—though I didn't know it then—the subversive, sometimes adult plotting and humor that gave them attitude and indelible personality.

Until I hit a book that was a revelation to me:

Huckleberry Hound, Giant Story Book by Eileen Daly (Whitman Books, 1961).

Three illustrations from *Huckleberry Hound Story Book* (Artist: Frank McSavage)

An anthology of 20 stories, each adapted from a toon script that featured either Huck…or Yogi Bear & Boo-Boo…or Pixie & Dixie and Mr. Jinks. Hardly classic prose, of course. But what Ms. Daly brought to the party was authentic capture of the show's wry tone.

And timing.

She didn't get in the way by describing *or* explaining everything. Instead, she trusted her kid readers to make intuitive leaps off the dialogue, *even* off nuances of technique, such as delaying an image description until *after* the sound-effect word—for the sake of getting a sight gag precisely cadenced.

She nailed the characters, their voices, got why they were funny, and most importantly, understood why they were (though ostensibly animals) *human.* Each story was its source toon's literary equivalent, and in those days—decades before home video—that was to be cherished. But curiously, not all the short story adaptations followed their episodes-as-televised beat for beat. Some were variants. I was too young to ponder *why* she might have made those changes—did she just feel like it? was there some expedience in-

volved in going from script to prose? had she ever been working from an early-draft script?—but the very fact that they were there introduced me to the conscious idea that adaptation could be more than direct transposition.

That may have been my first serious exposure to the essence of "real" tie-in writing.

Very quickly, I wanted more substantial fare to read, but I just couldn't "get with" the kid-lit that was popularly recommended. Franchises like *Tom Swift* and *The Hardy Boys* held no interest for me, I didn't care about the adventures of other boys; one-offs like *The Kid Who Batted 1,000* (ubiquitous then, a collector's item now) were actively anathema, because I wasn't remotely into sports. And I wasn't quite ready to appreciate literary classics, though a few made their way through.

I did, however, cotton to Walter Brooks' *Freddy the Pig* series, Hugh Lofting's *Doctor Doolittle* novels and Jerome Beatty Jr.'s adventures of moon-boy *Matthew Looney*. Because they were *kind of* like television shows, with continuing characters, some of whom were also animal/human analogs. Commensurately illustrated.

And my TV-watching was starting to encompass live action, in particular sitcoms—*if* they were fanciful. Through which enthusiasm I discovered adult paperbacks—all text, no illustrations—based on TV shows that I liked.

The most fateful 50¢ I may ever have spent was for the first book (of two), published by Pyramid, based on a black-and-white ABC network sitcom and named for it: *The Addams Family* (1965). The cover described it as a novel, but actually, each of its ten chapters was a self-contained original episode (no script adaptations), notwithstanding a little linking material.

The *sitcom*'s source material was, of course, the macabre one-panel magazine cartoons of Chas. Addams, depicting cameos of a charmingly gruesome, horror-nightmare family he'd named after his own. The sitcom, ahem, fleshed out these characters, crafting for them fully developed stories in a similar, ahem, vein.

Given that uniquely bizarre storytelling universe to borrow, the author of this not-quite-novel chose to offer a comic narrative whose literary style was both contemporary and baroque. His first chapter was an origin myth; a prequel to the TV series (before that word had even been coined)—which featured the first entrance of patriarch Gomez Addams, entering the central *location* of the series: the spooky old turreted mansion into which he and his family will move. Ellipses in brackets […] signify abridgment:

John Astin as Gomez Addams

There came the click of a closing door latch. Neither [realtor, Miss Bankly or Mr. Fedler] had heard it open. In silent unison, their heads swiveled about until they were facing the door to the street. A man stood silhouetted against the shadows beyond the glass of the door, the "twilight mists of winter" still curling over the polished toes of his midnight-black shoes. As he stepped toward them from

the damp threshold, what Miss Bankly had taken, for one hideous moment, to be a single luminous orange eye in the center of his face resolved itself into the hot tip of a long panatela gripped between teeth as white and symmetrical as tiered tombstones. But Miss Bankly's first impression was not entirely amiss. The bulging eyes of Gomez Addams did indeed have two bright orange fires in their inscrutable depths […]

Gomez Addams stretched out his hand and clasped that of Mr. Fedler. "Buenos dias!" he said crisply […]

Fedler wondered how the owner of such a hot-blooded face could have such icy fingers. "Y-you mean 'noches,' I think," he quavered, essaying a pallid little pleasantry.

Gomez widened his smile. "I like to think one's day begins at sunset, rather than ends. There's something invigorating about awakening to the first clammy shrouds of darkness! It makes the blood wonderfully sluggish."

And that's how—at the age of eleven—I encountered the work of science fiction novelist and comedy-mystery playwright Jack Sharkey (within the only tie-in he would ever write, but *still* among the best sitcom-based novels in the history of the genre).

It's not merely the wordplay and imagery that's notable here. It's the heightened sense of drama that comes via introducing Gomez through the eyes of a passing character who (unlike the reader), has no familiarity with him. This allows the reader to discover Gomez afresh, without simply being told things already known from the TV episodes.

More than this, by staying out of Gomez' head in this crucial introductory moment, the author sets up permission for Gomez to be always something of an enigma—even though, in time (as in tune with the charm of the series), the Addamses will begin to represent a "new normalcy," and the "normal" world will seem increasingly unhip and askew.

Jack Sharkey

And there's one more factor that needs to be pointed out; as vital as anything else:

This is Gomez *exactly* as he was played on television by John Astin. If you were a fan of the series, you'd recognize him. If the book inspired you to sample the series, you'd recognize him. Perfect in either direction.

One cannot underestimate the mastery of craft on display here.

And as a young reader discovering his future as a writer…I didn't.

Thus began my devoted, increasingly active love of media tie-in fiction—when most of the authors I would go through decades reading were still alive and at the peak of their powers—for those were the first books that triggered my addiction to reading; novel reading in particular, but non-fiction reading was not far removed, especially if there was free-associative interest.

And this introduces one of the most important—spectacular, really—aspects of media tie-in writing: The associative curiosity it inspires. Perhaps more than any other small-L literature, it is the most prolific and effective gateway to large-L literature that exists.

The lure, of course, is the property: an enticing TV show or film, established or forthcoming.[1] When you catalog the authors, the fields of interest, the types of story, the various free-associative connections, you have a radiating starburst of pathways to discovery. Depending on the reader's timeline entry point, current or collectible, in the present or in formative years, the potential for engagement at any age is limitless.

And not merely engagement: If your impulse is to be a writer yourself, even if you already *are* a working writer, tie-ins—especially experienced collectively over time and regularly—provide a terrific education or enhancement to an existing toolkit. You just have to think about them deconstructively…to find the principles you can emulate and the techniques you can employ, vary or refine. *The Novelizers* will be your guide through that as well.

Let me offer you a just a little taste of what I mean in practical terms…

I've made most of my living in the musical theatre, as composer-lyricist, lyricist-librettist and teacher, and I've authored a book on the craft (*The Musical Theatre Writer's Survival Guide*) which contains a chapter on adaptation…the practice of which has informed every musical of mine that's ever been produced.

Where tie-in writing is concerned, there are two crucial aspects of adaptation (which, here, can also be extended to bringing one's talent for original invention to a pre-established storytelling environment):

Process and *Approach.*

We'll deep dive via tie-in writing—of course—in the chapters to follow. But to start, I want to acclimate you to thinking about adaptive and borrowed-universe writing philosophically, by offering a shift in perspective. Tell you something that happened to me, in the service of delineating…

Process

2015 marked the world premiere, in Montreal, of *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*—book and lyrics mine, music by Alan Menken—based on the late Canadian novelist Mordecai Richler's classic, edgy coming-of-age story (also adapted as a film starring Richard Dreyfuss, with a Richler screenplay). [2] & [i] The novel has sometimes been referred to as "Canada's *Huckleberry Finn";* it takes place in the early 1950s, likewise in Montreal. And Richler (1931–2001)—who lived there, worked there and set many of his novels there—is a Montreal icon. And a major voice in contemporary Western literature.

Not long after the production closed, I was called for a meeting at the New York City office of a film studio executive who had seen the show, and of course admired it, because that's sometimes how those meetings come about.

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[1] Count computer game and toy franchise universes too—they're outside the focus of this book, but the principle is the same: a storytelling universe with built-in appeal to its audience.

[2] To those who may be curious, see the first endnote, back of the book, for more on the production itself.

Ken James Stewart and Marie-Pierre de Brienne in a scene from the musical *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* (2015, Photo: Maxime Côté)

Nothing came of the meeting. Zero effect on my career.

The point of the anecdote is an exchange that happened *during* the meeting.

Originally from Canada, the executive had been intimately familiar with Richler's book before attending the musical—and, knowing the novel to tell a fairly complex story within a ricochet structure that sometimes seems more improvised than organized, he knew too that musicalizing it had to have required rigorous restructuring. He knew as well that such restructuring meant engineering a constant sense of forward movement along a thematic spine holding everything together. (Musicals have to be built that way or the elements sprawl and audience focus becomes diffused.) Whatever didn't hew to the spine would have to be tossed or made *relevant* to the spine.

And—for audiences who knew and loved the book (to be expected in Canada, Montreal especially), the musical adaptation had to seem faithful to the novel—even though it couldn't be. In a structural sense, it was the novel's opposite. The executive knew that too. And felt compelled to question me about it.

"Okay, everything important from the book was there," he began, "and you still had room to sing. You were dealing with five, six—no, *seven* plot threads"—he ticked them off from memory, one at a time—"plus you made an ethically shaky character sympathetic without softening him, and got away with a happier ending. How the heck did you do all that?"

I had indeed worked my way through those challenges very consciously, and I love teaching—and I have enough ego to make "How I Did It" an agreeable topic—so I briefly took him through a cook's tour of my adaptation process—emphasize mine—addressing the issues his question raised: External adjustments. Deliberately invisible *internal* adjustments (i.e. that subtly altered the psychology of a character, the dynamic of a relationship,

the function of a story beat). Principles of song placement that let musical numbers *take over* from dialogue. All very nuts and bolts.[3]

When I finished, the executive thanked me…

(…isolating it…)

...for a fascinating breakdown and adding to his understanding of the craft.

In that case, the craft of adapting a pre-existing work for musical theatre.

But for our purposes here, that response begs a question.

Maybe the *essential* question.

Why, *why,* WHY should transformative craft, choice and process be considered—by critics, historians, literati or even the reading public or *anybody*—to be any *less* fascinating and worthy of learning about when adaptation goes the other way?

When a script is artfully novelized?

Or when the storytelling universe of a television series becomes the basis of equally artful original novels featuring its characters and concepts?

Why is it so often sidelined, even blithely dismissed, as "hackwork"?

Stop me when I hit a condition that can't as readily apply to the work of a stage or screen adaptation by a dramatist:

Because it's writing for hire?

Because it's commercial?

Because it's populist?

Because it has to be completed fairly quickly?

Because its shelf-life can be limited to the endurance of its popularity?

Because it's not wholly original?

Because the writer didn't "make it up himself"?

Or is it: the belief that a prose adaptation is "just filling out" the bones of a script? Or worse, just mechanically removing script-format indicia, throwing "stage directions" into past tense, and putting quotation marks around dialogue?

Those of you reading this book because you already love tie-ins will join me in saying to those of you who hold such untruths to be self-evident: don't be so sure.

Approach

Not only is much tie-in writing *artful*…it's *individualistic.* As individualistic as any other kind of adaptation or storytelling universe pastiche.

You'll remember the pointed emphasis above on *my* process; that's because—even with similar training and adherence to principles of craft—another musical dramatist would have approached *Duddy Kravitz* from a whole different angle.[4]

To illustrate the point (and the pointedness), let's take a property *everybody* knows.

Not only are we all familiar with Charles Dickens' eternal holiday novella *A Christmas Carol,* we've all seen it dramatized countless times: If we limit the roster to English language mainstream motion pictures and television alone, there are *dozens* of ad-

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[3] And to share credit where due, director Austin Pendleton (one of the great theatrical minds of the last half-century) and genius musical director Jonathan Monro (who ain't no slouch neither) provided some crucial rehearsal and-preview-performance insights that helped push everything over the top.

[4] And in fact, before our Montreal iteration became the official version, other musical dramatists *had*—including *me,* solely as lyricist, in an altogether different and much less effective adaptation that played a brief 1987 run in Philadelphia.

aptations, going back to the beginning of cinema…and we each have our favorite versions (and matching Scrooges), don't we? And probably you've gotten into a few—hopefully good-natured—debates about which one is better. And the Dickens source structure is far simpler than that of the Richler novel I described above.

Indeed, there's a limit to how much any adapter can fool around with it; *A Christmas Carol* is as ritualistic as a Catholic mass and brings along with it audience expectations that *must* be fulfilled, because it has been *that* universally known and ever-increasingly popular since its publication in 1843.

—You *have* to start Ebenezer Scrooge off as an implacable miser;

—you *have* to dramatize the damned, doomed ghost of his former partner Jacob Marley invading Scrooge's bedroom sanctum with a warning, to prepare him for the journey;

—you *have* to have the three Ghosts of Christmases Past, Present and Future to show him what he gave up, what he's missing and what's in store;

—you *have* to give Scrooge the same or similar situational realizations to shake his miserly resolve and trigger his buried sense of compassion—and finally…

—you *have* to burst into the endgame sequence of Scrooge waking up as if from a dream to embrace his redemption. And acting upon it *immediately*…because it's still Christmas Day, and he hasn't missed it after all.

Quincy Magoo as Scrooge (1962)

I, of course, have personal favorites of my own; two of them: the non-musical one starring George C. Scott (1984), teleplay by *Pippin* librettist Roger O. Hirson…and *Mister Magoo's Christmas Carol,* starring the voice of Jim Backus (1962), teleplay adaptation by Barbara Chain; and score by Broadway veterans Jule Styne (composer) and Bob Merrill (lyricist)—their first collaborative effort, preceding *Funny Girl*.

Byline info alone tells you that these two adaptations would have to be widely contrasting; but let's look even closer…

Mister Magoo's Christmas Carol—my very first exposure to the story, at the age of seven—was also the first-ever animated special created for network television. Occupy-

ing an hour-long slot, including commercials, it had to do its job in about 52 minutes (add a minute for opening and closing credits). It was fashioned around the additional familiarity of The Nearsighted Mister Magoo—the well-meaning but cantankerous senior citizen star of nearly 50 short cartoons—portraying Scrooge. To legitimize the conceit, the creative team devised a bookend framework: They "reintroduced" Quincy Magoo as a renowned actor (and why not?) currently *playing* Scrooge on Broadway. Because the storytelling had to be compact enough to fit within *that*, adapter Barbara Chain chose to eliminate the subplot involving Scrooge's nephew, Fred—and Scrooge's initial refusal to join Fred, his wife and friends for Christmas dinner—and she *conflated* the Fred-and-family function with the subplot involving Bob Cratchit, Scrooge's put-upon employee, and *Bob's* family. This prompted one more unique alteration: Ms. Chain *reversed* the appearance of the first two ghosts. She *started* with the Ghost of Christmas Present, to more firmly establish Bob as the second lead—marking what's at stake for the Cratchits as the first emotional anchor, while tacitly planting the seed of their becoming Scrooge's extended family upon his turnaround. An amazingly potent strategy for boiling a story down to its essentials, yet infusing those essentials with rich nuance.

George C. Scott as Scrooge (1988)

Roger Hirson's teleplay for the live action version was as effective in its own and even opposite way. Crafted around George C. Scott's larger-than-life screen presence, it obliterated the notion of Scrooge as a crotchety old skinflint and made him a truly formidable adversary to Christmas; a powerful, unsentimental man of fortune and a merciless business-is-business titan: a tougher nut to crack than any Scrooge before or since. I remember, the first time it aired, how struck I was by scenes that had never been dramatized before, that no dramatist had ever taken *advantage* of before. The one I relished most occurred early on, establishing Scrooge the Businessman, as he strolls magisterially through the London Stock Exchange, making hard-line deals. *How wonderfully, thoroughly faithful,* I thought. And when the movie was over, I pulled the novella off my bookshelf to relive those never-before-dramatized scenes.

And of course *none* of them were there.

Dickens never wrote them.

Mr. Hirson had extrapolated them from what was implicit; they were scenes of his own invention; and all of them enhanced rather than padded. But so dead-on was the characterization—the dialogue and its locution—the *integration* of the new material into the classic foundation—that it all *felt* like authentic Dickens.

Two adaptations of the same story; one brilliantly reductive, one brilliantly expansive, both entirely faithful to Dickens' tone, intent and vision, while also filtered through and intertwining with the tone, intent and vision of the authors.

Tie-in writers make precisely the same kinds of decisions.

Decisions, Decisions…

When adapting a dramatic work…Multiple, shifting points of view or one? If only one, how to account for the scenes where the observing character isn't present (and are they necessary given the other tools prose gives you to work with)? Third person omniscient or first person? If multiple POVs, what about alternating first person? Emulate a genre style for immediacy of tone, or slow-walk through ambiance to let a larger tapestry emerge? For novelistic comprehension, is there a sequence that needs to be reordered? Where the script quick-cuts back-and-forth between two parallel scenes, is it best to adapt each scene in its entirety, to maintain focus and flow? Is there a mandated word count; are there studio approvals to deal with; how does *that* affect approach and process?

When creating an original story in a borrowed universe such as a TV series…How to communicate the series' dramatic tone in prose? At what point does internalization violate known continuity and how to navigate the limits? What do you do with a main character who is also an enigma? Suppose your target *reading* audience is younger than the show's *general* audience; both will buy the book; how do you satisfy the *needs* of both?

These and many other considerations—examined in depth throughout this book—face tie-in writers all the time, and no two of those writers, even working within the same universe, will deliver their solutions the same way.

And there's no more stark evidence of this than a book series with multiple authors…

…or the same script adapted by two different authors for two different audiences (and the final chapter in this book is entirely devoted to *that*).

And One More Crucial Thing Is In Play

This actually comes from an email sent to me by my friend, theatre and television actor Daniel Marcus, upon reading a nearly-final draft of this book:

> You know I loved *Close Encounters of the Third* Kind—I couldn't see it enough. I always cried at the end. Not when Richard Dreyfuss went onboard the spaceship, or when the kid said "goodbye," of course. But at the hand signals between the alien and Truffaut, which is really where the movie's been heading all along.
>
> But boy, that last line in the book—"Jillian took one last picture, the last of the most important pictures in the history of the world"—that was MAGIC! It's that cool thing where, for a moment, I have the illusion that I'm sharing a secret with the book, that only it and I know. I guess that's a big BIG BIG BIG (now that I think of it) difference between a novelization and a movie. One is shared, which is culturally important for a civilization to survive. The other is a secret conversation between the writer and only me.[5]
>
> You see a movie. A book sees you.

[5] In this case, the writer was Leslie Waller (1923–2007), who ghosted *Close Encounters* for Steven Spielberg.