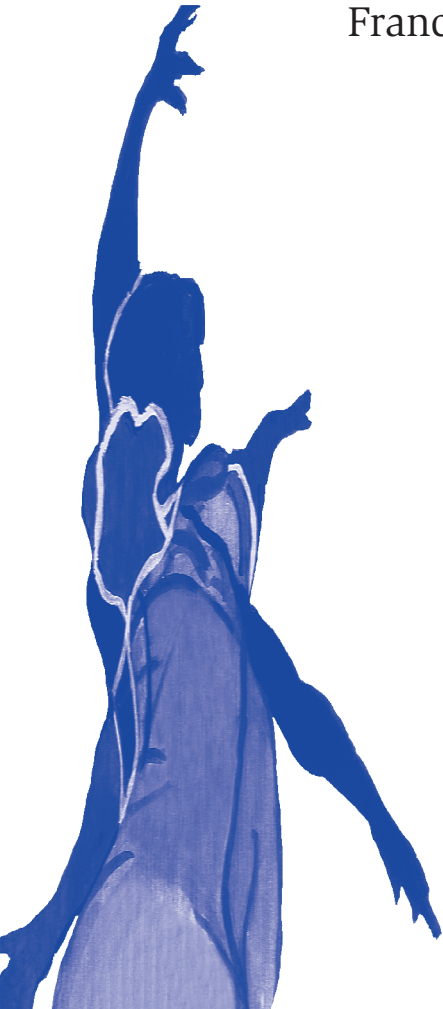Neil Archer and
Andreea Weisl-Shaw (eds)

Adaptation

Studies in French and
Francophone Culture

Modern French Identities

Originating in the conference held at the University of Cambridge in 2009, this collection of essays includes a range of innovative papers from across the diverse field of French and Francophone studies. From medieval texts to the dramatization of the novel, from post-colonial writing to the politics of film and the *bande dessinée*, the articles in this collection draw on recent developments in the theories of adaptation, translation, and cultural and textual transition. In keeping with these developments, they move the notion of adaptation away from questions of authenticity and fidelity, thinking instead about the movement across texts and time, and the way such movement generates new meanings. Offering insightful approaches to its subjects of study, the book is an engaging contribution to this growing area of research.

Neil Archer holds a PhD in French cinema from the University of Cambridge. He is a Lecturer in Film Studies at Anglia Ruskin University.

Andreea Weisl-Shaw completed a PhD in medieval French and Spanish literature at the University of Cambridge, where she is a College Lecturer and Fellow in Modern Languages at Corpus Christi College.

Adaptation

Modern **F**rench **I**dentities

Edited by Peter Collier

Volume 99

Neil Archer and
Andreea Weisl-Shaw (eds)

Adaptation

Studies in French and
Francophone Culture

Contents

vi

Acknowledgements

NEIL ARCHER AND ANDREEA WEISL-SHAW

Introduction: Theorizing Adaptation

To engage in any study of adaptation is to confront the often conflicting discourses that coalesce around the term across different contexts. If adaptation is regarded within scientific discourse as inherent and natural to all living beings, within the field of cultural production it is more likely to be seen as one artistic option amongst others. To ask within a scientific context why we should adapt would invite derision: we adapt because that is how we survive, exercise our curiosity, improve our skills and develop a sense of the world. Yet to ask the question in a literary or visual-cultural context, which this introduction is presently attempting, is to risk another kind of answer: one which might emphasize the derivative and second-hand aspect of adapted texts; their potential acquiescence to the safe, the tested or commercially viable option (in the form, say, of cinematic literary adaptation), and therefore a repudiation of those qualities – originality, creativity, spontaneity – often held to be essential values of any artist and artwork.

    This is a view questioned by the essays presented in this volume. These essays suggest, rather, that adaptation in its various cultural modes be seen on a level with its scientific sense. In conjunction with a number of other recent works devoted to adaptation as an artistic practice,[1] we would like to suggest an approach to adaptation which emphasizes those same qualities – of originality, creativity and spontaneity – which might otherwise be held in opposition to it. Above all, this book moves beyond the idea that the work of adaptation, as cultural production, is reducible to that form of text – sometimes literary, though more often than not visual,

---

1   See for example: Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006); Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

theatrical or musical – thought to stand in a secondary and hence inferior sense to the original text from which it derives. Clearly, and as many of the essays here argue, there is always a degree to which some signified of a source text, be it the work's cultural connotations or the author's notional intention, is dialogued with in any work of adaptation. Yet if we are to discuss the adaptive process in positive and generative terms, and in turn challenge the discursive dominance of the 'original' over the 'copy' which would otherwise impede us, our work must adopt the following approach: firstly, we should question the supposed markers of fidelity to an anterior model that might be assumed to be the requirements of an adapted text; secondly, and relatedly, we might focus our attention more on those markers of infidelity, rather than fidelity, that distinguish and foreground the adaptive practice.

The Possibility of Adaptation

The trans-media nature of much adaptation – be it the theatrical versions of novels by Balzac or Proust, or the illustrations embedded within Céline and Tardi's *Voyage au bout de la nuit* – emphasizes that a 'faithful adaptation' (like its relation, the 'accurate translation'), is an oxymoron. French culture has often placed an emphasis on the correspondence of value and meaning across different faculties of sensation: for example, in the *dérèglement des sens* of Rimbaud or Baudelaire's poetry; the subsequent cross-fertilization of music and poetry in the late nineteenth century; or indeed, in Proust's efforts to evoke sense memory in prose. While we might concede that certain aesthetic equivalences can be felt or recognized across different art forms, it is nevertheless difficult to ascertain whether such equivalences are not merely analogic, experienced as an approximate equivalence of the

value of each part within its own aesthetic domain.[2] Dudley Andrew, taking this semiotic approach, consequently addresses the problem of adaptation in the following terms:

> Since signs name the inviolate relation of signifier to signified, how is translation of poetic texts conceivable from one language to another (where signifiers belong to different systems); much less how is it possible to transform the signifiers of one material (verbal) to signifiers of another material (images and sounds)?[3]

It is important, moreover, to challenge the evaluative distinction between the borrowed or calqued nature of the adapted text, and the supposed self-sufficiency of the original work. Here we should note that the concept of *mimesis*, which has held such sway over artistic creation in the Western tradition, has its roots in practices of imitation. The artwork, then, to follow Aristotle's analysis in the *Poetics*, is always a copy of something within the world, whose significance lies not within its originality, but within its capacity to generate recognition through verisimilitude. The tension between the original and the copy (or what Harold Bloom would subsequently call the anxiety of influence)[4] was in this sense of less concern to the Ancient Greeks; just as, to an extent, it was of less concern either to Shakespeare, or to his near-contemporaries in the French neo-classical drama, all of whom freely borrowed pre-existing narratives. The irony in fact in any claim to artistic originality is that it ignores the extent to which all representation adapts some form of prior conception – for example, those markers which constitute 'verisimilitude'. As Andrew emphasizes, such representations always draw on common signs through which meaning is produced; signs which are always culturally and historically contextual.[5]

To summarize these arguments, looking closely at works of adaptation enables us to see the value of questioning both the equivalence between art forms, and also the hierarchical status of certain art forms over another,

2   Dudley Andrew, *Concepts in Film Theory* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 102.
3   Andrew, *Concepts*, 101.
4   Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973).
5   Andrew, *Concepts*, 97.

or of original works over copies. It enables us, moreover, to move beyond the question of an adaptation's 'fidelity' to its source. From a strict point of view, a true or faithful adaptation would by definition not exist, as it would simply replicate the primary model: how in fact can an adaptation in itself be experienced or recognized without its differentiation from the original? Adaptation study must therefore stress that the pleasures and meanings of adapted texts are always intelligible in terms of difference and dialogue, rather than subservience to some master text. To take a popular example, we might think of the way film and television adaptations of classic novels – Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, for example – assume their own visual shelf-life: their prominence, combined with the added value conferred on them by the book's literary status, confers on the adaptations in turn their own evaluation as 'classic'. At the same time, they might end up usurping the very source – the book, possibly less widely read than imagined – which helped confer their status in the first place. Not to mention the way Boublil and Schoenberg's musical version (now better known as *Les Miz*) has come to exist within its own signifying field of popular musical theatre, almost totally divorced from the novel to which it is notionally affiliated.

Adaptation, Authorship and French Critical Theory

Since adaptation theory focuses on the way in which second-order texts challenge their original models, generating meanings distinct from the latter, or in excess of them, it is perhaps not surprising that adaptation, as a practice and a critical study, should flourish within the late twentieth-century critical turn. In the French context, key essays by Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault paved the way for adaptive practices in their analyses and critiques of the signifying properties of authorship and originality. In 'The Death of the Author', for example, Barthes suggests:

> The author is thought to *nourish* the book, which is to say that he exists before it, thinks, suffers, lives for it, is in the same relation of antecedence to his work as a father to his child. In complete contrast, the modern scriptor is born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing.[6]

The vaunted concept of authorship and its attendant evaluation are what Foucault would call a function of the text: 'the author's name serves to characterize a certain mode of being or discourse [...] that, in a given culture, must receive a certain status'.[7] Importantly, the authority of authorship is seen here to operate in a bottom-up, rather than top-down fashion: a product to a large extent of the reader's work, or 'a projection, in more or less psychologizing terms, of the operation we force texts to undergo'.[8] While neither Foucault nor Barthes are discussing adaptation, but rather a politics of reading, it is significant to what extent both writers (and Foucault in particular) stress the way authorship is itself a text, subject to transformed modes of interpretation across different cultural and historical contexts. Indeed, just as each critical generation offers us a 'new' Racine, a 'new' Flaubert (a new Foucault even, or a new Barthes), the tendency within adaptation and to a degree translation practice continually to rework texts, in accordance with the critical concerns of the given cultural context, reveals to what extent adaptation participates in this same evaluative process of reading and interpretation.

For both Barthes and Foucault, the prescriptive and even patriarchal quality of what they specify as the 'work' (*l'oeuvre*) is countered by the organic and proliferating qualities of the 'text' (*le texte*): a distinction which similarly evokes Walter Benjamin's politicized separation of the reproduced art work from the auratic qualities of the original.[9] Foucault

---

6   Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author' [1967], in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. and ed. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), 142–8 (145).

7   Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?', in *Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984: Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology*, ed. James Faubion, trans. Robert Hurley et al. (London: Penguin, 1984), 205–22 (211). Originally published in French as 'Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?', in *Dits et Ecrits 1954–1988, I: 1954–1969* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), 789–820.

8   Foucault, 'What is an Author?', 213.

9   Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in an Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Illuminations*, trans. Hannah Arendt (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970), 219–40.

summarizes the discursively limiting quality of the author by suggesting that 'he is a certain functional principle by which [...] one limits, excludes and chooses; in short, by which one impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition and recomposition of fiction'.[10] For the purpose of adaptation study, however, it is important to stress that such 'composition, decomposition and recomposition' should not, if it is to be intelligible as adaptation, simply give way to the free play of interpretation and re-interpretation. The form and content of an adaptation always indicates some form of response to a prior model, even if we move beyond the linear, secondary status of the practice: in any adaptation, as Julie Sanders argues, 'the intertextual relationship may be less explicit, more embedded, but what is often inescapable is the fact that a political or ethical commitment shapes [the] decision to re-interpret'.[11] The somewhat premature death of the author retains its vital power to 'enable multiple and sometimes conflicting production of meaning';[12] yet it is also important to stress the way even a proliferating network of texts retains its own ongoing process of interpretation and re-interpretation, to the extent that adaptations can themselves be the catalyst for adaptation, and so on *ad infinitum*.

Adaptation, Canonicity and Politics

So far we have argued that the work of adaptation at once acknowledges and refutes an anterior or original model. As this suggests, adaptation remains double-edged: in its own practice, it cannot separate itself totally from that other object to which it stands in relation or even conflict, yet at the same time it is constantly foregrounding this relationship. This ongoing and always-present antagonism is nevertheless a marker of the particular power of adaptation, just as it may be the source of its potential weakness.

10   Foucault, 'What is an Author?', 221.
11   Sanders, *Adaptation*, 2.
12   Sanders, *Adaptation*, 3.

Though reading adaptation in the light of Barthes or Foucault empha-sizes a political potential, the common objection persists around adaptation study that such practices, while they may disrupt the hegemony of author intention and the preferred reading, do not challenge the hegemony of those same works which discursively pre-exist in order to be adapted. Even the most revisionist reading of a classic work still acknowledges the cultural primacy of that same work: in fact, the palimpsest nature of adaptation, especially of so-called classic texts, may be understood as merely adding extra layers to a work's historical reception, and therefore enacting the process of inscribing and re-inscribing the same canon it might otherwise think to challenge.[13] While the tendency for adaptations to add to their subject's cultural status through repetition is clear, we should suggest here that the same act of re-inscription or re-presentation that is foregrounded in adaptation work also has a radical potential.

As we argued above, all representational work contains an element of adaptation, the only difference being that it is only adaptation that acknowl-edges its referent within a pre-existing cultural model. If the debunking of the concept of the author sought to challenge the authorship (and hence the authority) of texts, it was at the same time a challenge to the naturaliz-ation of the artwork as 'truth'. If critical theory under the aegis of Barthes and Foucault, and that of Marxist critics in the light of Louis Althusser's work, called on us to recognize the ideology at work in all representation,[14] then adaptation, in laying bare its relationship to a prior cultural model or object, participates in the critique of representational transparency. All works of adaptation, as their discursive labeling indicates, acknowledge their presence within a network of other texts. This in turn works to foreground those very notions – plural readings, critical distance, intertextuality – so central to much critical theory, and its politicized approach to texts and their reading in particular.

---

13   Sanders, *Adaptation*, 9.
14   See Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1971), 129–87.

Essays in Context: Adaptation in Practice

This book is divided into five parts; while these to an extent have chronological and disciplinary unity, they also aim to emphasize thematic links and shared interpretational approaches across the different works.

Part 1 explores the translation and adaptation of words and images from the medieval and Early Modern periods, showing the way in which language, as well as texts, changed and adapted under the constraints and demands of the time. Laurence Grove's 'Adapting the Image', as well as offering an illuminating view of image production over various historical contexts and media – from seventeenth-century pastiche to *bande dessinée* and film – also serves as an extension to this present introduction in its outlining, through specific readings, of our key ideas. An image, almost by definition, exists as a form of adaptation, itself dialoguing with or referencing previous imagery. Drawing on theory from the likes of Barthes and Umberto Eco, Grove examines image adaptation within the broader context of text/image productions from the early modern era to the present day, showing how certain codes of interpretation work to 'anchor' the signification of imagery across changing contexts and contents. Geoffrey Roger's linguistic analysis of Île-de-France scripta in Burgundy during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, meanwhile, shows how Burgundian scribal practices adapted to the linguistically turbulent times of the later Middle Ages and to the Parisian-dominated standardization of the language, yet still influenced the written language to the present day. Andreea Weisl-Shaw's chapter, 'The Strengthening of the Frame in the *Fables Pierre Aufors*', moves into the domain of literature, exploring the way in which the thirteenth-century French verse translation of an earlier Latin text in prose was at once faithful to the original, yet also reflected the concerns of the French adaptor and his audience. Weisl-Shaw's essay therefore illustrates the way adaptations shed light both on their textual models and changing contexts in a form of dialogue.

Part 2 discusses a variety of adaptations of themes, myths or novels to the theatrical stage. Emilia Wilton-Godbertforde analyses Molière's use and transformation of the Dom Juan legend, used first by Tirso de

Molina's *El burlador de Sevilla*, and then by Italian reworkings, arguing that the playwright's reworking of his sources shows further insight into his unique comic vision and inventiveness. Moreover, Wilton-Godberfforde argues, these textual transformations are interesting because the process of changing, borrowing, reworking, adding and subtracting is at the heart of Dom Juan's mendacious enterprises. Moving into the field of adaptation across forms, Sotirios Paraschas's '"La contrefaçon spirituelle": Balzac and the Unauthorized Stage Adaptations of Novels' and Geneviève de Viveiros's 'Theatrical Adaptations on the Parisian Stage during the Nineteenth Century' get to the heart of adaptation theory in their analysis of the debates surrounding authorship, intellectual property, and the cultural status of different media. Paraschas's essay examines the problems posed, in the first half of the nineteenth century, by the lack of legal protection against the unauthorized appropriation of fictional characters and plots, focusing on Balzac's attitude towards the stage adaptations of his novels. Theatrical adaptations were immensely popular in the nineteenth century, and Geneviève de Viveiros's contribution explores the heated discussions that such adaptations provoked between literary critics, novelists and playwrights of the era, as shown by articles issued throughout the century by urbane newspapers such as *Le Figaro*, as well as more popular publications such as *Le Petit journal*. Finally, Peter Collier revisits the British National Theatre's production of *A la recherche du temps perdu*, considering the problems and possibilities of adapting Proust's novel to the stage. With reference both to the Harold Pinter screenplay that formed a basis for the production, and to his own discussion with director Di Trevis, Collier asks whether or not such adaptations can be measured merely in terms of loss, or whether the transition across media can itself illuminate or re-articulate the literary reading.

Moving into the sphere of postcolonial writing, Part 3 is dedicated to adaptation and translation within the context of cultural pluralism, and the effort to find alternative modes of expression to the dominant, colonial, written model. Claire Bisdorff investigates the oral strategies employed by Maryse Condé in her novel *Traversée de la mangrove* and its translation into English by Richard Philcox. Bisdorff illustrates how the graphics of Creole play a vital role in the new mixed-medium world of creolized

writing, and how Philcox's translation can help shed light on the creolization strategy at the heart of Condé's fiction itself, perpetuating the *parole de résistance* against a dominant writing-based memory model. Similarly focusing on the resistance of *négritude* writers against colonialism and their reflections upon surviving colonial racism in Paris as migrant authors, Bart Miller's 'Adaptation to Colonialism in Paris: Damas's *Pigments*' examines the poetic voice of Léon-Gontran Damas, which has not been widely taken account of within the context of these discourses. Miller examines Damas's work through a close reading of his 1937 collection *Pigments*, suggesting that future criticism might contemplate a gradient, rather than a traditionally polarized interpretation, of *négritude*.

Part 4, discussing trans-cultural and trans-historical reception in literature and film, extends our analysis of adaptation, focusing in particular on reading, reception and interpretation. In 'Adapting Imagery: The Seventeenth-Century English Translation of French Poetic Descriptions', Anne Cameron examines the ways in which seventeenth-century English translators of contemporary French lyric poetry rendered poetic descriptions, particularly of natural landscape, more precise and vibrant in keeping with tendencies evident in English poetry. Cécile Renaud's chapter on the adaptation of French film trailers for British audiences explores the transformation and adaptation processes undergone by French films in their journey across the Channel, using as a specific case study the 2006 fim *Tell No One*. By examining its British and French marketing materials, Renaud shows how the tension between hiding and marketing Frenchness, which appears in the different choices made in the composition of the poster and the trailer, undoubtedly contributed to the success of the film on British screens. Yet in the process, we should note, this kind of 'misreading' may itself work to query those same connotations of Frenchness notionally pertaining to Guillaume Canet's film, itself an adaptation of an American novel. Lastly, Neil Archer looks at the way the increasingly prominent film genre of the biopic works around images and narratives of celebrity as texts in themselves subject to adaptation. Applying adaptation theory to the genre, Archer suggests that the biopic is always a potentially redundant or conservative form in its reiteration of celebrity and cultural status; he then goes on to argue that, as such, the French biopic tends to promote the qualities of performance and theatrical transformation inherent to the form, over and above its qualities of historical narrative or realism.

The final part, 'Performance, Adaptation and Subjectivity', rounds the discussion off by exploring the use of texts and image in juxtaposition to explore questions of identity. Ruth Morris's analysis of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* reads the novel in the light of Georges Cuvier's catastrophist view of the world, which posits radical change rather than subtle transformation, problematizing Darwin's more gradual interpretation of adaptation. According to Morris, Emma Bovary's constant yearning for flight and her leaving every home she has known subtly engages with catastrophism, while her disconnection with her community also bespeaks a Cuverian severance between organisms and their environment. Armelle Blin-Rolland's discussion of Céline's *Voyage au bout de la nuit*, and its republication in 1988 with illustrations by Jacques Tardi, argues that, by being transposed in a different medium and refashioned as cross-media artwork, the novel allows a dialogue between visual and textual, where the images reshape the pre-conceived text. For Blin-Rolland, the juxtaposition of the text and its visual re-formulation provides a cross-media reading experience which refigures the narrative process by challenging the figure of the narrator who, though still present in the images, is deprived of the control sought and attained in his re-writing of reality. In the final article of the collection, Catriona McLeod brings the discussion back round to the medium of the *bande dessinée*, examining how it captures processes of adaptation of ethnic minority women to citizenship in post-imperial France. McLeod shows how their depiction foregrounds the themes of marginality and exclusion, while also raising the issues of gender difference and subordination, and demonstrates that the *bande dessinée* adapts in a most suitable way to the specific challenges of postcolonial representation, by manipulating narrative and memory, juxtaposing colour, and strategically interweaving text and image.

Like those essays that precede it, McLeod's contribution demonstrates what, as we have outlined here, makes the practice and study of adaptation so engaging. Not to be reduced to an inferior or poor imitation, the adaptation possesses its own autonomy and vitality, often assuming a critical stance to the original from which it notionally derives. In covering a range of textual forms, and thinking about adaptation practice beyond some of its more established modes – such as 'text into image' – we have aimed in this volume to suggest at once the reciprocal interaction of different media, but also their freedom and indivisibility as vehicles for particular

narratives or ideas. We have also tried to extend the boundaries of adaptation theory in our questioning of what might constitute the 'primary' text of adaptation, and hence where, and how, we might locate and understand those concepts of signification, originality and invention. In doing this, we hope to add to the ongoing re-evaluation of this often-neglected cultural practice, and make a case for future (re)readings.

Suggested Reading

Andrew, Dudley, *Concepts in Film Theory* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1984)

Barthes, Roland, 'The Death of the Author', in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. and ed. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), 142–8

Foucault, Michel, 'What is an author?', in *Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984: Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology*, ed. James Faubion, trans. Robert Hurley et al. (London: Penguin, 1984), 205–22

Hutcheon, Linda, *A Theory of Adaptation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006)

Sanders, Julie, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006)

Translation and Adaptation of Scripts and Images from the Medieval and Early Modern Periods