

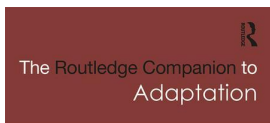
This article was downloaded by: 10.2.98.160

On: 07 Mar 2021

Access details: *subscription number*

Publisher: *Routledge*

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London SW1P 1WG, UK



Edited by Dennis Cutchins, Katja Krebs, Eckart Voigts

The Routledge Companion To Adaptation

Cutchins Dennis, Krebs Katja, Voigts Eckart

Adaptation and the concept of the original

Publication details

<https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315690254-5>

Rainer Emig

Published online on: 12 Apr 2018

How to cite :- Rainer Emig. 12 Apr 2018, *Adaptation and the concept of the original from: The Routledge Companion To Adaptation* Routledge

Accessed on: 07 Mar 2021

<https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315690254-5>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR DOCUMENT

Full terms and conditions of use: <https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/legal-notices/terms>

This Document PDF may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproductions, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The publisher shall not be liable for an loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

3

ADAPTATION AND THE CONCEPT OF THE ORIGINAL

Rainer Emig

Fidelity Criticism, a critical point of view that measures the success of an adaptation against the supposed value and meaning of the original, is as much a stalwart companion of adaptation studies as it is an embarrassment for it. Especially forms of adaptation studies that seem to assume that adaptation only comes into being with film, and that its traditional ‘enemy’ is literary studies, are often perplexed at the fact that critics are still tempted to search for truthful representations of original works or, worse, the intentions of their authors. Focused on the overt communal production of media such as film, such perspectives appear to them outdated and downright inappropriate.

The present chapter intends to show on the one hand that the question of originality is as old as the human concern with artistic expression, and on the other that it cannot simply be laid to rest by stressing the production modes of modern audio-visual media. Moreover, it tries to demonstrate that some central literary models also become testing grounds for contemporary adaptation and the theories that accompany them. Two famous linchpins of Fidelity Criticism in European culture, William Shakespeare and Johann Wolfgang Goethe, will appear as touchstones, but also as interrelated discursive reference points of the debate. This chapter’s latter section will then shift from general cultural and literary questions to those of adaptation between media and its contemporary critics.

Perceiving a piece of art as a ‘work’ has an old as well as a relatively recent history. An early transition already occurred when the era of Classical Antiquity slowly mutated into the Middle Ages. The works of great Classical artists, such as those of the sculptor Praxiteles (c. 390–320 BC), whose works had spawned innumerable copies in the world of Antiquity, were then superseded by works whose origin was attributed to the one Christian creator-God, whose ideas were merely executed by human helpers. These executors could then justifiably remain anonymous.

Fidelity to an original therefore already means contradictory things at this early stage. In Classical thinking fidelity referred to the precise copying of models and their techniques, while in medieval thinking fidelity to an original meant conformity to an underlying theological idea (on Classical Antiquity, see Porter 2005; for the Middle Ages, see Tatarkiewicz 2010: 247).

This tension also characterises the Early Modern period, in which Michel Foucault locates the origin of modern authorship. While in Antiquity and in the Middle Ages so-called scientific works were authorised by the signatures of their supposed creators while artistic ones could remain anonymous, an artistic work now became an original by having an identifiable

creator, while supposed science was acceptable without an identified discoverer (Foucault 1977: 125–127).

The authenticating creator (usually male) supposedly infused an original work with his ideas and skills. These could amount to genius. Since the combined power of creative genius and original work was believed to be strong, there could be no doubt as to its reception. Readings and interpretations were meant to pay tribute to artist and work of genius alike. They were thus usually both biographical and universal, even though this combination (like that of genius) carried within itself another contradiction. If the work was individual and inseparable from the life of the artist–genius, how could it at the same time carry timeless universal meaning on which all interpretations ought to agree unanimously?

The original author

The term ‘genius’ derives from the pagan Classical idea of inspiration as supernatural. In Greek and Roman art, genii were presented as external figures that attached themselves to humans and inspired them (Murray 1989: 9–31). With the Enlightenment, the idea of inspiration as external shifted into the individual human. This culminated in Romanticism, when it became *de rigueur* that a great artist and thinker had to be a genius. The first texts praising Shakespeare, later frequently held to be the greatest English author, as a genius appeared in the eighteenth century (see, for instance, Montague 1770). In his encyclopaedic study on Goethe, Shakespeare’s German equivalent, Gero von Wilpert rightly states that by then the term had become so fashionable as to mean almost anything, but also that Goethe himself revised his definition of genius throughout his lifetime (von Wilpert 2007: 22).

When Goethe reviewed the poetry collection *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* by his colleagues Clemens Brentano and Achim von Arnim in 1806, he aired his own positions on genius:

Das wahre dichterische Genie, wo es auftritt, ist in sich vollendet, mag ihm Unvollkommenheit der Sprache, der äußeren Technik, oder was sonst will, entgegenstehen, es besitzt die höhere innere Form, der doch am Ende alles zu Gebote steht, und wirkt selbst im dunkeln und trüben Elemente oft herrlicher, als es später im klaren vermag. Das lebhaft poetische Anschauen eines beschränkten Zustandes erhebt ein Einzelnes zum zwar begrenzten doch unumschränkten All, so daß wir im kleinen Raume die ganze Welt zu sehen glauben.

1806: 146–147

[True poetic genius, wherever it manifests itself, is complete in itself, however strongly the incompleteness of language, of external technique or other issues may oppose it. It possesses the higher inner form that ultimately determines everything and sometimes even acts more splendidly in dark and murky spheres than later in clear ones. The lively poetic perception of a restricted state elevates a singular state to a bounded but unlimited universe, so that we believe to perceive the whole world in a small space.]

Translation Rainer Emig

Genius stands for completeness, even though the conditions inside which it manifests itself are incomplete and deficient. Goethe points at language as a transient and unstable code as much as at the changing fashions of genre and style. A plethora of other “dark or murky” aspects may hamper genius, and we might well assume that these comprise biographical as well as other contextual issues, i.e. ideological ones. Genius, however, and with it the truthfulness of correct

reading, the ideal of Fidelity Criticism, outshines these problems. The effect is a paradoxical impression of universality within actual limitation.

It is noticeable that in this early eighteenth-century discussion of fidelity a central aspect of what would later become adaptation studies does not yet feature: the media. This is due to the fact that modern audio-visual media were not yet on the horizon and would only enter the scene in the second half of the nineteenth century (although Goethe was very interested in optics). Nonetheless, there already existed an awareness of adaptation, in the sense that popular literary material in prose and verse was frequently transferred to the stage. Goethe himself did not participate in this, but as a playwright, poet and novelist he not only understood the appeals of diverse genres, but also their mutual interplay. It is no coincidence that his famous Bildungsroman *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* [*Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*] was first conceived as a novel about the protagonist's hopes of a theatrical career. In the case of Shakespeare, we do not only find adaptations within the dramatic medium, for example, John Dryden's adaptations of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, the much freer reworking of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* into *All for Love, or The World Well Lost* and the adaptation of *Troilus and Cressida*. In 1673, Thomas Shadwell had already turned *The Tempest* into an opera (see Fischlin and Fortier 2000). We also find prose adaptations of Shakespeare's plays, most famously those of the Romantic siblings Charles and Mary Lamb in *Tales from Shakespeare* of 1807.

Media change is crucial in modern views on adaptation (see, for instance, Cartmell and Whelehan 1999). The inevitable contradiction inherent in the simultaneous adherence to the idea of creation and interpretation (and transformation) of something already created is squeezed into a nutshell in Linda Hutcheon's shorthand for adaptation as "both process and product" in her *Theory of Adaptation* (2006: 31). A little earlier in the same study, she is even more explicit in describing adaptation as "always a double process of interpreting and then creating something new" (2006: 20).

Goethe, this much is evident, is not interested in the fact that creation is inevitably entangled in interpretation, something that later theorists would call intertextuality (Allan 2000). He is a traditionalist inasmuch as he assumes an inner integrity of artist and work that transcends external factors. A further conservative move is the claim of universality in the face of evident limitations. The combination of these effects apparently leads to an interpretation that can only be uniform and unified, an idea of reception that is ultimately authoritarian.

Yet the fact that Goethe also spells out these limitations together with the important disclaimers that we are talking about manifestations and their effects – and end up believing (rather than knowing) that we see a universe inside the limited sphere of art – also opens up the debate to more sceptical views on creativity and fidelity.

For Shakespeare, who lived and worked before the Enlightenment, though in an era that was acutely conscious of its Classical heritage, issues of universality inside a murky sphere of power, politics, religious strife and social mobility and its attendant destabilisations of nation, class, family and the individual, also assume a crucial role. Even more radically than Goethe, Shakespeare must have been aware of the instability of language as a code, since not even spelling was standardised at his time. As a prolific author of plays, he was also undoubtedly alive to the changing fashions that made certain conventions all the rage in one season and outmoded in the next.

Yet, much in contrast to Goethe, no claim to unity of an authorial genius that outshines external challenges and becomes one with the work would have made sense for Shakespeare. Drama, his main genre, possessed a high popular but low cultural status as one of several forms of cheap mass entertainment. An avid theatre-going audience demanded new plays every week. As a result, collaboration as well as plagiarism were rife – and untrammelled by modern copyright laws. This was not perceived as a problem for the works thus produced. Their status as uniform

and unified works of one singular genius is in fact an erroneous attribution of later periods. The fact that Shakespeare never oversaw the publication of his works (and the resulting confusion of versions) is closely linked with the problem of attributing works to Shakespeare at all – and not his sources and/or collaborators (see Drábek, Kolinská and Nicholls 2008).

The original work of art

Ben Jonson was the first playwright to oversee the publication of his works in a complete edition. Jonson's first folio of 1616 proudly sports a frontispiece that places the title *The Workes of Beniamin Jonson* inside a Classical arch, flanked by allegorical figures in antique costumes (Brady and Herendeen 1991). The plural employed in Jonson's strategic publication, however, rather points at the notion of *oeuvre*, the collected products of a now proudly signatory artist, more so than to the integrity and privileged status of a unique work. Only the latter would be capable of demanding a treatment in accord with the demands of fidelity. It is no coincidence that it took a long time for the English language to employ 'work' for anything other than God's and nature's creations – or human activities in relation to God's plan. The *Oxford English Dictionary* lists John Skelton as the first proponent of such a use in 1523. Shakespeare himself is an early exponent of such a loaded use of 'work' to mean work of art. In *The Winter's Tale* of around 1611, the final reconciliation scene contains the lines "her mother's statue, / [...] by that rare / Italian master, Julio Romano, who, had he himself / eternity and could put breath into his work, would / beguile Nature of her custom, so perfectly he is her / ape" (v.ii.97). Compared with their primary works, those of human artists must necessarily remain imitations and therefore deficient.

This changes in the course of later centuries until, once again in the Romantic era, the work of art acquires that which later critics call a nimbus or an aura that makes them resemble traditional theologically sustained creations and become primary works of genius themselves. This change was brought about by a detachment of nature from religion – or rather a projection of traditionally theological qualities into the newly discovered psychology of the now emancipated human being. Already the enlightened eighteenth century had started this trend by assuming that human rationality was in complete accord with the Divine rules of the universe. Rational association of ideas was therefore capable of constructing a world in agreement with both God and nature. External and internal nature were in correspondence in this thinking – and no longer a relation of distanced (and reverential) observation. Wordsworth's famous definition of poetry as the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" from the Preface to his and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads* of 1800 applies to artistic creativity as much as to the reception of the art thus produced (Wordsworth 1800: xiii). This means that it encapsulates the art work in a safe position, where there can be no discrepancy between artistic intention and the audience's perception.

This, together with the already discussed genius concept, turned the artist into a now worldly creator-God, one who could unite hitherto separated art forms, as does Richard Wagner in his concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the total work of art. Since the work was apparently generated from nothing but the artist's genius, it was not bound by any rules or conventions. This opened the way for the radical experiments of Modernism and the avant-garde, yet also deprived art of use-value, something that the aesthetes of the *fin de siècle* proudly proposed in their slogan *l'art pour l'art* – art for art's sake (see Roberts 2011). It is interesting, though, that the independence of this new work of art by no means precludes adaptation. Wagner recycled the German national myth of the *Nibelungen* for many of his operas and used medieval legends for others. Oscar Wilde, the most prominent of the British aesthetes, turned a biblical tale into his play *Salome* of 1893.

The professed aim of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* and art for art's sake was the autonomy of the work of art that would make it independent of previous artistic works and the norms and rules institutionalised by them. It would also make it immune to the ideological issues of its time. Of course, this proved an empty promise. It was also a dangerous one, since it postulated an illusory freedom and a position of complete artistic irresponsibility. Theodor W. Adorno criticises the nimbus of the autonomous work of art as delusional and dangerous in his *Aesthetic Theory*. There he writes (in his usual dense style):

Art works are things which tend to shed their thing-like quality. The authentic and the thing-like do not form distinct layers in a work of art; spirit is not superimposed on some supposedly solid objective basis. One of the key characteristics of works of art is, on the contrary, their ability to undo their own reified shapes in such a way that reification becomes the medium of its own negation.

The two levels are mediated through each other. The spirit of art works evolves from their thing-likeness, and conversely their thing-likeness – i.e. their existence as works – springs from their spirit.

Adorno 1984: 389

In other words: art works use the material conditions of their production as means of obscuring this very production. As works, now with the nimbus of original creation, they deny the labour that was put into them to make them what they are. This, of course, is exactly where adaptation produces a problem for the supposedly original work of art: it reminds the work of art of its object status – since adaptation relies on a source that it adapts. Fidelity Criticism tries to find an escape from this impasse by declaring adaptation false or at least inferior when it does not respect the supposed integrity and definiteness of the original. This original is miraculously exempt from a potential object status and remains rife for associations with nimbus and aura, with unquestioned greatness that exceeds the material, historical and biographical conditions of production.

With reference to Shakespeare, the materiality of the work is blatantly evident in the many versions that exist of diverse texts attributed to Shakespeare, including the so-called 'bad quartos' that nonetheless comprise the first editions of *Romeo and Juliet*, *Henry V*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and even *Hamlet* (Maguire 1996). But it also affects any production of any of his plays. If Shakespeare's apparent original is the model, then all actors would have to be male, since this was the convention of his time. If this convention is revived today, though, it comes across as a daring directorial decision.

Similar problems apply to costumes – which in Shakespeare's time were generally contemporaneous, i.e. Elizabethan and early Jacobean. This produces a conflict with the epochs and cultures in which Shakespeare's plays were set, from Classical Antiquity and the distant British past to the Danish Middle Ages to more or less contemporaneous Italy and the Mediterranean. If 'faithful' productions today put their actors into English Renaissance costumes, they do not escape this problem of anachronism. The issue could be expanded via stage technology and would make reconstructed Renaissance playhouses like the Globe on London's South Bank the only locations where truthful productions might take place.

A much more subtle, though nonetheless material, issue is the stability of language, of the linguistic codes used in adaptations and productions. Would the unstable Elizabethan spellings be the only truthful ones to which a faithful rendering and production must adhere? And what about pronunciation? Even Goethe, our much closer contemporary, is not treated to reissues of his works in their original spelling – or with their original mistakes.

Walter Benjamin was a modern thinker who made the fate of the work of art in the context of its mechanical reproduction a theme of his investigations. The perspective of his 1936 essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” is a twentieth-century one, yet his view is deeply coloured by the effects of the Industrial Revolution. One of its early manifestations was the introduction of the printing press, first manually operated and later steam-powered. For many scholars, the introduction of printing marks the shift from the European Middle Ages to the Early Modern period. Shakespeare’s works were printed, as were Goethe’s, and the printers introduced their own conventions and mistakes into the versions thus produced.

Benjamin’s essay operates in a tellingly dialectic fashion. First it declares: “In principle a work of art has always been reproducible” (1969: 219), though later it seemingly reverts to art’s originality when it states: “The uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from its being imbedded in the fabric of tradition” (1969: 222). Yet in the very next sentence, it already qualifies this assertion again by insisting that “This tradition itself is thoroughly alive and extremely changeable” (1969: 223). There is an original for Benjamin, an authentic art work located in a specific time and space. But this location is far from stable. A similar ambivalence is visible in T.S. Eliot’s essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (1975), first published in 1919. Tradition leads us to the final aspect in which adaptation enters a problematic relation with the idea of fidelity: interpretation.

Universally valid interpretations

When the German Romantics agreed that Shakespeare’s character Hamlet was the prototypical German, they founded an interpretative community and a new tradition, one that has remained alive to the present. When Heiner Müller wrote *Die Hamletmaschine* [*Hamletmachine*] in 1977, he used a term in Hamlet’s speech to his mother: “Thine evermore, most dear lady, whilst this machine is to him, Hamlet” (ii.ii.123–124) for his title and a fragmentary new translation of Shakespeare’s text as the basis of his own. And yet, as critics have established, he also included ideas by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, especially that of the “desiring machine” from their *Anti-Oedipus* of 1972, a critique of capitalism through the psychoanalytic concept of schizophrenia. Lastly, Müller’s text reflects on the role of the intellectual in the GDR and thus represents in a nutshell adaptation, reproduction and the dilemma that Benjamin had outlined for the contemporary art work (Fischlin and Fortier 2000: 208–214). Müller’s works in general refrain from clear positions and messages and are thus prototypical postmodern works. But then again, this might be a contemporary prejudice, for did *Hamlet* convey unanimous messages to its original audience?

German readers not only identified the character Hamlet as one of their own; they also quickly claimed to be a better audience for Shakespeare than the English. Thus, Friedrich Theodor Vischers claims in his lectures on Shakespeare at the turn of the nineteenth into the twentieth century:

Die Deutschen sind nun also gewohnt, Shakespeare als einen der Unsern zu betrachten. [...] Ohne undankbar zu sein gegen England, das uns diesen größten aller Dichter geschenkt hat, dürfen wir es mit Stolz sagen: daß der deutsche Geist zuerst Shakespeares Wesen tiefer erkannte.
1905: 2

[Germans are used to considering Shakespeare as one of their own by now. [...] Without being ungrateful to England, who has bestowed on us this greatest of poets,

we can proudly say that the German spirit was the first to recognise Shakespeare's essence more deeply.]

Translation Rainer Emig

Here we once again have an interpretative community, but now one that recognises itself as such and is capable of evaluating itself. In doing so, it postulates a unique essence in Shakespeare and tellingly no longer distinguishes between person and works, as is typical of genius approaches.

Modern literary and cultural theory knows, of course, that interpretation cannot rely on an essence of meaning that is hidden in texts and art works and merely requires expertise and authority for its correct identification. Reader-response criticism has pointed out the productive uncertainties in meaning that are the real triggers of interpretation (see Iser 1978). Poststructuralism and Deconstruction have driven this further to question whether an ultimate attainment and presence of meaning is even possible, or whether the desire for one is a mere reminder of the theological foundations of knowledge, something Deconstruction calls *logocentrism* (see Derrida 1976: 71).

A more moderate position is chosen by Stanley Fish, who nevertheless posits that interpretation actually precedes the work. In his famous essay "Is There A Text in this Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities" (1980) he argues that

communication occurs within situations and [...] to be in a situation is already to be in possession of (or to be possessed by) a structure of assumptions, of practices understood to be relevant in relation to purposes and goals that are already in place; and it is within the assumption of these purposes and goals that any utterance is *immediately* heard.

1980: 318

What Goethe assumed to be the dark and murky conditions of artistic creation and reception by readers and audiences, and what Benjamin considered the inevitable but troublingly unstable context of tradition without which no work can be an original one, turns the table on the art work in Fish's argument. Interpretation decides what the work is – and what it means – before the work has any say in this. This might seem paradoxical, yet Fish makes a valid point when he continues:

My students did not proceed from the noting of distinguishing features to the recognition that they were confronted by a poem; rather, it was the act of recognition that came first—they knew in advance that they were dealing with a poem—and the distinguishing features then followed.

1980: 326

This spells the end of Fidelity Criticism – or perhaps its reversal: what is to be trusted is now the established meaning produced by an authorised community of readers, who become the new authors of meaning in the place of the original author. This corresponds to the conclusion of Roland Barthes' essay "The Death of the Author", which states: "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author" (1977: 148).

Cultural studies have willingly taken up Barthes', Foucault's and also Fish's position, declaring the common ground of interpretative communities to lie in common political, economic and ideological conditions that enable a group identification under the banner of a correct reading. In a famous Shakespeare essay of 1773, the prominent German intellectual Johann Gottfried Herder tried to wrestle interpretative authority from the French and even the

English by promoting his own genius reading of Shakespeare that put him on a pedestal next to Sophocles (see Osinski 2007). Goethe eventually united his own self-declared genius with that of Shakespeare in a speech given on so-called 'Shakespeare Day' in Frankfurt am Main in 1777. It recuperated Shakespeare not only for Goethe's self-promotion, but also for the emerging programme of *Sturm und Drang*, Storm and Stress, a period also known as that of the cult of genius (Grange 2011: 260–261).

Modern Fidelity Criticism and its uncertain demise

Taking into consideration that the above-mentioned tenets of Fidelity Criticism all belong to a liberal Humanist paradigm that considers the link between authorial power and greatness, the indissoluble work of art and the unity and uniformity of interpretation solid and unbreakable, it is astounding that the first theoretically informed assault on it came from exactly that camp of liberal Humanists. The New Critics, an elitist group of writers and scholars of literature who worked in the 1920s–1940s, wished to rescue the artistic work (mainly poetry) from the onslaught of Marxism and psychoanalysis and revert it back to a notion of greatness that they saw lying within the text itself, in its structures. For their approach, they needed to exclude the focus on the author as the guarantor of meaning, and they did this with one of their famous fallacies (which means common mistakes in interpretation): the intentional fallacy (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1954). Recourse to explicit and supposed intentions of artists and writers were from now on considered erroneous projections. This, of course, also took the authority of the genial author away from any interpretation of a work and opened the path for adaptations that could be more than travesties.

The already mentioned Marxist and Psychoanalytic Criticism, early forms of alternative readings of literary and cultural texts that were later joined by Feminism, Gender Studies, Queer Theory and Postcolonial Criticism, insisted that the artistic work had to be seen in the force field of the political, economic and, in the widest sense, ideological conditions of its time – and that of its reception. A monolithic work to which one could remain true was declared a delusional fable, an expression of an unquestioned ideology rather than its artistic challenge. Coming from the opposite direction as the New Critics, these forms of ideological criticism achieved the same thing, and again made the positions of Fidelity Criticism appear outmoded and reactionary. Cultural studies, which relegated so-called 'high' art and literature to the rank of merely one expression of human culture, did not ask for the meaning of a work of art, but (again in the Marxist tradition) about what 'work' such a work did for a culture at a specific point in history (see Greenblatt 1995). What cultural studies has further done for adaptation studies is to declare the study of all manifestations of art – be they visual, aural, tactile or otherwise – textual studies in its insistence on an extended notion of the text that covers all human manifestations and refuses to differentiate between popular and supposedly high ones. For cultural studies, therefore, hierarchising originals and adaptations is, from the start, a mistaken endeavour, merely a symptom of cultural formations and their prejudices and not an answer to any questions that the hierarchised texts might pose.

The onslaught on the third column upholding Fidelity Criticism, that of a unified and uniform interpretation, came via Poststructuralism and Deconstruction. While Formalism (which emerged at the same time as New Criticism, although its origins in Russia made it forego a bourgeois praise of artistic greatness in favour of the efficiency of the textual machinery) and its successor Structuralism, though more focused on the mechanisms of texts and art works, did not per se abandon the notion of meaning in art and literature, their successors Deconstruction and Poststructuralism focused on the irreconcilable elements in artistic and literary texts and

thus came to stress their openness (see Eco 1989), or what the Yale critics Paul de Man, J. Hillis Miller and Geoffrey Hartman called the “unreadability” of the text, by which they meant the impossibility of arriving at any final meaning (see de Man 1986: 21–26). Deconstruction, indeed, declared the very idea of the presence of a final meaning, *logocentrism*, a hangover from the theologically determined view of meaning.

Yet if this was meant to make the positions of Fidelity Criticism ultimately untenable by erasing at one stroke the authority of author, work and interpretation, it also had a paradoxical opposite effect: if all readings are misreadings, as some Poststructuralist and Deconstructionist works seem to imply, or – going even further with the likes of Jean Baudrillard – if simulacra are not the copies of originals, but have replaced originals, then the era of adaptations has dawned upon culture (see Baudrillard 1994). Among the many misreadings, there is then also space for those that postulate an attachment to a supposed spirit of the original, whether it resides in authors, works or interpretations. In the same way as the author has returned into criticism (see Burke 1992), for example through forms such as life writing that itself emerged out of ideological readings such as Marxist, Feminist and Postcolonial ones, Fidelity Criticism cannot justifiably be excluded from the possible realms of approaches to art and literature, even when its bases are exposed as ideological.

Already the early film critic André Bazin had tried to build a bridge between Fidelity Criticism and adaptation when he declared (in the context of adapting novels into films): “Fidelity meant respect for the spirit of the novel, but it also meant a search for necessary equivalents” (Bazin 1971: 141). As George Raitt (2010) points out in his provocatively entitled essay “Still lusting after fidelity?”, this double-edged approach, which he sees pursued, among others, by the likes of Brian McFarlane, leads to the problem of differentiating between equivalence and difference, between the translation of material from one code and medium to another and the attendant deformations (McFarlane 1996: 14) – if this term is acceptable at all, since it implies loss rather than potential gain (see Raitt 2010: 50). Other recent contributions to adaptation studies even regard the structural turning away from idealised Fidelity Criticism as its very reinstatement through the back door. Thus, Nico Dicecco argues: “so long as we persist in thinking about the aesthetics of adaptation through the lens of formal repetition, we risk reinforcing the very problems of fidelity intertextual approaches purport to overturn” (2015: 163). Critiquing other recent repeat attacks on Fidelity Criticism, such as John Hodgkins’ *The Drift: Affect, Adaptation, and New Perspectives on Fidelity* (2013), Casie Hermansson compares such “ritualistic” attitudes to the “Flogging” of an “(Un)Dead Horse” (Hermansson 2015: 147).

In his essay “Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation”, Robert Stam (2000) views the resilience of Fidelity Criticism as a way of retaining moralistic forms of criticism that have lost their hold in critical methods. Stam, like many adaptation studies scholars, takes the novels-into-film scenario as his starting point (see Stam 2000: 54), thus underestimating the long history of adaptation and its attendant criticism. Yet he is correct when he insists on an “automatic difference” that the change of medium introduces: “beyond such details of mise-en-scène, the very processes of filming – the fact that the shots have to be composed, lit, and edited in a certain way”, in short, the difference between a “single-track” and a “multitrack” medium in addition to film’s very different production processes (Stam 2000: 56). Yet Stam also acknowledges the inherent essentialism of Fidelity Criticism (see Stam 2000: 57), the insistence on one unique and indivisible meaning.

The alternative form of Fidelity Criticism is identified by Stam as an emphasis on truthfulness to “the medium of expression” (Stam 2000: 58). It assumes that some media are better

at expressing some features than others. A common prejudice is, for instance, that film dazzles with the simultaneity of aesthetic features (picture, sound, movement, etc.), while the novel possesses greater depth through the abstraction inherent in language. Yet, as Stam also points out, both novels and films are already intertextual forms that contain within themselves adaptations of other texts and cultural artefacts (Stam 2000: 61–62). Stam eventually suggests a compromise that replaces the inadequate notion of fidelity with that of translation and finally dissolves it in a concept of dialogic intertextuality (Stam 2000: 62–68). Yet this is as convincing as it is facile. Intertextuality is always inherent in adaptation, but who is to say that all intertextuality is dialogic? Stam appears to make the mistake of replacing the intentionalism of Fidelity Criticism with that of a more modern but equally intentionalist adaptation scholar. Nevertheless, he precisely outlines the steps in this process that lead to a successful adaptation: “selection, amplification, concretization, actualization, critique, extrapolation, analogization, popularization, and reculturalization” (Stam 2000: 68). But he does not state if this “Grammar of Transformation” (Stam 2000: 68) is a prescriptive one for producing adaptations or for analyzing them. That the two ultimately fall into one proves that even Stam, with his demonstrated knowledge of the same shifts in literary and cultural theory that were outlined in the present chapter, cannot escape the attraction of a coherent monolithic meaning that Fidelity Criticism offers, even when it is presented as multiple, dialogic and translational.

But if detractors of Fidelity Criticism have a hard time escaping its clutches, its postmodern supporters also have problems sustaining its praise. Colin MacCabe, Kathleen Murray and Rick Warner’s *True to the Spirit: Film Adaptation and the Question of Fidelity* (2011) pays much attention to the intertextual and dialogic nature of adaptation (almost as if it wanted to confirm Stam’s contrary claims), but has very little that is new to say about fidelity. In his Introduction, MacCabe reminds us of the fact that literature also reacts to film, for instance, in the shape of modernist writing (MacCabe 2011: 5), but then jubilates prematurely when he discovers the term “ideal construct” in André Bazin’s writings on film, a term that MacCabe apparently sees as a way out of the conundrum of fidelity (see MacCabe 2011: 6). For him, it combines an impersonal view of adaptation as a process with a residual insistence on value. But does it? Ultimately, as the conclusion of MacCabe’s chapter proves, he simply shifts the ground of fidelity from author to director (MacCabe 2011: 21–22), even when he does so with the aid of Eliot and Barthes. Whether this new author and authority of adaptation is indeed a “super-author”, as he claims (MacCabe 2011: 22), is questionable, especially when all the above rhetoric only ever leads to Raymond Williams’ “structure of feeling” (Williams 1961: 41–71). Instead of individual genius to which our adaptations and their interpretations have to be true, we would then have communally shared expectations and perceptions, with the problem that these are equally unquestioned and unquestionable.

Works cited

- Adorno, Theodor W. *Aesthetic Theory*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984.
- Allan, Graham. *Intertextuality (The New Critical Idiom)*. London and New York: Routledge, 2000.
- Barthes, Roland. *Image – Music – Text*. New York: Hill & Wang, 1977.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*. Trans. Sheila Faria Glaser. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1994.
- Bazin, André. *What Is Cinema?* Vol. II. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1971.
- Benjamin, Walter. “The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction.” *Illuminations*. Trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1969. 217–251.

- Brady, Jennifer, and W.H. Herendeen (eds.). *Ben Jonson's 1616 Folio*. Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 1991.
- Burke, Sean. *The Death and Return of the Author. Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992.
- Cartmell, Deborah, and Imelda Whelehan. *Adaptations. From Text to Screen, Screen to Text*. London: Routledge, 1999.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Athlone Contemporary European Thinkers. London: Athlone, 1972.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976.
- Dicecco, Nico. "State of the conversation. The obscene underside of fidelity." *Adaptation* 8.2 (2015): 161–175.
- Drábek, Pavel, Klára Kolinská and Matthew Nicholls (eds.). *Shakespeare and His Collaborators over the Centuries*. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008.
- Eco, Umberto. *The Open Work*. Trans. Anna Cancogni. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989.
- Eliot, T.S. "Tradition and the individual talent." *Selected Prose*. Frank Kermode (ed.). London and Boston: Faber & Faber, 1975. 37–44.
- Fischlin, Daniel, and Mark Fortier, Eds. *Adaptations of Shakespeare. An Anthology of Plays from the 17th Century to the Present*. London and New York: Routledge, 2000.
- Fish, Stanley. *Is There A Text in this Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980.
- Foucault, Michel. "What is an author?" *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977. 113–138.
- von Goethe, Johann Wolfgang. Review of *Des Knaben Wunderhorn. Alte deutsche Lieder*, by Clemens Brentano and Achim von Arnim. *Jenaische Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*. 18/19 (1806): 137–144 and 145–148.
- Grange, William. *Historical Dictionary of German Literature to 1945*. Historical Dictionaries of Literature and the Arts 47. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2011.
- Greenblatt, Stephen. "Culture." *Critical Terms for Literary Study*. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (eds.). 2nd ed. Chicago, IL : University of Chicago Press, 1995. 225–232.
- Hermansson, Casie. "Flogging fidelity. In defense of the (un)dead horse." *Adaptation* 8.2 (2015): 147–160.
- Hodgkins, Jack. *The Drift. Affect, Adaptation, and New Perspectives on Fidelity*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2013.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Adaptation*. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Iser, Wolfgang. *The Act of Reading. A Theory of Aesthetic Response*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978.
- MacCabe, Colin, Kathleen Murray and Rick Warner (eds.). *True to the Spirit: Film Adaptation and the Question of Fidelity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- McFarlane, Brian. *Novel to Film. An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Maguire, Laurie E. *Shakespearean Suspect Texts. The "Bad" Quartos and Their Contexts*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- de Man, Paul. *The Resistance to Theory*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.
- Montague, Elizabeth. *An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespeare*. 2nd ed. London: unknown publisher, 1770.
- Müller, Heiner. *Die Hamletmaschine: Heiner Müllers Endspiel*. Cologne, Germany: Prometh, 1978.
- Murray, Penelope (ed.). *Genius. History of an Idea*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1989.
- Osinski, Jutta. "Shakespeare als Sophokles' Bruder? Über Herders Shakespeare-Rezeption." In Roger Paulin (ed.) *Shakespeare im 18. Jahrhundert*. Das achtzehnte Jahrhundert – Supplementa. Göttingen, Germany: Wallstein, 2007. 167–180.
- Porter, James I. "What is 'classical' about classical antiquity? Eight propositions." *Arion* 13.1 (2005): 27–61.
- Raitt, George. "Still lusting after fidelity?" *Literature/Film Quarterly* 38.1 (2010): 47–59.
- Roberts, David. *The Total Work of Art in European Modernism*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011.
- Stam, Robert. "Beyond fidelity: the dialogics of adaptation." In James Naramore (ed.) *Film Adaptation*. London: Athlone, 2000. 54–76.
- Tatarkiewicz, Władysław. *A History of Six Ideas. An Essay in Aesthetics*. Trans. Christopher Kasperek. The Hague, the Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 2010.
- Vischers, Friedrich Theodor. *Shakespeare-Vorträge*. 2nd ed. Stuttgart and Berlin: J.G. Cotta, 1905.

- Williams, Raymond. *The Long Revolution*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1961.
- von Wilpert, Gero. *Goethe. Die 101 wichtigsten Fragen*. Munich: C.H. Beck, 2007.
- Wimsatt Jr., W.K., and Monroe C. Beardsley. "The Intentional Fallacy." *The Verbal Icon. Studies in the Meaning of Poetry*. W.K. Wimsatt Jr. (ed.). Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1954. 3–20.
- Wordsworth, William. "Preface." *Lyrical Ballads: With Other Poems*. Second Ed. London: Longman & Rees, 1800. v–xlvi.