Adaptation, Appropriation and Translation - Dancing cheek to cheek, or leading on a merry dance: Understanding textual adaptation as a dynamic between dancers

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Introduction – It takes two to Tango.

The papers contained within this volume were initially presented at a Theatre and Drama Network (TDN) conference exploring *Adaptation, Appropriation, and Translation*, in 2023. The aims of that conference were to explore the complex relationship between adaptations and their original source material, to examine the ethics of adaptation, and to reevaluate the meaning of adaptation within contemporary theatre, film, literature, and media studies.

Adaptation is a term most commonly associated with the work of Linda Hutcheon, whose 2006 *A Theory of Adaptation* offered a ground-breaking analysis of the process and meaning of adaptation, as well as coining seminal definitions of the process. Hutcheon's influential "repetition with variation" (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 4) is critical in appreciating the nuances of the tangential relationship between the original, often canonical work, and the resulting new creative product. To apply Hutcheon's definition is to acknowledge that there must be sufficient similarity between the two versions (repetition) so that an audience can understand that they are fundamentally connected, and that one is a product of the other, but there must also be sufficient distance (variation) to warrant the new product being made. This complex dance between the two versions comprises the meaningful definition of adaptation. Sometimes the dance is very close, and the distance between the two barely noticeable; at other times the dance partners are on the opposite side of the dance floor seemingly disconnected, and yet still dancing the same dance, and in some proximity to each other, creating a connection, albeit from a distance, between the two versions. In the same way as a dance should be a visually entertaining and pleasurable event, an audience should derive a certain satisfaction in

viewing the adaptation through the lens of the original. In holding one in front of the other, and in noting the changes as well as the repetitions, audiences can anticipate changes, as well as enjoying the familiarity of engaging with a well-known original. In noting changes, it is always useful to reflect on why these occur. Exploring the purpose of the variation, as well as acknowledging where there is repetition, is the act of analysing adaptation. Why might a new writer insert a change of location, for example? Of character? Of period? In exploring these variations, critics can unearth political messages, for example, as well as correct 'errors' in the original, revealing contemporary concerns and preoccupations. At all times, the synthesis between the two versions is critical – there can be no adaptation without an appreciation of the original, otherwise the playwright, novelist or filmmaker would just have created original content, and not engaged with a preexisting text. Just as a dance takes place between two partners, an adaptation also requires a partner text.

Appropriation is a term with a slightly more complex meaning. It suggests a more nuanced relationship between the two versions, perhaps one whereby ownership of material is rather more contested or unclear. To use the term in its usual form, for example, if you were accused of 'appropriating' finances, or 'appropriating' some land, we might assume that this was an illegal acquisition, taken without legal entitlement or in accordance with due process. Or you might be being accused of 'appropriating' another culture – adopting signifiers from a culture other than your own in ways that are partial, stereotypical, or simplistic. In either case, to be accused of appropriation is to be charged with taking something unfairly, in bad faith, or without due diligence or respect. There is also a suggestion of an imbalance of power, that one party has executed a takeover of the other from a position of greater influence or authority. In this sense, to 'appropriate' a text, might be to take one and to use it unethically, or to 'take it over' obliterating the original and leaving no trace of it within the new version.

In looking for a definition of this term within Adaptation Studies, scholars often refer to Julie Sanders, who seeks to place an understanding of what we might call 'appropriation' within how we already define adaptation. Acknowledging what I have outlined above regarding the slipperiness of the relationship between the two texts, she writes, "appropriation frequently affects a more decisive journey away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural product and domain… appropriated […] texts are not always as clearly signalled or acknowledged in the adaptive process" (Sanders, 2006, p. 26). There may be any number of reasons for this. The new version might be completely rewritten, and only contain a small element of the original. It might be that they are located in very different contexts, and so the messages and meaning of the work are starkly contrasted. It could be that the appropriation is based on a pervasive and well-known cultural myth,

and so barely requires much gesturing towards the source material. However, in order to avoid charges of plagiarism, an appropriation must stand in some relation to its original. It must in some way gesture to the source material, even if it is in quite oblique ways, for example the name of a character or location, or a specific plot device. To continue the analogy, this may still be a dance, but it is one in which the partners only barely acknowledge each other, choosing instead to enact their own interpretation of the music, albeit still on the same dance floor, and still in sight of each other.

At the heart of all appropriation lies what Sanders describes as a "querying [of] the ability or even necessity of being 'original'" (Sanders, 2006, p. 1). This argument, which recalls Roland Barthes' *Death of the Author* as a theory to end authorial interpretation and instead liberate reader empowerment to determine meaning, asserts that there is nothing original in textual creation, and that all stories, ideas, images, and meanings are already part of a network of texts from which all 'new' writers must draw. Several theorists and philosophers, including Barthes, Julia Kristeva, and Jacques Derrida, suggest that texts are culturally interdependent and inherently connected, thus rendering the need to define any single one as 'original' or 'first' impossible. A simple example of this in practice is rehearsed within this very volume. Bilge and Okan's article on *The Taming of the Shrew* explores reinterpretation of Shakespeare's classic story as a twentieth century ballet. In Western culture, Shakespeare is often placed in the position of the canonical originator of text, such is his profound impact on theatre and literature. However tempting it might be to think of Shakespeare as the originator, it is worth remembering that he was also a mediator of pervasive cultural tales and stories: *The Taming of the Shrew* was even at its first performance an amalgamation of traditional myths and stories from Europe and India, as well as existing Tudor texts (Dates and Sources | The Taming of the Shrew | Royal Shakespeare Company). In this way, even our cultural signifiers of canonical dominance, such as Shakespeare himself, are subject to the laws of appropriation.

Translation, the third key term under consideration in this collection, carries connotations of geographical location. A simple definition of the term suggests that the activity of translation "involves a simple process of linguistic transfer" (Bassnett, 2014, p. 2), a literal movement of meaning between one language and another. This process takes place within a context of national borders – a transference of meaning from one country's language into another. Of course, while a simple 'hello' might easily translate into 'bonjour' or 'hola', more complex sentences or concepts defy literal transfer. As Bassnett makes clear, languages never map onto each other directly, and so there are always gaps to navigate, leading her to argue that "translation has been refined in recent years as a form of rewriting" (Bassnett, 2014, p. 3), suggesting an altogether more creative and assertive process whereby new

meaning can potentially be generated. In this way, the dance between the original and the translation is complicated; at first it may appear that the partners are performing the same dance in perfect synchronicity, but throughout the performance there will be gaps and new additions, elements that differ, that don't fit, that appear to be at odds with each other.

Many of the articles contained within this collection are concerned with the translation of work between one nation and another. As I have argued elsewhere, in shifting the context of a piece of theatre from one country to another, perhaps the most pertinent term to employ is 'translation' rather than 'adaptation', taking into account as it does the implied shift of language, culture, and politics – "the act of translation necessarily involves the movement of a text between languages and also frequently nations" (Rees, 2017, p. 180). In examining the three terms under consideration here, 'translation' would at first appear to be the one with the closest relationship of texts, seeking to achieve a close fidelity of meaning between sources. However this is achieved, we also must take into account the necessary linguistic gaps and slippages, however, as two languages often fail to map onto each other with perfect symmetry. In the same way, translation also typically infers a transfer of national context, and as such, the reader should also be alert to the probable transference of national culture, society and politics as well, as two countries also stand in contrast to each other. In this 'dance' of adaptation, translation also takes into account different national flavours – the texts might be performing to the same song, but one partner may be dancing a South American Tango, while the other is dancing a European Viennese Waltz!

The articles contained within this volume all explore different positions between an original text and its adapted version. There is a broad spread of types of material as well, including plays, songs, films, classical texts and contemporary work, demonstrating that adaptation is a popular form for many different artistic engagements. The authors within this collection also examine a wide range of source material, from a spread of eras and places, including Britain, Türkiye, and America, as well as engaging with well-known, canonical work by writers such as Shakespeare, Austen, and Shelley, alongside lesser known works, creating a complex and dynamic dance between heavyweight literary sources, and comparatively featherweight newcomers!

In all cases, the authors explore adaptation critically, taking into account all of the complex webs of meaning and connection outlined above. They all critically reflect on the ethics of adaptation, taking into account what we might term the ethics of 'appropriation', with all the implications of that term. To put it simply, who's story is it to tell? And who

has the right to 're'tell it, to *translate* it into a new story, which may or may not pay homage to its original. In exploring this complexity, all the articles here reflect meaningfully and carefully on the adaptation's relationship with its original. In some cases, authors also wish to examine what we might see as an adaptation's attempt to readdress 'errors' in the original text, to give voice to marginalised characters, to unravel new meanings, place texts in new contexts, to reveal contemporary concerns.

About this collection – the articles.

Özbaş places metafiction and metatheatre centre stage in her article's uncovering of a trilogy of plays performed at Cambridge University between 1598-1601, marking the end of the Elizabethan age and the Tudor era. These anonymous plays, adaptations of Roman comedies by Terence, were staged originally around 100 BC. This layering of two arguably ancient historical periods exposes a Tudor fascination with neo-Roman comedy. The Tudor period was also, as Özbaş argues via an analysis of literary narcissism, a period preoccupied with shoring up the authority of textual interpretation and of securing the status of the literary text. In so doing, adaptation in this context, performed in this case through Renaissance corridors of academic power, is more about the Tudor appropriation of classical stories than a more reflexive adaptation approach. This article has great value in exposing and analysing lost or lesser known moments of English theatrical history, and in discussing theatre in non-traditional spaces, in this case a fusion of Roman classical comedy and Renaissance academic drama, framed by a Tudor imperative to rebrand the past within their own distinctive likeness.

Gülter's analysis of Rupert Goold's 2006 production of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, performed by the Royal Shakespeare Company, explores the process of reinterpretation of classical work, aiming to understand the production of meaning-making in the act of shifting the context of Shakespeare's plays. The production in question is staged within an Arctic, Inuit setting, which Gülter's article weaves into a critique of global warming, climate change, and climate crisis. By adapting a play already preoccupied with exploring the impact of human conquest of land, of the interaction between humanity and its environment, and with disturbed and frightening weather patterns, Gülter argues that this relocation of action is an act of political reinterpretation. By prioritising a reading of the play that emphasises ecological catastrophe, the RSC production is part of a body of work we might term ecological theatre, adjoined with ecocriticism. This paper also challenges what we might consider as 'adaptation', using instead the term 'appropriation', which implies a slightly different relationship with the source material; one perhaps that

takes what it needs from the original text in order to reframe the action in a new cultural or political context, in this case, one that examines the impact of colonisation and dominance not in Jacobean England, but instead in the twentieth century. Of course, the term 'appropriation' might also be applied to humanity's conquest of the landscape, and its impact on the environment, as well as the act of appropriating a text for performance.

Kılıç's chapter takes a feminist approach to Marina Carr's 2015's adaptation of Euripides' *Hecuba*, exploring the concept that adaptations can exist to highlight and legitimise previously ignored or overlooked aspects of the canonical text. This repositioning of priorities has a political purpose, as the plot can be changed or shifted to create an alternative narrative or outcome. In exploring the gaps and silences of the original, Kılıç's article offers a repositing of the classical tale, as well as an updating to reflect upon the relevance of this myth in contemporary warfare. Throughout the analysis, there is a focus on the ethics of adaptation; of the ethical encounter within adaptation, applying Levinas to explore the responsibility of rewriting, reimagining, and witnessing.

Poore explores *The Interview*, a play without a text, to analyse the tension within definitions of adaptation, documentary, and history plays, troubling what we might mean by what is 'real' and what is generated. The subject matter, the Panorama interview of Princess Diana in 1995, is a subject so frequently mediated through a wide variety of films, television, drama, and literature, that it becomes an historical event already dislocated from its original source, so retold that the original has become increasingly marginalised, particularly given the forged documents we now know were used to secure the story. Given the unethical basis of the original interview, it is itself an appropriated story, stolen without sufficient integrity and care, as indeed Diana herself is an appropriated icon, her image subject to a myriad of retellings and adaptations. Throughout this article, it becomes clear that this is a story with which we are all familiar, and yet none of us actually know it; it is an event shrouded in scandal, mystery and appropriation and yet the drama of its performativity is familiar to all. Tantalisingly, Poore ends this analysis with a brief consideration of royal conspiracy theory as a form of adaptation; a subject that certainly deserves an exploration of its own!

Bilge and Okan's article seeks for its source that most appropriated of canonical writers – William Shakespeare. It is difficult to think of a series of texts more looted for their stories in adaptation that the Bard. Their fascinating approach explores the text located not within a new text but within dance, analysing the ballet adaptation of John Cranko's *The Taming of the Shrew* in 1969 by exploring adaptation from theatrical text into choreography.

Setting their analysis of this performance against the development of second wave feminism, and emphasising the importance of movement within the text, this article unravels other meanings within the original Shakespeare text, and offers a retelling of the gender relations in the play.

Günenç's exploration of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, adapted for the stage by Emma Rice in 2022, focuses on the 'deconstruction' of the original text. The bleak and battered moor of the original Victorian text is refigured, for example, as evoking a Greek tragedy, tapping into that other well-mined source of tales for adaptation. Most importantly, this article analyses the way in which Rice juxtaposes the contemporary refugee crisis with the characterisation of Heathcliff in the original. In exploring his liminal identity as a refugee, orphan, and immigrant, Günenç argues Rice aims to 'restore the nobility' of this iconic, and much misunderstood and maligned, character. The adaptation at the heart of this article therefore aims to represent and explore the margins of the original text, seeking to throw light onto that which is marginalised, ambiguous, and oblique in Brontë's narrative.

Another canonical text – in this case Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* – comes under consideration in Gündüz's article. In this exploration of the many iterations of one text, Gündüz's focus is on the relocation of the classic story into different cultures and new genres, most specifically *Bride and Prejudice* and *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, adaptations that invite the reader to see the original Austen novel in a wide network of other texts and meanings. This article demonstrates an interesting dynamic between past and present, exploring the role of nostalgia and memory, as well as hybridity and parody, in the contemporary retellings of historical texts, and exploring how such appropriations help shape our understanding of the Regency era. Throughout these diverse and eclectic retellings of Austen's novel, a strong sense of the gender relations and politics of the original remain, as contemporary writers and storytellers rewrite their own cultures and concerns into the new parodies and iterations of this well-worked tale.

Üstün-Kaya's article explores the translation of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* for a Turkish audience in the form of the 2023 Netflix series *Yaratılan*. Through an outline of what Hutcheon has identified as the fidelity fallacy, Üstün-Kaya outlines some of the key differences between the original text and the new series, exploring the fascinating slippage between languages and meanings, analysing the relationship between the source material and its new translation. In exploring the resonances of meaning between Victorian England and contemporary Türkiye, the article draws on different definitions of adaptation to also incorporate translation between languages and intertextuality.

Festa takes a broad approach to adaptation, examining not the translation of one text within another but instead the appropriation of cinematic genres. In exploring the violence of Quentin Tarantino's *Django Unchained*, the article reflects on the appropriation within the film of previous cinematic traditions, particularly the Western and Blaxploitation films. The argument that Tarantino's film makes use of black history, and applies it to the imagery of the classic Western, forces us to consider who has the right to tell whose stories, and in what ways. The article's conclusions, that white men make money from the exploitation and appropriation of black culture and black stories, is depressingly familiar.

Pesen's paper tackles a different form of adaptation, examining the translation of 1960s French religious song 'La Mamma', originally by Charles Aznavour, into Turkish by Zeki Müren as 'Annem'. Utilising a range of methodological approaches, including archival research and content analysis of the original vinyl covers, this fascinating article explores the importance of listening to song in one's own language. Understanding translation as an act of cultural storytelling, Pesen's analysis outlines a translation process that results in a musical fusion, blending Turkish cultural elements with global pop culture.

Conclusion – Foot loose and fancy free?

As the variety and diversity of subjects, genres, and nations explored in this collection make clear, adaptation is a process that can be explored in relation to many different texts and performances, from song and dance, to classic plays and literary texts. In exploring this vast diversity, it might be tempting to understand that anything can be termed an adaptation, that any cultural product with even the most tangential relationship with an original can be analysed in this context.

Perhaps so, and certainly Adaptation Studies offers scholars a broad church in which to explore texts and performances, but it is also important to remember that, to continue the analogy, while adaptation may offer dancers the opportunity to dance free from some formal constraints, some rules of engagement are also still necessary, if we wish to avoid stepping on the shoes of our dance partner. To return to Hutcheon, adaptation is best understood as 'repetition with variation', a definition that also helpfully could be said to describe a dance – the similar or corresponding movements reoccur throughout the performance, helping to establish the character of the dance, but there must also be variation, places where the dancers move in a different direction, changing the tempo, going in for a lift, or building to a crescendo in the music.

My hope with this Preface has been to consider adaptation, appropriation and translation, as an analogy to a dance, a dance in which partners perform a complex and at times fractured relationship with each other. In exploring this analogy, and suggesting that it is comparable to the distance or closeness of two dancers performing on a stage, I have attempted to consider the relationship between an adaptation and its original source – however complex we acknowledge the term 'original' to be. In using this analogy, it has been my intention to argue that, while some adaptations may have a distant or tangential relationship with their original, the process is never a 'free for all' dance, cutting loose from all formal restraints, and striking out on its own. In order to be understood and recognised as adaptations, there must be some sort of formal relationship with the original work, and therefore, while Adaptation Studies may offer a wide range of topics and genres to investigate, we must always understand this process as a dance between two (or sometimes more) partners, rather than a solo effort. It is in the intricate relationship between the dancers where the adaptation takes place – the joy of adaptation is always in the pattern of the dance steps between an original source text and its offspring. The dance of adaptation requires multiple texts, dancing together, but performing their own steps, in new and distinct rhythms.

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