

1 A Breath of Fresh Eyre. Intertextual and Intermedial Reworkings of "Jane Eyre"
2 Ed. by Margarete Rubik and Elke Mettinger-Schartmann

3 Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2007, 418 pp.

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5 A Theory of Adaptation
6 By Linda Hutcheon

7 London, New York: Routledge, 2006, 232 pp.

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9 Journal of Adaptation in Film and Performance 1, 2007, 1

10 Ed. by Richard Hand and Katja Krebs

Bristol: Intellect, 80 pp.

Adaptation. The Journal of Literature on Screen Studies 1, 2008, 1

Ed. by Deborah Cartmell, Timothy Corrigan and Imelda Whelehan

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 77 pp.

"In the workings of the human imagination, adaptation is the norm, not the exception", Linda Hutcheon provocatively concludes her most recent book, entitled *A Theory of Adaptation* (p. 177). And indeed, judging from the number of recent publications on the subject, and the nearly simultaneous launch of two new journals devoted to it, adaptation is fast moving central stage in cultural, literary, media and performance studies, discarding its previous image as a lesser form or derivative genre. It now assumes the status of major subject, worthy of serious academic study. Adaptation studies, the name of the new (inter)discipline, is an important development in the humanities, kindred to Reception and Translation Studies in its concern with cultural transfer and dissemination. This review essay surveys the emerging field: it assesses the significance of the new valuation given to what may well be the oldest form of cultural production, and explores the forms this valuation takes. Focusing especially on the collection of essays edited by Margarete Rubik and Elke Mettinger-Schartmann entitled *A Breath of Fresh Eyre: Intertextual and Intermedial Reworkings of "Jane Eyre"*, the review examines how the theory of adaptation gets practiced in this study of Jane Eyre adaptations.

To begin with, it is worth reflecting on the very term "adaptation", which is now increasingly the term of choice. Its use in reference to a great diversity of cross-generic, intertextual and intermedial cultural productions and artworks signals a shift in the cultural perception and academic valuation of such works. It also signals a methodological shift. Adaptation is a flexible, even protean term that refers to "[v]ideogames, theme park rides, Web sites, graphic novels, song covers, operas, musicals, ballets, and radio and stage plays" alongside novels and movies (Hutcheon, p. XIV), and it designates both a product and a process. Displacing earlier preferred terms such as intertextuality or rewriting, and bypassing that of "productive reception" altogether, adaptation releases the emergent new (multi/inter-) discipline adaptation studies from the obsessions with "fidelity", "originality" and "authorship" that have for so long dominated discussions of adaptations. Since so-called "literature on screen" studies especially have suffered from this traditional conceptual apparatus, it is not surprising that the first issue of *Adaptation: The Journal of Literature on Screen Studies* spends much of its space on clearing the conceptual ground. In their editorial introduction,

1 Deborah Cartmell, Timothy Corrigan and Imelda Whelehan list ten reasons why adaptation
 2 has for so long been regarded as unworthy of serious academic attention, many of them
 3 having to do with some perceived “impurity” of form: neither real cinema nor literature, and
 4 tainted by money, the term film adaptations suggest a single “sourcetext” yet take their cues
 5 from many sources.¹ The work of clearing the conceptual ground is continued in original
 6 articles and reviews, especially Thomas Leitch’s review essay *Adaptation Studies at a Crossroads*,
 7 which surveys some fifteen books recently published on the subject, distilling their founda-
 8 tional assumptions by identifying the main questions they raise.² More provocatively,
 9 *Adaptation* challenges what Leitch terms the “based-on-the-literary-text” model by featuring
 10 Simone Murray’s essay on the unmade film *Eucalyptus* as its opening major article.³ As the
 editors explain, by ignoring the “habitual recourse to comparative textual analysis [it] forces
 the discipline to engage with potential alternative methodologies for understanding how
 adaptation functions, or [...] fails to function”.⁴ To this end, Murray focuses on a film that
 was set to star Nicole Kidman and Russell Crowe but was postponed, possibly indefinitely,
 purportedly because of disputes between Crowe and director Jocelyn Moorhouse, to explore
 the institutional, commercial and legal machinery that accompanies the production of book-
 to-screen adaptations.

The choice of the term “adaptation” attests, then, to a desire to move beyond text-based
 (even logocentric) models of understanding cultural production and to engage with the
 phenomenon outside the institutional boundaries of literary studies, in a complex, multi-
 medial and interdisciplinary field. Thus conceived, it logically finds allies in performance
 studies, which have a long history of viewing “adaptation as a creative act of conversion” and
 of recognizing “texts” as incomplete and in process, as Richard Hand and Katja Krebs point
 out in their editorial of the first issue of *Journal of Adaptation in Film and Performance*.⁵ For
 Hand and Krebs, “adaptation reflects the very nature of postmodern existence”. It is “a
 creative process which reflects and mirrors ideologies and manipulation of meaning in hybrid
 cultures”.⁶ Particularly adapted to the postmodern or cosmopolitan condition, adaptation can
 thus be viewed as cultural studies’ response to Ulrich Beck’s call for a “methodological
 cosmopolitanism” in the social sciences.⁷ According to Beck, the cosmopolitan condition,
 which increasingly marks our times by dissembling the traditional national premises and
 boundaries of sociological research, implies that “the sociology for the 21st century has to be
 reinvented”.⁸ Do the humanities not need to devise “non-national units of research” and
 “post-national concepts of the social and the political”, as well as of culture, so that they, too,

33 ¹ Deborah Cartmell, Timothy Corrigan and Imelda Whelehan, Introduction to *Adaptation*, in:
 34 *Adaptation: The Journal of Literature on Screen Studies* 1, 2008, 1, pp. 1–2.

34 ² Thomas Leitch, *Adaptation Studies at a Crossroads*, in: *Adaptation* (see note 1), pp. 63–77.

35 ³ Leitch, *Adaptation Studies at a Crossroads* (see note 2), p. 65; Simone Murray, *Phantom Adapta-*
 36 *tions. Eucalyptus, the Adaptation Industry and the Film That Never Was*, in: *Adaptation* (see note 1),
 pp. 5–23.

37 ⁴ Cartmell/Corrigan/Whelehan, Introduction to *Adaptation* (see note 1), p. 3.

38 ⁵ Richard Hand, Katja Krebs, Editorial, in: *Journal of Adaptation in Film and Performance* 1, 2007, 1,
 39 p. 3.

40 ⁶ Hand/Krebs, Editorial (see note 5), p. 3.

41 ⁷ Ulrich Beck, *The Cosmopolitan Condition. Why Methodological Nationalism Fails*, in: *Theory,*
 42 *Culture and Society* 24, 2007, 7–8, pp. 286–90.

⁸ Beck, *The Cosmopolitan Condition* (see note 7), p. 287.

1 develop “a methodology of ‘cosmopolitan understanding’”⁹ Movies have been multi-national
 2 and multi-ethnic productions for some time now, with global financing and “globalized”
 3 distribution systems and audiences, and so have operas, musicals and videogames.
 4 Books are increasingly also cultural products that cannot be framed by a “national outlook”
 5 anymore, as they are typeset in Hong Kong, designed in India, and copyedited in yet another
 6 geographical place, or conceived as a global venture, as for instance Canongate’s series of
 7 rewritings (or “novel adaptations”) of well-known myths, aptly entitled *The Myths*.¹⁰ To
 8 acknowledge the impact of global capital on cultural production and to admit the latter’s
 9 plural, hybrid character is to recognize it as increasingly complex and therefore requiring the
 10 tools of interdisciplinarity: “complexity and interdisciplinarity are increasingly entwined”.¹¹
 Adaptations bring this convergence of interdisciplinarity and complexity especially to the
 fore, showing cultural production to involve complex, interdependent and emergent phenomena.
 Adaptations, indeed, have many sources, and the motives behind them are many
 and varied, forming a complex field of interconnected activities.

Adaptation studies moves beyond the structuralist taxonomies identifying the “trans-
 textual relations” between texts and their “hypertexts” characteristic of Genette’s *Palimpsestes*,
 for instance, or of Michael Riffaterre’s *Semiotics of Poetry*.¹² Instead, it addresses issues of
 “remediation” central to the industries of the new media, which include issues of creativity
 and of mediation, but also of economics, of production, of politics, of contingency and the
 arbitrary. To this end, Linda Hutcheon proposes to begin theorizing adaptation, in her *A
 Theory of Adaptation*, by asking “What? Who? Why? How? Where? When?” and exploring
 adaptations as adaptations by devoting chapters to the forms of adaptations, inquiring into the
 adapters and their motives, looking at audiences and the contexts of adaptations.

In short, the methodological shift is away from studies focusing on the work of the text
 (intertextuality studies) or the work of the adapter (modelled after translation studies centring
 on the task of the translator) towards a new, more encompassing ecological perspective,
 looking not just at the adaptation itself as text or cultural product, but reaching towards a
 more comprehensive study of the relationship of adaptations to their environments. Crucial
 in this shift is the new sense that adaptations are not forms of the afterlife of a work, text, or
 character, but its very life. Adaptation is life itself. In the realm of biology, adaptation
 designates the capacity of organisms to adapt to their changing environment or circumstances
 and thus to survive. Taking their cue from the analogy suggested by Spike Jonze’s 2002 film
Adaptation starring Nicolas Cage, scholars of adaptation like Robert Stam and Linda Hut-
 cheon have used the term adaptation in the cultural realm explicitly to include this biological
 evolutionary sense. Linda Hutcheon writes: “To think of narrative adaptation in terms of a
 story’s fit and its process of mutation or adjustment, through adaptation, to a particular
 cultural environment is something I find suggestive. Stories also evolve by adaptation and are
 not immutable over time. Sometimes, like biological adaptation, cultural adaptation involves

37 ⁹ Beck, *The Cosmopolitan Condition* (see note 7), p. 287.

38 ¹⁰ See Liedeke Plate, *Remembering the Future. Or, Whatever Happened to Re-Vision*, in: *Signs:*
 39 *Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 33, 2008, 2, esp. pp. 402–405.

40 ¹¹ Julie Thompson Klein, *Interdisciplinarity and Complexity. An Evolving Relationship*, in: *E:CO* 6,
 2004, 1–2, p. 2.

41 ¹² Gerard Genette, *Palimpsestes. La littérature au second degré*, Paris: Seuil, 1982; Michael Riffaterre,
 42 *Semiotics of Poetry*, Bloomington, London: Indiana University Press, 1978.

1 migration to favourable conditions: stories travel to different cultures and different media. In
 2 short, stories adapt just as they are adapted” (Hutcheon, p. 31).

3 This perspective is no doubt informed by the more general tendency, in our times, to turn to
 4 the biological and the natural sciences to explain cultural phenomena, as Veronica Vasterling has
 5 cogently argued.¹³ First introduced by Richard Dawkins in his 1976 *The Selfish Gene*¹⁴, the idea
 6 of cultural evolution is slowly taking hold, its metaphors increasingly framing the way we think
 7 about cultural processes. This language is insidious – “suggestive”, as Hutcheon acknowledges. It
 8 is productive, to be sure, yielding new ways of thinking about rewriting, adaptation and
 9 translation as product and as process. Yet it is metaphoric language: language yielding concepts
 10 (“conceptual metaphors”, as Lakoff and Johnson say¹⁵) by which to address the real and
 comprehend it. This language should therefore not be confused with the phenomena it tries to
 grasp, but be seen as a form of addressing it. Whatever one might say about literary longevity or
 cultural fecundity, reproduction in cultural matters is not biological reproduction, and it is
 surely a biological fallacy simply to use the term in the domain of cultural (re)production
 without reflecting on how this language use construes what it talks about.

How does the new theory apply to the practical study of adaptations? The theory can best
 be tested on a complex case. As adaptation industry, Shakespeare, of course, continues to rule
 supreme: Shakespeare on stage is nothing new, Shakespeare on screen has been an industry for
 a while, and we now even have a Shakespeare on screen critical industry. Yet there are
 contenders for the position: Jane Eyre, for one, is a fast-growing adaptation industry. “Few
 literary works”, Margarete Rubik and Elke Mettinger-Schartmann write in their introduction
 to *A Breath of Fresh Eyre: Intertextual and Intermedial Reworkings of “Jane Eyre”*, “have proved
 their capacity to act as sources of literary inspiration, to be constantly re-assembled, re-
 contextualized, re-imagined, re-written, so exuberantly as Jane Eyre” (p. 11). Exploring various
 adaptations of Jane Eyre in the twentieth and twenty-first century as they adapt, rewrite,
 remediate, abridge and transform Charlotte Brontë’s nineteenth-century novel, the focus of
 the collection as a whole, and of most of the contributions, is on the relationship of the
 adaptation to Jane Eyre. This is not surprising, of course, as the volume focuses precisely on
 Jane Eyre adaptations. This necessary focus notwithstanding, the editors are careful to
 recognize that the Jane Eyre adaptations “variously interact with one another, interweave the
 hypotext with later rewritings and take up suggestions from Brontë scholarship” (pp. 11 – 12).
 Returning “influences” or texts co-informing the recent adaptations are Jean Rhys’ *Wide
 Sargasso Sea* (three entire chapters are devoted to this one novel, but many others reference it as
 one of the sources of subsequent adaptations; for instance, the essays dealing with David
 Malouf and Michael Berkeley’s opera, and Polly Teale’s plays) and Sandra Gilbert and Susan
 Gubar’s seminal interpretation of Jane Eyre in their 1979 *The Madwoman in the Attic*. There is
 also a general consensus, already formulated in Patsy Stoneman’s *Brontë Transformations*¹⁶,
 that cultural concerns of the time inform the adaptation, and, vice versa, that adaptations are

37 ¹³ Veronica Vasterling, *Evolutionaire psychologie. Het reductionisme van een genenverhaal* [Evolu-
 38 tionary Psychology. The Reductionism of a Genes Story], in: *Tijdschrift voor Genderstudies* 10,
 2007,4, pp. 2–16.

39 ¹⁴ Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* [1976], Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

40 ¹⁵ George Lakoff, Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*. 2d edition, Chicago: University of Chicago
 Press, 1980.

41 ¹⁶ Patsy Stoneman, *Brontë Transformations. The Cultural Dissemination of “Jane Eyre” and “Wuthering*
 42 *Heights”*, London etc.: Prentice Hall / Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1996.

1 revealing of those concerns. Thus “enactments of the Jane Eyre story in the seventies and later
2 [are] responsive to both the women’s movement and the 1966 publication of *Wide Sargasso*
3 *Sea*” (p. 246). “Modern readings of *Jane Eyre*”, Wolfgang Müller writes, “are the result of the
4 knowledge, awareness and sensitivity of a later – postcolonial – period” (p. 68). Not sur-
5 prisingly, therefore, recent adaptations of *Jane Eyre* include explorations of a colonial subtext
6 in Brontë’s novel. In contrast, popular film adaptations of *Jane Eyre* tend to emphasize the
7 romance plot, with “the standardized iconography of Jane as she appears on book covers, in
8 illustrations and in films” representing a submissive Jane in love rather than an angry rebel
9 (p. 31). Similarly, as Carol Dole shows, film adaptations do not only respond to changing
10 various strategies “to satisfy the assumptions of twentieth-century audiences that good people
are kind to children” (p. 254).

Contributors to the collection differ significantly in their treatment of *Jane Eyre* adap-
tations. Whereas some of the essays take great pains to detail the adaptation’s manifold
sources, others almost exclusively focus on its transformation (read: distortion) of what is still
viewed as the “original”, in adaptations that still ought to be “faithful”. Consider, for instance,
the conclusion: “No matter how well intentioned, adaptations are necessarily engaged in
compromise regarding the novel’s language, as well as its plot and characterization” (p. 268).
From such a perspective, adaptations can only be poor imitations, never able to get anywhere
close in quality to the “original”, which will always be better, simply because it was first there.
Despite attempts to derive “the features that need to be observed in order to arrive at a
successful operatic adaptation” (pp. 327–28), discussions of Malouf’s libretto suffer from a
similar premise, as do the discussions of the novel’s adaptations for children. More interesting
to this reader are essays such as Carol Dole’s, which explains the influence of films on film,
showing the similarities in emphases and omissions in the film adaptations of 1934, 1944,
1970, 1996 and 1997 as revealing of relations between the films rather than to a (mis)un-
derstanding of Brontë’s novel. Dole identifies such instances in recurring montage and
editing techniques and the borrowing of particularly memorable shots, both from earlier *Jane*
Eyre film adaptations and from other famous Brontë film adaptations (p. 246). The chapters
on Jasper Fforde’s *The Eyre Affair* establish this 2001 bestselling science-fiction novel as the
most important literary rewriting of Brontë’s novel to have appeared since *Wide Sargasso Sea*,
eclipsing in importance the plays, operas, paintings, even the films. This is, of course,
interesting, considering that it is not only “the most antic and unusual engagement with the
great model”, as Margarete Rubik puts it (p. 167), but that its billing as “filled with CLEVER
wordplay, LITERARY allusion and BIBLIOWIT” (as it says on the Penguin edition’s front
cover) may not immediately read as a recipe for bestselling success. (But then, neither does the
novel adaptation – indeed, mutation – *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, which was a summer
2009 bestseller.) Particularly interesting is Rubik’s application of frame theory to understand
the text and its reception. This use of cognitive psychology stands in productive tension with
Dole’s revelation that Selznick’s 1944 *Jane Eyre* film featuring Orson Welles and a yet little-
37 known Elizabeth Taylor was a carefully packaged affair, designed to respond to perceived
38 audience demands. As she explains: “Selznick hired the Audience Research Institute to find
39 out what the audience would expect to see in a film of *Jane Eyre*, only to find out that the best
40 “remembered” scene was one not dramatized in the novel at all: the fire at Thornfield”
41 (p. 247). Once again highlighting the problematic nature of “fidelity”, the anecdote reveals
42 the fickleness of human (and collective) memory, and how stories get adapted in the mind,

1 Material, um den Konventionenbegriff der Empirischen Literaturwissenschaft ausdifferenzieren
2 comparative analyses of texts as a means of understanding how adaptations work.

3 What, then, are we to retain from *A Breath of Fresh Eyre* in relation to the new field of
4 adaptation studies? First, that a project that takes a particular novel as its focus need not devise
5 it as solely or primarily in relation to that one text. Adaptations have multiple sources. Some
6 film adaptations of *Jane Eyre* were made by directors who had seen the movies but not read
7 Brontë's novel (p. 246). Second, those other sources are as important, possibly even more
8 important, than the "original". They challenge notions of authority, and demand that we
9 rethink adaptation as a product and a process, caught in intertextual, intermedial and in-
10 ternational networks of "texts" as well as power, thus requiring an interdisciplinary cosmo-
opolitan approach. Third, adaptations are to be studied as adaptations. This means looking at
adaptation as life itself – not as an afterlife (which is an existence that follows death).
Adaptations are an integral part of the cultural life of "texts".

Adapt or die, then? Perhaps. Although I distrust the endless elasticity presently attributed
to the term "adaptation", I have to concede I find myself asking new questions about lite-
rature, translation and rewriting. Is every reading an "adaptation"? Are the interpretations in
"critical rewritings" forms of adaptations? Is Gilbert and Gubar's *Madwoman in the Attic* also
an adaptation (of *Jane Eyre*)? While my initial response would be to say it is not so, I cannot
but wonder: might it not yield interesting insights to think of academic writing, and teaching,
equally in terms of adaptation? The teaching of *Jane Eyre* is certainly a classroom perfor-
mance. It involves an audience with expectations, as well as teachers and administrators who
have assumptions about audience expectations. There is an institutional context caught in
complex (inter)national networks that are also power structures. Teaching *Jane Eyre*, I adapt
the text to the genre and to the media of teaching, as well as to the needs of the class and the
course, which may vary from surveys in *Brit. Lit. or World Lit.* to courses in *Gothic Fiction* or
on *Women's Writing*. "Adaptation", Hutcheon writes, "is how stories evolve and mutate to fit
new times and different places" (p. 176). Adapt, then, or die.

Liedeke Plate