T2. A Book Review of Lissette Lopez Szwydky and Glenn Jellenik's Edited Collection Adaptation Before Cinema: Literary and Visual Convergence from Antiquity Through the Nineteenth Century[1][2]

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Adaptation Before Cinema: Literary and Visual Convergence from Antiquity Through the Nineteenth Century is one of the latest additions to the Palgrave Studies in Adaptation and Visual Culture, an outstanding series dedicated to exploring new ways of reflecting on the dialogue between adaptation and visual culture. With an underlying impulse to obliterate the unidirectional perception of adaptation as a derivative version of a source text, the series encompasses a broad range of media as symbolic spaces of multiplicity that generate connections and continuities between all forms of texts and narratives. Adaptations are treated as "complexly multiple" texts that are connected to "other pervasive plural forms" such as "sequels, series, genres, trilogies, authorial oeuvres, appropriations, remakes, reboots, cycles and franchises" (Szwydky & Jellenik, 2023, blurb). As such, the books published in this series offer a rich and thought-provoking ground not only for scholars of adaptation studies but also for scholars of literary studies, cultural studies and film studies who seek fresh perspectives and like to think outside the box.

Edited by Lissette Lopez Szwydky and Glenn Jellenik, *Adaptation Before Cinema* includes twelve original essays that introduce diverse ways of contemplating adaptation as a method of generating transhistorical discourses and culture-texts. Given that adaptation studies had long been restricted within inured approaches marked by an overemphasis and over-reliance on film adaptation until recent

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decades, *Adaptation Before Cinema* is yet another powerful attempt to unlock the potential of adaptation studies to build networks of textuality across disciplines. It presents a sound manifestation of the premise that adaptation "is an ongoing process, probing into unnoticed corners of human endeavour. Examples of adaptation are all around us, if we look for them" (Welsh, 2013, p. 2). On a broader scale, regarding how an image or any visual material work in the process of adaptive signification, the book offers new responses to Barthes's stimulating questions that are still valid today: "How does meaning get into the image? Where does it end? And if it ends, what is there *beyond!*" (Barthes, 1977, p. 32).

Jellenik and Szwydky's Introduction chapter provides us with a conceptual trajectory that covers the key critical approaches to adaptation studies in the past, and manifests how the field has evolved to embrace new and diverse approaches in the aftermath of a number of foundational critical studies such as Linda Hutcheon's scholarly corpus. As a transhistorical and transgeneric practice as well as a form of "extension and transmediation" (Szwydky & Jellenik, 2023, p. 2), adaptation is addressed as an influential source and method of producing texts across cultures and disciplines. Most importantly, it is noted that the book aims to demonstrate "how much twentieth- and twenty-first-century media forms and industry practices continue to be influenced not only by historical literary sources but also by early adaptation practices that predate film and other contemporary media" (Szwydky & Jellenik, 2023, pp. 1-2).

The first five essays following the Introduction chapter are grouped under the title "Reframing Adaptation's Potential, Historically," while the rest are sectioned under the title "Transmedia Culture-Texts." In Chapter 2, Mary-Antoinette Smith shows how supplicatory iconographies and image adaptations have formed adaptive discourses of "kneeling narrative[s]" (Smith, 2023, p.41) across time through repetition. Smith reads these repetitive adaptations in diverse contexts as interconnected images that form a network of transhistorical rhetoric of social justice. Smith traces these adaptive repetitions in visualised narratives such as emblems, coins, engravings, illustrations, woodcuts and paintings, and she introduces an impressive analysis of this adaptive "network" of supplicatory imagery which sets a powerful example of the "[t]he rhetorical convergence of the written and the visual" (Smith, 2023, p. 39).

In Chapter 3, Glenn Jellenik discusses adaptation as an art form of democracy and places his discussion in the context of the cultural productions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. According to Jellenik, the "act of adaptation democratizes in that it functions as a re-telling of its source text but also as an intertextual liberation from that source" (Jellenik, 2023, p. 50). Moving beyond the confining "fidelity contract implied in the act of adaptation" (Jellenik, 2023, p. 50), he contemplates adaptive practice not as a cultural act performed on a linear axis between a source text and its derivative adaptation but rather as a kind of performative reformulation within a web of interconnectedness where concepts as well as texts, images, discourses and all kinds of narratives are transgressively transferred from one medium to another. Jellenik explains how Thomas Paine, for example, retold his book of philosophy, *Rights of Man*, in the form of a pamphlet and in a plain style so that it would be accessible to "common" readers. Apart from such examples of adaptation as popularisation, novelisation is addressed in detail as a particular form of adaptation of ideas into fictional media. The way Godwin and Wollstonecraft used the gothic novel—a popular mainstream genre of their time—to deliver their revolutionary philosophical ideas to the masses for democratic purposes is illustrated. In such acts of adaptation as reformulation, "the act of adaptation becomes an act of activism, using a fictional story to individualize things as they are" (Jellenick, 2023, p. 63). Jellenik also sets such democratic acts of

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adaptation, which demolishes the binary opposition between original and derivative copy, against conservative approaches that defend the "subaltern status" of adaptation (Jellenick, 2023, p. 65), providing us with a fuller picture of the literary and intellectual ecosystem of the texts he is referring to.

Chapter 4 is reserved for Melissa Caldwell's essay on the seventeenth-century poet Henry More and his "adaptive poetics" (Caldwell, 2023, p. 80). Reading More's *A Platonick Song of the Soul* as an adaptation of Neoplatonic philosophy, Caldwell brings together two relatively neglected genres in adaptation studies: poetry and philosophy. The author argues that More "synthesizes poetry, science, and mathematics with his translation of Neoplatonic philosophy" (Caldwell, 2023, p. 73), which can be described as "transculturation" (Caldwell, 2023, p. 76). She then proceeds to highlight another layer of adaptation More adds to his poetics with the revisions he makes to the second edition of his work. Caldwell interprets these revisions (inclusion of astronomical diagrams among other additions of visual material) from the critical lens of adaptation studies and labels them as a particular kind of "adaptive strategy" that defines More's poetics (Caldwell, 2023, p. 77).

The next three chapters concentrate on the adaptive strategies Shakespeare used while re/creating plots and characters for his plays. Anja Hartl's essay "History and/as Adaptation: MacBeth and the Rhizomatic Adaptation of History" rereads Macbeth as an example of Shakespeare's historiographic adaptation of MacBeth, the eleventh century Scottish king, and offers an "adaptational approach to history and biography" (Hartl, 2023, p. 92), using Douglas Lanier's critical concept of rhizomatic adaptation. Jim Casey's essay "Shakespeare, Fakespeare: Authorship by Any Other Name" carries the discussion into the context of the role of authorship and textual reception, drawing on the idea of "rhizome" and Umberto Eco's concept of "absolute fake." While Casey interprets Shakespeare's plays as "texts [that] are haunted by the ghosts of Shakespeare's Past" (Casey, 2023, p. 116), in "Shakespeare's Adaptations of the Fae and a 'Shrewd and Knavish Sprite' in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*" Valerie Guyant addresses a different kind of ghostly presence that potentially informs the reception of Shakespeare's play. She not only explores how "the exterior texts" such as "previous iterations of the same play" work in this manner (Guyant, 2023, p. 137), but also shows how Shakespeare made use of the British as well as Irish, Scottish and Welsh folk and fairy tales as part of his adaptive strategy in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

In Chapter 8, Katie Noble introduces an in-depth analysis of the eighteenth-century adaptations of Medea in "The Medea Network: Adapting Medea in Eighteenth-Century Theatre and Visual Culture." She explores these adaptations through a "network" of visual "intertexts" such as theatrical prints, portraitures, sketches and drawings, inferring that Medea functions as a "culture-text" which is "a collectively remembered narrative existing outside an originating text" (Noble, 2023, p. 159). Woven around the conflicting transgressive themes of motherhood and infanticide, the Medea narrative is examined as one of the most frequently iterated or adapted stories of antiquity. As Noble illustrates, Medea's transhistorical and transcultural singularity, especially in terms of the image of the monstrous mother, makes it a powerful culture-text that creates a dynamic and transformative network of adaptations.

Chapter 9, "The Making of Monsters: Thomas Potter Cooke and the Theatrical Debuts of *Frankenstein* and *The Vampyre* in the 1820s" by Eleanor Bryan, addresses a different category of monstrosity and examines two of the most popular monstrous figures of literary and cinematic culture. After providing a descriptive frame for the emergence of the "thematic links" between the vampire and Frankenstein's creature in their juxtaposed representations, the author looks at the early theatrical adaptations of

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Shelly's *Frankenstein* and Polidori's *The Vampyre* and shows how the popularity of celebrity actors shaped the high reception of both figures in the nineteenth century. Bryan argues that these early adaptations had an enormous impact on the reception of the "source" texts, especially in the sense that the stage productions of *The Vampyre* served as dialogic "adaptive intertexts" for dramatic adaptations of *Frankenstein* (Bryan, 2023, p. 192).

In Chapter 10, Dominique Gracia directs our attention to an interesting dynamic between verbal and visual narrativisations in the context of transmedia artists/poets of the Pre-Raphaelite circle. Gracia's essay titled "Dante Gabriel Rossetti at the Intersection of Painting and Poetry" brings up the role of marketplaces and industries where adaptations are *capitalised* as *presold contents*. Putting emphasis on "ekphrasis" as adaptation and its working principle that relies on the "collaborative" transmediality between text and image, Gracia shows us how Rossetti as a transmedia artist produces adaptations as bidirectional "paths" through an ecosystem of adaptations and "becomes only a sort of middleman, a facilitator of observer effects, performing adaptation to encourage adaptation" (Gracia, 2023, p. 227).

The last two chapters of the book are reserved for new readings of some of the most highlighted texts of children's literature. Maggie E. Morris Davis in "Markers of Class: The Antebellum Children's Book Adaptations of *The Lamplighter* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*" explores the ideologically informed poetics of the illustrated adaptations of two popular examples of American fiction from the Antebellum period. Here we see how these illustrated adaptations become class-bound spaces of signification where "race and class are marked similarly on the bodies of children" and "marginalized bodies become smaller [...] and childlike" (Morris Davis, 2023, p. 239). It is thus inferred that "unmarked differences" are made "visible" through adaptive strategies (Morris Davis, 2023, p. 243) and that illustrated adaptations produced for children play a significant role in constructions of childhood as extensions of class-bound social hierarchies. Especially in terms of the reception of these visual narratives by children, "the gaze as a mode of engagement with the world" emerges as a fundamental aspect of the working principle of this adaptive agency (Hatipoğlu, 2023, p. 195). Kristen Layne Figgins's "Alice, Animals, and Adaptation: John Tenniel's Influence on Wonderland and Its Early Adaptation History" scrutinizes another popular title from the canon of children's literature, and looks closer at the earliest visualisations of Alice and her Wonderland. Figgins's analysis exposes once again the rich visual repertoire of the Victorian cultural landscape which is characterised by "a fascination with the visual" reflected on its vibrant "visual mass culture" (Hatipoğlu, 2024, p. 23). With a keen observation that adaptations "do not merely resemble one another through a desire to recreate the source text but because they are all descended from one another," Figgins uses the critical lens of Hutcheon's and Bortolotti's evolutionary theory of adaptation to trace "the genealogy of adaptations transhistorically to understand their resemblances" (Figgins, 2023, p. 263). In a palimpsest-like fashion, pre-cinematic adaptations of Alice are shown to build upon one another and mutate in each phase of reiteration or retelling in order to survive in transmedia culture.

Last but not least, the book wraps up all these observations and discussions in the coda where Lissette Lopez Szwydky proposes a new theoretical perspective and an inspiring set of concepts for adaptation studies. With a strong emphasis on the fact that "adaptation is a primary driver of culture" (Szwydky, 2023, p. 283), Szwydky's projections develop around two pivotal concepts: culture-text and transmedia storytelling. Each of the essays included in this book becomes a solid proof for the rich potential these two concepts carry for further research not only in adaptation studies in particular but in cultural and literary studies in general. The book also offers researchers an extended and up-to-date bibliography, and the large-scale content of the book promises readers a thought-provoking reading experience. Most importantly, with new conceptual connections and stimulating theoretical frames the book offers, this

edited collection as a whole stands out as a valuable contribution to the fortification of the "adaptation canon across media, nations, and periods" (Elliott, 2020, p. 29).

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