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Virality, Slipperiness and Challenges:
Adaptation Studies and/on the Contemporary Anglophone Stage
A Critical Review of

Graham Saunders. 2017. *Elizabethan and Jacobean Reappropriation in Contemporary British Drama: "Upstart Crows."* London: Palgrave Macmillan. xi + 194 pp. ISBN: 978-1-137-44452-3.

Catherine Rees. 2017. *Adaptation and Nation: Theatrical Contexts for Contemporary English and Irish Drama.* London: Palgrave Macmillan. ix + 185 pp. ISBN: 978-1-137-42586-7.

Kara Reilly, ed. 2018. *Contemporary Approaches to Adaptation in Theatre.* London: Palgrave Macmillan. xxix + 357 pp. ISBN: 978-1-349-95580-0.

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Etymologically, the word *adaptation* derives from the Latin verb *adaptare*, which encapsulates the idea of “adjusting to something,” that is to say, of reshaping, rethinking and reimagining standards, conventions and boundaries in order to render them “suitable” to new circumstances (Ramos Gay 2013a, 1). In this gloomy pandemic period, each individual on this planet has been challenged to learn to come to terms with a certain degree of personal and professional adjustment. Indeed, COVID-19 has disrupted what we knew as “normalcy,” reminding us of our inherent resilience and ability to adapt in order to face the wide-ranging reverberations of an unexpected crisis. Notably, the frightening SARS-CoV-2, like other viruses, is continually evolving and proving to be extremely adaptable to human beings by reinventing itself, producing the infamous variants. In truly adaptive terms, the World Health Organization webpage states: “The more opportunities a virus has to spread, the more it replicates—and the more opportunities it has to undergo changes” (World Health Organization 2021).

As this somewhat Darwinian opening makes clear, adaptation is a built-in feature of the organic world, necessary for the survival of the human species and—simultaneously—able to cross various kinds of borders. In keeping with this, in *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies*, Timothy Corrigan observes that “in the broadest sense, adaptation has described the capacities for human, cultural, and biological adjustments as a way of surviving, advancing, or simply changing. In this sense, adaptation has been a frequently recognizable and assumed process in cultural sociology, political economies, and evolutionary science through much of human history” (2017, 25). Even more interestingly, he adds that particular circumstances and ground-breaking events—the current pandemic might probably be counted as the latter—have advocated for communally adaptive dynamics over the centuries: “Early and advanced societies have been characterized by their ability to adapt to environmental and social conditions, whether that has meant adapting to physical conditions, such as climate changes or the need for different natural resources, or to social shifts, such as population growth or political turmoil” (25).

The 2008 launch of two international peer-reviewed journals welcoming contributions to the field—Oxford’s *Adaptation* and Intellect’s *Journal of Adaptation in Film and Performance*—as well as the recent publication of two monumental collections, the aforementioned *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies*, edited by Thomas Leitch (2017b), and *The Routledge Companion to Adaptation*, curated by Dennis Cutchins, Katja Krebs and Eckart Voigts (2018), attest to the undeniable liveliness of adaptation studies. Despite its vitality, and permeable, multifaceted and malleable as it is, this “massively expanded and proliferating field” (Cardwell 2018, 7) still struggles to establish its boundaries within the academic universe, “lack[ing] a progressive disciplinary narrative history and a consensus on whether it is a disciplinary field or a range of interdisciplinary practices” (Leitch 2017a, 6). The ubiquitous and protean notion of adaptation, both as a process and a product, as well as a cultural practice, has become “harder and harder to pin down” (Cardwell 2018, 8) and tentative definitions are ever “more numerous, more elaborate, and sometimes more combative” (Corrigan 2017, 31). If adaptation has primarily been associated with the wider dimension of intertextuality, more recently notions such as intermediality and transmediality have frequently intersected with it, blurring the edges further. On the one hand, the lack of a clear-cut theoretical frame (Emig 2012) and the instability of the terminology mobilise adaptive discourses, adding to the dynamism of the field. On the other hand, adaptation studies thus becomes a misty academic limbo in need of some sort of coordinates, with “adaptationists” as wandering scholars fighting to position themselves. Despite the considerable difficulties, in order to survive—and thrive—this discipline has grown to be extremely adaptable: “definitions of adaptation are invariably about readapting other definitions” (Corrigan 2017, 23).

This book review article examines the peculiarities and challenges of adaptation studies in the field of contemporary theatre, focusing—more specifically—on plays

written and produced in the British Isles. The stage branch of adaptation appears to be flourishing: notably, in 2017 Palgrave Macmillan launched a dedicated series entitled “Adaptation in Theatre and Performance,” edited by Vicky Angelaki and Kara Reilly, which explores this practice “as a way of responding and adapting to the conditions, challenges, aspirations and points of reference at a particular historical moment, fostering a bond between theatre and society” (Palgrave Macmillan). Eckart Voigts points out that this series is not the only instance testifying to the vitality of this research area and lists “a spate of books [responding] to the recent wave of interest in adaptation in the theatre” (2020, 358). Among the most relevant recent publications, it is worth mentioning Margherita Laera’s collection of interviews *Theatre and Adaptation: Return, Rewrite, Repeat*, published by Bloomsbury (2014), and two collections of essays, *Translation and Adaptation in Theatre and Film*, edited by Katja Krebs (2013), and *Adapting Translation for the Stage*, edited by Geraldine Brodie and Emma Cole (2017b), both published by Routledge, all of which throw light on the fruitful intersections between translation studies and adaptation studies.

Scholars contributing to the vibrancy of the field have noted that theatre has always featured an adaptive potential. Brodie and Cole open the introduction to their collection by pointing out that “after all, transformation and metamorphosis, particularly of the unexpected kind, are staple elements of theatrical art” (2017a, 1). In the same vein, Laera observes that the inherent capacity of theatre to reinvent itself over the centuries is highly revealing about the natural resilience typical of this art form, which should not be overlooked: “It [theatre] repeats itself and the act of returning and rewriting, as though it were struck by an obsessive compulsion to reiterate and re-enact, again and again, the vestiges of its past. In so doing, it adapts itself to present contingencies and situations, like an animal species struggling to survive through evolution” (2014a, 1). However, the theatrical urge to self-reiterate is not the mere result of an evolutionist instinct. Rather, Laera adds, it stresses the two-way relationship between theatre and the society in which it is produced, as well as its transformative power: “Theatre [...] does not reshape its coordinates simply to remain alive or to remain itself through time, but also to change the world around it. Theatre, one could say, never stops adapting its features to the world and the world to its features” (1).

After these introductory reflections upon adaptation studies and its theatrical instances, I will concentrate on the three volumes to which this contribution is devoted: *Elizabethan and Jacobean Reappropriation in Contemporary British Drama: “Upstart Crows,”* by Graham Saunders (2017), *Adaptation and Nation: Theatrical Contexts for Contemporary English and Irish Drama*, by Catherine Rees (2017), and *Contemporary Approaches to Adaptation in Theatre*, edited by Kara Reilly (2018). All of these books form part of Angelaki and Reilly’s series and their methodologies accord with Palgrave Macmillan’s commitment to publishing paradigm-shifting research. Despite adopting different approaches, the three books share common concerns about some of the most crucial—and controversial—points in the field of theatrical adaptation, especially questions of

terminological slipperiness. Indeed, at the crossroads of different disciplines—some of them less established than others—terminology tends to be highly unstable: when it comes to the rewritten text—the *hypertext* in Genettian terms—each scholar opts for a different label, including *version*, *adaptation*, *appropriation* or *rewriting*.

In his engaging monograph, the first major study of its kind to explore postwar British dramatists' reprising of Elizabethan and Jacobean plays, Saunders takes a terminological stance from the very beginning by employing the word *reappropriation* in the very title. Saunders passionately devotes a section of his introduction—"From Adaptation to Appropriation"—to theoretical shifts and makes it immediately clear that, in this field, there is a "lack of consensus over terminology" (2017, 11). Aptly, he draws upon the seminal work of Gérard Genette (1997), Linda Hutcheon (Hutcheon with O'Flynn 2013) and Julie Sanders (2006). After exploring Genette's notion of *transtextuality*, Saunders defines adaptation as a "blanket term" that nowadays "dominates as a default for the entire practice of rewriting itself" (2017, 5). He states that Sanders's monograph represents a much-needed turning point in the theoretical discourse, stirring the stagnant waters of adaptation studies by providing the scholarly community with "an alternative term, *appropriation*, along with a substitute vocabulary that gives nuanced meanings to the complex and myriad practices that operate underneath the canopy of adaptation" (6; italics in the original). However, Saunders does not limit himself to fighting for Sanders's cause, but delves into the criticism against appropriation, an intertextual and cultural operation that has often been "dismissed as a presumptuous practice," while "the attitude taken to adaptation is a respectful one" (14). Moreover, in order to complete the frame, Saunders takes into consideration Harold Bloom's anxiety of influence (1997) and postmodern discourses—e.g., the parodic—as well as the need to resist them.

In Chapter 2, Saunders interrogates himself about some of the possible reasons why postwar British playwrights decide to rewrite the Bard and his contemporaries. Identifying 1968 as the starting point of this proliferation of Elizabethan and Jacobean appropriations, he focuses on the so-called generation of New Jacobean, including Howard Barker, Howard Brenton, David Edgar and David Hare, and well-established British dramatists who share several similarities with older writers such as Peter Barnes and Edward Bond. Chapter 3 concentrates on three provocative reinterpretations of William Shakespeare's *King Lear* ([ca. 1605] 2000): Barker's *Seven Lears* (1990), Elaine Feinstein's—and The Women's Theatre Group's—*Lear's Daughters* (1987) and Sarah Kane's confrontational *Blasted* (1995), three plays that revision (dysfunctional) familial dynamics from different angles.¹ Barker takes centre stage in Chapter 4, where Saunders does not concentrate exclusively on the output of the playwright, but also reflects upon his relationship with tragedy and the tragic, as well as on his critical

¹ Throughout the body of this article, the first year mentioned after the title of a play refers to the premiere. Publication details are provided in the list of works cited.

deliberations on appropriation, a process that, in Barker's case, can be considered as "an act of cultural archeology" (89). Chapter 5 discusses a selection of contemporary renditions of "the Shakespearian Despot" (105) by examining Brenton's *Measure for Measure* (1972) and *Thirteenth Night* (1981), Edgar's *Dick Deterred* (1974) and the more recent Scottish revision by David Greig, *Dunsinane* (2010), which reappropriates historical sources with fresh eyes. Chapter 6 moves to an Italian locale, discussing Arnold Wesker's *The Merchant* ([1976] 1983)—subsequently retitled *Shylock* (2008)—Charles Marowitz's *Variations on the Merchant of Venice* (1977, published 1978) and Julia Pascal's *The Shylock Play* (2009), three plays that write back to Shakespeare's sixteenth-century *The Merchant of Venice* ([ca. 1597] 1993). The last chapter of the book analyses Jez Butterworth's *Jerusalem* (2009) as an instance of "festive tragedy" (Saunders 2017, 151), a hybrid generic label that can be applied both to tragedy and to comedy and celebrates the innate capacity of a community to survive (166).

Throughout his monograph, Saunders engages in a stimulating conversation with his critical and textual sources, which he constantly interpellates and challenges. *Elizabethan and Jacobean Reappropriation in Contemporary British Drama: "Upstart Crows"* provides readers with "a host" of case studies (2017, 57), ranging from plays first performed in the 1970s to 2000s drama. In his exhaustive book, Saunders adequately demonstrates how in the mid-1990s the approach to Shakespeare and his contemporaries shifts "from being one of confrontation to accommodation" (vii). The study would possibly have benefited from a concluding chapter tying the argument together and slightly more polished copyediting. These very minor comments notwithstanding, it is a hugely satisfying read. Contextualising and investigating each text, Saunders's deeply layered, highly detailed volume indeed illuminates both the original plays and the output of some of the most interesting playwrights writing for today's British stage, offering a substantial contribution to Shakespeare scholarship, as well as to the field of adaptation and appropriation in contemporary Anglophone drama and theatre.

Published in the same year as Saunders's study, Rees's *Adaptation and Nation: Theatrical Contexts for Contemporary English and Irish Drama* perceptively investigates the prismatic intersections between theatrical adaptation and national constructs. In her words, this monograph aims to analyse plays "that have been adapted from one national context to another" by discussing the work of present-day writers "who use theatrical stories or narratives from other countries and transpose them into their own culture" (2017, 1).

In her introduction, appealingly entitled "Adapt[N]ation," in line with Saunders, Rees reflects upon adaptation from a theoretical point of view drawing upon Hutcheon's and Sanders's landmark studies, as well as Julia Kristeva's notion of intertextuality and Roland Barthes's belief that only an authorial withdrawal can unleash polysemic nuances. Rees then (re)maps the territory of nationhood by (re) considering the formulations put forward by eminent thinkers including Benedict Anderson, Homi K. Bhabha, Gilles Deleuze and Edward W. Said, before quoting UK

scholars such as Jen Harvie and Nadine Holdsworth, who have extensively explored the relationship between theatre and the nation.

Rees's book discusses the adaptations of five contemporary English and Irish playwrights: Brian Friel, Marina Carr, Sarah Kane, Patrick Marber and Martin McDonagh. As she points out, even though they are all viewed as prominent Anglophone dramatists, their original dramas have somehow obscured their insightful rewritings (2). Chapter 1 approaches Friel's "translations" of Anton Chekhov's work, *Three Sisters* (1981) and *Uncle Vanya* (1998), throwing light on the historical and political relations between Ireland and Russia and showing how "no text can ever move between nations without some shifts and compromises" (28). Rather than being termed translations, these dramas might be classified as adaptations. Friel's *Afterplay* (2002), in which one character from each of the two Chekhovian *tradaptations* meet, is discussed as well.² Another Irish chapter follows: in this case, the protagonist is Carr, a skilful adaptor of classical tragedies. Rees focuses on *By the Bog of Cats...* (1998)—a rewriting of Euripides's *Medea* (431 BCE)—and *Ariel* (2002)—which reworks the tragedian's *Iphigenia at Aulis* (ca. 407 BCE). Like Friel, Carr keeps "questions of national identity at the fore, as she blends ancient Greek tragedy with twentieth-century Irish scandal and controversy" (Rees 2017, 58). Chapter 3 concentrates on Kane's *Phaedra's Love* (1996), a radical adaptation of Seneca set in an unspecified contemporary Britain. Rees offers new insights into this well-known rewriting, illuminating the sociopolitical echoes of the text and the connections between the domestic and the communal by placing the dramatic narrative in the aftermath of Princess Diana's premature death. In Chapter 4 Rees turns her attention to Marber's sexual politics. After briefly considering *Closer* (1997), she focuses on *After Miss Julie* (1995)—an adaptation of August Strindberg's scandalous play ([1889] 2006)—and *Don Juan in Sobo* (2006)—which relocates Molière's drama ([1665] 2001) to London's West End. As she states, both dramas "feel resolutely modern and British, concerned with social inequalities and class, darkly ironically comic and with an obsession with sexual mis-adventures" (2017, 20). In the following chapter, which might be defined as a short "Interlude" (139), Friel and Marber converge: Rees discusses the two playwrights' versions of Ivan Turgenev's *A Month in the Country* ([1855] 2014), respectively staged in 1992 and 2015, showing their different approaches to adaptation (Friel 1992; Marber 2015). Chapter 6 offers original reflections on McDonagh's cinematic references: here, Rees scrutinises the influence of Robert J. Flaherty's *Man of Aran* (1934) on McDonagh's *The Cripple of Inishmaan* (1996, published 1997), as well as Harold Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter* (1960) on his film *In Bruges* (2008). Rees adds a conclusion to the book, entitled "Translation, Adaptation or Hybrid?," which fosters the ongoing debate in the field.

² The term *tradaptation* was coined in 1978 by the Canadian poet, translator, musician and dramatist Michel Garneau in his Quebecois translation of *Macbeth* (Garneau 2018).

Clearly and cogently written, *Adaptation and Nation: Theatrical Contexts for Contemporary English and Irish Drama* is a welcome contribution to scholarship focusing on the fecund encounter between contemporary Anglophone theatre and the world of adaptation. This study on the poetics and politics of transferring plays from one national frame to another is lucid and grounded. It persuasively shows how the English and Irish stages have closely mirrored national, political, societal and cultural mutations since the 1980s. Rees adopts—and adapts—a broad and fluid notion of adaptation, which is suitable for diverse positions, practices and national contexts.

The collection edited by Reilly, *Contemporary Approaches to Adaptation in Theatre*, is a thought-provoking and eclectic volume, the first publication to date—to my knowledge, at least—entirely devoted to theatrical adaptation(s). This book has a wider geographical scope, boasting seventeen case studies that explore a large range of adapted artefacts and adaptive practices, promoting scholarly heterogeneity and polyphony. In line with several other scholars in the field, the editor is perfectly aware of the productive instability of labels: “Adaptation is a slippery term, and like dramaturgy, it eludes definition because it is so context specific. This volume does not seek to narrow the definition of adaptation, but instead to expand it” (xxi). In her fascinating introduction, Reilly also highlights the inherent theatricality of adaptation—“the actual nature of the theatre is that it repeats” (xxii)—and argues that the ancient Greek dramatists were adaptors *ante litteram*. She explains that this project originated from her long-standing work as a dramaturg, which has given her the opportunity to experience firsthand how theatre makers are shaped by what she intriguingly terms “onto-epistemic mimesis,” that is to say, “mimesis that changes a person’s way of knowing and therefore their way of being” (xxii). By flirting with the idea of repetition with a difference—something Rees similarly does in her opening paragraph, thus nodding toward Deleuze—Reilly introduces the notion of haunting. She writes that “adaptation presents history’s ghost to us” (xxiii) and—in psychoanalytical terms—suggests that this practice is possibly the result of a cultural impulse to repeat: “While Freud associated the repetition compulsion with trauma, he also recognized that playful acts of repetition might alleviate certain traumatic anxieties” (xxv). Entirely in keeping with Hutcheon, for Reilly adaptation is not a derivative process, but “a creative act in its own right” (xxvi).

This collection is divided into four thematic clusters, each introduced by a specialist in the field. Part I, entitled “Company and Directorial Approaches to Adaptation,” is introduced by collaborative creation expert Scott Proudfit, who starts his contribution by noting that company and directorial ways of dealing with theatrical adaptation might seem to stand in opposition. This assumption is, however, questioned by the chapters that follow, demonstrating that “group-centred and directorial approaches are rarely antithetical” (2). Heather Lilley looks at the adaptations produced between 1999 and 2011 by the Cornwall-based Kneehigh Theatre, whose joint artistic director Emma Rice would prefer to call them *retellings* (5). Jessica Silsby Brater explores “Dead End Kids” (1980, unpublished) and “Bélen: A Book of Hours” (1999, unpublished),

two feminist adaptations of history presented by American avantgarde company Mabou Mines. Melissa Poll examines—from a visual perspective—director Robert Lepage’s reworking of Richard Wagner’s *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (1848-1874), first presented at the Metropolitan Opera in New York in 2011. Adam J. Ledger draws upon his rehearsal notes and interviews to investigate a selection of director Katie Mitchell’s international “Live Cinema” productions.

Part II, “Re-mediating the Book to the Stage,” is opened by Frances Babbage, who has published extensively on adaptation and rewriting, as well as—more recently—on the theatrical representation of books. Firmly believing that theatre “is inherently a site of repetition” (91), she examines the peculiarities of this remediation, well exemplified by the Royal Shakespeare Company’s staging of Hilary Mantel’s historical fiction, and addresses questions of fidelity, a recurring notion in the four contributions that follow. The first study in Part II, by Benjamin Fowler, goes back to Mitchell—one of the protagonists of this collection—by analysing her use of technology to remediate Virginia Woolf’s *The Waves* ([1931] 2019) in 2006. Jane Barnette draws upon her own experience reframing Stephen Crane’s novel *The Red Badge of Courage* ([1895] 2004) for Kennesaw State University and Atlanta’s 7 Stages Theatre in 2014, an adaptation she directed herself for Auburn University in 2015. Barnette coins the neologism *adapturgy* to refer to “the merge between new play and production dramaturgy” (137). Samantha Mitschke offers a critical analysis of Theater Amsterdam’s 2014 production of *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* ([1947] 2001), comparing and contrasting it with other renditions of the same template. Both Mitschke and Edmund Chow tackle issues of fidelity. The latter discusses Matthew Spangler’s adaptation of Khaled Hosseini’s bestseller *The Kite Runner* (2003)—staged at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre in 2014—renegotiating the mediated construction of Afghanistan in the war on terror era. The final contribution in Part II is by Reilly herself, who welcomes a certain degree of infidelity in her reading of two feminist adaptations of John Cleland’s pornographic novel *Fanny Hill: Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* ([1748] 2000) by TheatreState (2014, unpublished) and April De Angelis (2015, published 2018).

Part III, titled “Reinscribing the Other in Contemporary Adaptations of Greek Tragedy,” is introduced by classical reception scholar Eleftheria Ioannidou and deals with the idea of reframing Otherness via discourses of displacement and disembodiment in present-day adaptations of ancient drama. Ioannidou opens her insightful piece with a reference to hegemony in the oldest extant tragedy—Aeschylus’s *Persians* (472 BCE)—and concludes by pointing out that “the canonical authority of the classical text is recast in the hierarchies that are embedded in the process of collaboration” (193). Thus, power dynamics are replicated rather than subverted in “an intricate process within which the encounter between texts is often only a pretext” (193). Olga Kekis offers a Genettian analysis of two reinterpretations of Euripides’s *Trojan Women* (415 BCE)—Kaite O’Reilly’s *Peeling* (2002) and Christine Evans’s *Trojan Barbie* (2009, published 2010)—both of which rehabilitate female voices and bodies victimised in the source. Interestingly, the

last two chapters in Part III are both set in the Middle East: George Potter looks closely at Jordanian representations of Syrian refugees in one adaptation presented before and two after 2011, while Gabriel Varghese discusses Brian Woolland's *This Flesh Is Mine* (2015, published 2014), a radical coproduction of Homer's *Iliad* ([8th century BCE] 1987) by the London-based company Border Crossings and Ramallah's Ashtar Theatre.

Presented by modernism scholar Kimberly Jannarone and entitled "Postmodern Meta-Theatrical Adaptation," Part IV offers five postmodern case studies showing that live performance challenges the "stability" of the canon and has a close connection with adaptation and metadiscourses, "whether by displaying the thought behind rehearsal, by creating a collage or a mash-up, or by committing to an inflexible fidelity" (249). Adrian Curtin studies the Chicago-based collective The Neo-Futurists' 2009 adaptation of Eugene O'Neill's *Strange Interlude* (1928). Scott Proudfit provides readers with a US example of textual assemblage, Bill Rauch and Tracy Young's theatrical mash-up "Medea/Macbeth/Cinderella" (1998, unpublished). Sarah Grochala reads adaptation as an iconoclastic stance in Rupert Goold and Ben Power's Marlovian *Faustus* (2004, published 2008) and Jake and Dinos Chapman's Goyan *Insult to Injury* (2003). Nora J. Williams writes about the 2012 postmodern production of Thomas Middleton and William Rowley's *The Changeling* ([1653] 2006). The essay collection closes with Pedro de Senna's investigation of "Ensaio. Hamlet" (2004, unpublished), an adaptation by Brazilian ensemble Cia (Companhia) dos Atores, playing with the polysemy of the word *ensaio*, which in Portuguese means "essay" as well as "rehearsal."

Reilly's wide-ranging collection speaks for itself: this ambitious project—offering a plethora of case studies from different countries—is an extremely valuable book to anyone planning research in the field of stage adaptation. The volume is clearly structured and well crafted: each part gathers attentively selected contributions and each introductory section is accurately conceived. Having a national focus, Saunders's and Rees's monographs are certainly more relevant to English studies, but I have decided to include Reilly's collection—which crosses Anglo-American borders—because it encourages new directions and fresh areas of investigation.

This book review article has demonstrated that (stage) adaptation studies is in good shape and spirits. If recycling is a typically postmodern practice, in more recent times replication is literally going viral. The dynamism and vitality of this discipline are unique, as well as its capacity to create unexpected synergies. This "hybrid, interstitial field" (Aragay 2005, back cover), which is constantly developing, evolving and redefining itself, perfectly exemplifies the idea of scholarly cross-fertilisation. Thanks to its porous borders, "adaptationland" is a liminal zone that promotes stimulating contacts, intersections and exchanges with various disciplines including literary studies, translation studies, reception studies and cultural studies, to name but a few.

More specifically, the in-betweenness of the field of theatrical adaptation facilitates its intersection with English studies, which has accommodated the investigation of adapted artefacts like many other disciplines and undoubtedly benefited from

the encounter. Obviously, the study of English language and literature has a long and prestigious academic history and its boundaries are clear-cut—and somewhat guarded. This process has, therefore, not always run smoothly. For instance, despite the abundance of reinterpretations of Greek tragedies on the contemporary British stage, anglicists tend to be silent about the adaptation of classical sources. *Pace* Shakespeare, nowadays English studies seems to be more resistant than other disciplines to the investigation of this genre. Rita Felski suggests that the recent decline of scholarly interest in tragedy—possibly the most prestigious dramatic form, even in its revised iterations—“is more evident in English departments than in comparative literature and continental philosophy, where tragedy continues to occupy a prominent place” (2008a, 1). Similarly, Sarah Annes Brown observes that “institutional structures and related cultural pressures have discouraged transhistorical work in English studies. In fact, transhistorical research is encouraged far less than interdisciplinary research” (2007, xi). Significantly, despite being relevant to English studies, the three volumes examined in this article are not written or edited by academics specialising in English literature, but by UK theatre scholars.

In conclusion, as its etymology suggests, adaptation studies needs to adapt itself to its multifaceted, slippery, protean object of analysis. In turn, its theory is constantly adapted, drawing on the critical tools of other research areas in the name of interdisciplinarity. However, its ambiguous position poses major problems to a relatively young discipline struggling to find its place within a poorly funded and increasingly bureaucratised academia. As Leitch observes, “this is not the ideal time for adaptation studies to declare its disciplinary independence” (2017a, 5). Nonetheless, between virality, slipperiness and new challenges, adaptation supplies us with “mechanisms for new creation which will itself branch off into infinite possibilities of hermeneutic openness” (Montgomery Griffiths 2017, 78)—and will probably continue to do so for a very long time.

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