

**Mireia Aragay, ed. 2006: *Books in Motion: Adaptation, Intertextuality, Authorship*. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi. 289pp. ISBN: 90-420-1885-2**

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As a collection of essays on the adaptation of literary works to the screen, Mireia Aragay's *Books in Motion: Adaptation, Intertextuality, Authorship* is a welcome addition to the existing critical literature in this area of study (Cartmell and Whelehan 1999; Cartmell 2000; Elliot 2003; Naremore 2000; MacFarlane 1996; Sheen 2000; Stam 2004; Stam and Raengo 2005). This is an area sometimes looked down upon by film critics in the past, but now becoming a fruitful arena for lively, exciting research and seriously taken into account not only in Film and TV studies themselves but also in other fields such as English, American, Post-colonial and Cultural Studies. The issue of the fidelity of the screen adaptation to its literary source is often addressed in the volume but one of its greatest virtues as a collection is that, unlike some of its predecessors, it decidedly aims to transcend the 'fidelity debate' and to open up the critical discussion of the journey from the page to the moving image, foregrounding other issues from a wide array of theoretical positions. Rather than unimaginatively devoting a section to each of the three concepts in the subtitle, the collection has been articulated into complex sections with intriguing and suggestive titles ('Paradoxes of Fidelity'; 'Authors, Auteurs, Adaptation'; 'Context, Intertexts, Adaptation'; 'Beyond Adaptation') that enable the paths of adaptation, intertextuality and authorship to cross each other freely in the analysis of particular films. Its thirteen contributions deal not only with an ample selection of films and TV series that range from Harry Potter and a South African adaptation, *Fools* (1997), to both high-brow and popular English classics such as Olivier's and Branagh's *Henry V* and the BBC's *Pride and Prejudice* (and its off-shoot, Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary*), but also include adaptations based on works by Emily Brontë, Mary Shelley, Charles Dickens, Virginia Woolf and James Joyce. Each of these self-contained but sharp and incisive contributions is preceded by a useful summary of its contents that guides the reader's gaze to the essential issues in each chapter – the editor must be sincerely thanked for either providing or requesting them.

In her Introduction, Aragay historicises the evolution of the critical reception of literary adaptations and dissects the crucial issues that criticism both of film and of series based on novels and plays have to face today. Fidelity to the original is no longer a critical measuring-rod; it has been replaced with the notion of *successful adaptation* and it is precisely the 'lapses of fidelity' that often contribute to the success of the adaptation, triggering new readings or rewritings of the original. Aragay also links the evolution of critical trends in adaptation studies to the changes experienced by film and literary studies under the widespread influence of theoretical criticism since the 1980s. Aragay's introduction is no doubt one of the most valuable assets to this collection and

it will be used in future research and postgraduate teaching. It is exemplary in its economy of style, managing to provide a considerable amount of information in a tight, concise manner. It also places the collection as a whole in relation to previous criticism on screen adaptations and gives the reader a substantial 'state of the art' account of the field itself that is of great use to anyone in need of a succinct overview of the existing literature.

The first section, 'Paradoxes of Fidelity' addresses the fidelity issue from three very different angles. Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan take the first adaptation of a Harry Potter book, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (2001), as an example of the evils of accuracy, showing how fidelity to the 'original' may sometimes backfire, as it can foreground what is missing. Sara Martin, focusing on Ralph Fiennes performance of Heathcliff in Peter Kosminsky's *Wuthering Heights* (1992), explores the relation between the reader's previous mental realisation of a given character and an actor's impersonation of that same character, arguing that the actor's performance may succeed even if the adaptation as a whole fails. John Style's study of *A Tale of Two Cities* (1958) discusses the film's fidelity not only to the source novel but to Dickens' own source and to Carlyle's work on the French Revolution. As does the previous chapter, it also engages with an actor's performance, by examining Dirk Bogarde's Sidney Carton to show how a new layer can be added to the original by suggesting a gay reading of Dickens' novel. Together, these three essays show how fidelity as an issue is not likely to disappear from adaptation studies; rather, if approached with a theoretically well-informed pen it may still become a rich and powerful critical notion.

In the second section, 'Authors, Auteurs, Adaptation', three essays address related but distinct issues around the retrieved figure of the author. Karen Diehl explores the writer as a literal presence in films such as *Shakespeare in Love* (John Madden 1999), *The Hours* (Stephen Daldry 2002), *Le Temps Retrouvé* (Raoul Ruiz 1999) and *Adaptation* (Spike Jonze 2002), in which the author figures as a character and adaptation becomes a film genre that offers a vantage point for discussion of the critical concept of the author, dead or alive. Thomas Leitch traces the careers of three filmmakers, Alfred Hitchcock, Stanley Kubrick and Walt Disney, and discusses the implications of the terms *adapter*, *metteur-en-scène* and *auteur* to suggest that these three adapters, unlike others, have become also 'auteurs' since they have managed to turn their public persona into a trademark. Together, Leitch concludes, their careers and their ways of dealing with their chosen literary sources pose challenging questions about the construction and source of authorship in literary adaptations. In her study of the German writer and director Doris Dörrie, Margaret McCarthy has found an interesting case for the study of the *writer/auteur* dichotomy in adaptations, since Dörrie writes and adapts her own works of fiction for the screen, providing an occasion to study how characters evolve and how masculinity is transformed in the process of adaptation.

The third section, 'Contexts, Intertexts, Adaptation', brings together four essays that are not so closely related as those in the previous sections, even though three of them deal with canonical authors (Austen, Joyce, Shakespeare). These four chapters are nevertheless truly interesting in isolation, as they show the variety of angles from which adaptations can be approached. Manuel Barbeito contrasts James Joyce's well-known

story in *Dubliners* with John Huston's adaptation *The Dead* (1987) and explores how through the particular use of the camera, its relationship with Gabriel and with the audience, Huston manages to transpose onto the screen a difficult subject-matter, the hero's reflections on death. In an excellently contextualised chapter, Lindiwe Dovey dissects *Fools* (1997), a TV adaptation of a novella by a twentieth-century South African novelist who wholly rewrites and re-historicises its source text. By showing how filmmaker Ramadan Suleman has revised Ndebele's novella through a consistent programme of calculated infidelities, Dovey argues in favour of the ideological and artistic potential of the 'unfaithful adaptation'. In a chapter on screen adaptation of Shakespeare's *Henry V*, José Ángel García Landa avails himself of the notion of symbolic interactionism, which he borrows from the field of social studies, to read meaning as something which does not reside in a fixed place but emerges from interaction. His post-modern hermeneutic approach is particularly suited to film adaptations of Shakespeare's plays, which are generally steeped in a dense reception history. The last chapter in this section, by Mireia Aragay and Gemma López, examines the BBC *Pride and Prejudice* in terms of its relation to what is known as *chick lit* and *chick flicks* to display a network of cross references between Austen's novel, the BBC TV mini series, Helen Fielding's off-shoots with Bridget Jones as heroine and the films based on these two novels, *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason*. The result is a tightly-packed chapter that makes two important theoretical contributions on the need to decentre fidelity as a site of critical debate in the discussion of adaptations and the benefits of replacing it with a conceptual framework in which source text and adaptation are seen as existing in a dynamics of mutual inflection.

Aragay and López's chapter provides a convenient nexus with the next section, as it has more in common with the two chapters that follow it, which also discuss intertextuality and representations of femininity and masculinity, than with the two that precede it. The last section contains, in fact, some of the most exciting essays in the entire book. In a chapter on Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and its fate on the screen, Pedro Javier Pardo certainly goes 'beyond adaptation' when he suggests that adaptation should be replaced by "cultural intertextuality" (237-240). He shows how Kenneth Branagh's *Frankenstein* (1994) is indebted to Francis Ford Coppola's *Dracula* (1992) and complicates the linear conception of adaptation as a shift from text to film by suggesting that most adaptations are intertextually dependent on previous films. Celestino Deleyto, in a smooth chapter that flows easily and reads well, looks into the presence of the internal narrator in two film adaptations of popular British novels, *High Fidelity* (1995) and *Bridget Jones's Diary* (1996) to prove how this formal device may have crucial ideological effects on the portrayal of gender relations and gender issues. The internal narrator in these films allows Deleyto to undertake a very thorough discussion of representations of femininity and masculinity in relation to the conventions of romantic comedy which will no doubt serve as a model to trigger similar analyses of other films. Belén Vidal cleverly challenges the conservative ring often attached to costume drama with a shrewd analysis of three pieces by women filmmakers, *The Luzhin Defence* (Marleen Gorris, 2000), *Mansfield Park* (Patricia Rozema 1999) and *The Governess* (Sandra Goldbacher 1998). Her reducing these works

“from the ‘major’ idiom of the historical and the literary past to the ‘minor’ key of romance” (263) is rather questionable, at least as far as *Mansfield Park* is concerned – and one could turn her reasoning inside out and argue that what both Austen and Rozema do is precisely the opposite, i.e. to avail themselves of the ‘minor’ key of romance to reassess the ‘major’ idiom of the political present (Austen) or the historical past (Rozema).<sup>1</sup> However, Vidal’s essay is probably one of the most valuable chapters in the whole book and sets up a path for future studies on women’s *literary films* (to use the term she herself has coined). It is easy to see why the editor has chosen this contribution to bring the collection to a stimulating *fin de fête* and let the reader close the book with a smile of thoughtful satisfaction.

As a whole, the collection privileges film over TV mini series, and hyper-canonical and popular British fiction over plays. As a result, British TV series lack visibility and the same applies to adaptations of dramatic works. Although the BBC *Pride and Prejudice* and Shakespeare’s *Henry V* are discussed, readers of this book may long for an assessment of well known British TV series such as *Brideshead Revisited* (1981) or the two adaptations of *The Forsyte Saga* (1967; 2002) that obtained an undisputed success both in and outside Britain and the US. More British audience-oriented ones, including the two versions of *Middlemarch* (1968; 1994) or of *Vanity Fair* (1998; 2004) would have also provided exciting ground for comparison and analysis at several points in this book. Given that many of these TV adaptations engage intertextually not only with their literary source but with previous adaptations of the same work, they provide excellent material for both formal and ideological explorations of the remake, a concept that is touched upon directly by García Landa and indirectly by Javier Pardo. Oscar Wilde and Bernard Shaw are absent – and the presence of Colin Firth in *The Importance of Being Earnest* (2002), openly marketed as *this is not Jane Austen, it is Wild(e)* could easily have been discussed, even if briefly, by Aragay and López in their account of how Firth served as object for the female gaze in romances of the 90s. Although the 1958 adaptation of *A Tale of Two Cities* is cleverly and thoroughly discussed by John Style, recent Dickens on film and TV are ignored.

The reader looking for a historical survey of literary adaptations or a wide array of samples from all decades of cinema history will therefore be disappointed. There is a taste of the contemporary, with some exceptions, as a great many of the adaptations discussed are post-1970. In fact, it is the case that some adaptations/novels are over-present (*The Diary of Bridget Jones* and *Adaptation* are discussed in several chapters) and this lack of variety may end up leaving some readers with a bitter after-taste. One need not be a Shakespeare scholar to notice that his presence is scanty, given that his plays have given rise to a major industry in adaptation not only in Hollywood and for television (from silent film to Al Pacino; from the BBC to ITV and Channel 4), but also

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<sup>1</sup> *Mansfield Park* is Austen’s most political novel, together with *Persuasion* perhaps, and it probably prompted W. H. Auden to see in “An English spinster of the middle class” a pre-Marxist that could unveil “The economic basis of society” through her dissection of “the amorous effect of ‘brass’” (Auden 1974: 41). Rozema’s adaptation does not recoil, disguise or underplay any of the ‘major’ political and economic roots of Austen’s work; rather, it has blown them up, to the disgust and rage of those who look for fidelity to the original.

in experimental, independent, non-mainstream directors (Jarman, Greenaway) and non-US/non-UK cinema (Kosintsev, Goddard, Kaurismäki, Van Gogh). It is not only that Shakespearean films are poorly represented but also that the topic chosen for the only chapter on Shakespeare is slightly anti-climatic when placed in a collection such as this one, geared towards the very contemporary. Valuable as it is for its theoretical reflections, García Landa's contribution deals with two films, Olivier's *Henry V* (1944) and Branagh's *Henry V* (1989), which cannot be said to be excitingly new, and its enquiry into what is a Shakespeare film and what is a remake ignores a good deal of the pioneering work done in Shakespeare Studies on the matter – the wealth of terms such as *adaptation*, *appropriation*, *rewriting*, *off-shoot*, *derivative*, etc., which Shakespearean criticism has used for decades shows how much thinking has been carried out already. And yet, García Landa's chapter is a crucial addition to the book and stands as an oasis for drama lovers, as it is the only essay that engages with the particularities of adapting a play, not a novel, to the screen. Were this chapter to be removed from the book, the title of the latter would have to be *Novels into Motion*.

If the collection has only token contributions on English and European canonical male, dead, white authors (Shakespeare, Dickens, Joyce and a pinch of Proust) while the long tradition of Hollywood pre-1960 adaptations of US authors is largely ignored (no chapter here, for instance, to please crime fiction lovers of the hard-boiled persuasion), there is by way of compensation enough Jane Austen and Bridget Jones, much Darcy and some Heathcliff, a dash of Harry Potter and Disney and a touch of Virginia Woolf (*The Hours*). This collection then stands out for its many chapters devoted to the work of women writers and women filmmakers (including a whole chapter on Doris Dörrie, and another on Marleen Gorris, Patricia Rozema and Sandra Goldbacher) – so gender and gender issues are certainly not neglected, turning this into a volume that solidly and steadily foregrounds the contribution of female voices to the field of screen adaptations.

The strong presence of contemporary adaptations suggests in fact that the focus of the volume is not the array of films brought to the fore for discussion but rather the wide sample of theoretical positions and frameworks proposed by the authors as valuable tools of analysis. It is here that the strength of the volume resides, on the bold move to assemble and pack between covers an array of different models for the dissection of filmic texts. Aragay has chosen the contributors to this book with great care and together they provide a joint proof of the critical vigour of the study of screen adaptations. Given the strong, if subdued and not proclaimed, feminist slant of this volume, and the interest several contributors show in the twin notions of masculinity/femininity, one wonders if the editor might not have been better off commissioning chapters which centrally addressed gender issues, as this would have given the volume an extra zest. Even those contributors whose works does not touch on gender issues at all would have been equally capable of writing on adaptations bearing on the work of women authors or women filmmakers. The depth and width of theoretical approaches brought together is such, however, that the book does not really need a joint focus to stand on its own as an important contribution to literary and film studies. Perhaps a collection of essays on screen adaptations with a decided feminist angle is Aragay's next project. *Books in Motion 2?* Yes, please.

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