

Introduction

The essays collected in this book focus on the relationship between German literature, the cinema screen and the many critical interfaces between. Predominantly, the papers present critical readings of the transposition of German language texts to film, while also considering the impact of cinema on literature, exploring intertextualities as well as intermedialities; the forum of discussion thus created spans from cinematic narratives based on Goethe's *Faust* to Caroline Link's adaptation of Stefanie Zweig's novel *Nirgendwo in Afrika* (*Nowhere in Africa*).¹

When analysing a film based on a novel, short story or even poem, the comparative approach is most widely used in order to assess a film within the context of adaptation. However, as the essays in this book will show, widening the theoretical and methodological lens is essential in order to comprehend fully some of the filmmakers' choices that shape the final cinematic product. The adaptation of prose fiction for the screen requires analysis on a number of levels. At the same time and approached from a semiotic point of view, the binary relationship between a novel (as a verbal system) and a film (as both verbal and visual system) is thoroughly central to this enquiry. It is hence no surprise that the essays in this book address adaptation first and foremost in a comparative manner. The authors of this volume focus predominantly on questions of narrative and clearly emphasise the text itself. However, they all share an awareness that adaptations are, on several levels, translations of a literary text into the language of film. Any analysis of a text transposed from one medium into another requires an understanding of both the narrative and the technological aspects of film and the particular type of transposition. Consequently, anyone who writes about a film as adaptation places him- or herself in between two texts (literary and cinematic) and their respective contexts, which renders an appreciation of the specificities of both representational forms critical.

Commonly, introductions of this kind begin by examining the difference between film and literature. One of the most recent examples is Robert Stam's introduction to his and Alessandra Raengo's edited volume *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation*,² in which he analyses convincingly both experiential and ontological differences between the two media.

¹Caroline Link's film *Nowhere in Africa* (2001) won numerous awards, among them five golden 'Lolas' at the German film awards (Deutscher Filmpreis) in 2002 and the best foreign film Oscar in 2003.

²Robert Stam: Introduction: The Theory and Practice of Adaptation. In: *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation*. Ed. by Robert Stam and Alessandra Raengo. London: Blackwell 2005. Pp. 1–52.

While explorations of binary oppositions between a novel and its cinematic version are indeed obvious starting points for any analysis of a film as adaptation, discussions of the wider context of production and elements that might have influenced anything from the casting of the film to its reception are often ignored. When we look at Rainer Werner Fassbinder's film *Lola* (1981) for instance, we are dealing with an adaptation of an adaptation of a novel by Heinrich Mann. Josef von Sternberg, who directed the original adaptation of Mann's novel, in fact had little interest in exploring the contexts of Mann's *Professor Unrat* (*Small Town Tyrant*, 1905) when preparing to film *Der blaue Engel* (*The Blue Angel*) in 1929. In contrast, Rainer Werner Fassbinder's adaptation of Sternberg's film is performing a split between its return to the novel on the one hand, capturing its spirit much more directly than Sternberg would have ever aspired to, and its desire to comment on West Germany's *Wirtschaftswunder* society on the other, in which ruthless commodification and moral adjustment keep the local economy surging. Fassbinder uses the specific social and political backdrop of 1950s West Germany to position his (or Heinrich Mann's) characters Lola (the novel's Rosa Fröhlich) and von Bohm (Professor Rath) in reference to the original novel as well as to both Sternberg's and his own film narrative. Fassbinder's adaptation illustrates how film may comment simultaneously on a number of past events or contexts as well as incorporating the film-makers own present. In addition, he clearly engages as a director with the fact that cinema is, as a narrative form, literary. Fassbinder's French colleague Eric Rohmer, who adapted Heinrich von Kleist's *Die Marquise von O...* (*The Marquise of O...*, 1810) both as the author of the screenplay and as director of the 1976 film (as well as appearing as a Russian soldier), even referred to literature as his "mother"³ and the root of his creativity as a director. This is a view undoubtedly shared by many film-makers, especially those of Rohmer's own and earlier generations. The camera became the director's pen and film-making was considered *écriture* not only by the creative minds of the French *Nouvelle Vague* and the New German Cinema.⁴ Even today, the connection between cinema and literature is systemic. As T. Jefferson Kline points out: "Cinema has always [...] been 'literary', if only in the sense that it wanted to tell a story, and 'borrowed' from the novel not only many of the narrative techniques necessary to this project but most of its plots".⁵

³ Quoted in Jefferson Kline's book on intertextuality in French cinema. See Jefferson T. Kline: *Screening the Text: Intertextuality in New Wave French Cinema*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP 1992. P. 3.

⁴ Already in 1946, Jean Cocteau wrote: "It is true that the author of a film is its director. Everything belongs to him. I directed *La Belle et la Bête*, because I wanted to be the real author of the work". Jean Cocteau: *The Art of Cinema*. Trans. by Robin Buss. London: Marion Boyers 2001. P. 32.

⁵ Jefferson T. Kline: *Screening the Text: Intertextuality in New Wave French Cinema*. P. 2. See also the works by Dudley Andrew, such as: "The Impact of the Novel on French Cinema of the 30's". In: *L'Esprit Créateur* 30.2 (Summer 1990). Pp. 3–13.

But as much as cinema is literary, so does much of literature focus on the visual. Writers are often quite explicit in seeking to aid their readers in visualising a narrative. Joseph Conrad, for example, stated his mission as a writer as follows: "My task [...] is by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel – it is before all, to make you see". The visualisation of a narrative is part of the reading process. Understanding of a literary text only occurs once the narrative begins to unfold 'visually' in our minds. We inevitably form visual images of characters, places and plots while reading a novel, short story or perhaps even a poem. And it is via this visualisation of the narrative in the mind that the emotional engagement of the reader occurs. However, making films is not just creating images on screen that might coincide with or challenge our imagination. In 1913, only a few years after Joseph Conrad's statement, the film-maker D. W. Griffith said: "The task I'm trying to achieve above all is to make you see".⁶ Seeing here implies an increased awareness and appreciation both with regard to the narrative in question and to the world around us, imagined or real. The author's aim here differs little from the film-maker's aspirations and underlines the proximity between the two media or narrative forms.⁷

Cinematic adaptations of literary texts have been the object of more or less uninterrupted scholarly investigation since the mid-twentieth century. Not surprisingly, analyses of adaptations (mostly Hollywood adaptations of well-known English and American novels and plays) predominantly focus on the absence and/or presence of similarities between the narrative of the novel and the film, i.e. on the 'fidelity' of the adaptation. Typically, equivalence or fidelity criticism engages in discourses of 'loss' and principally questions elements left out or altered during the process of transposition. The notion of absence and presence, however, is also inherent to the medium film itself, for it is the creation of an illusion that is cinema's essence and drive. Cinema tells us stories, it sheds light on and evokes the spectre of that which is absent, creating a reality that draws the past into the present. As Robert Scholes points out, narration is also a performative act that "rests upon the presence of a narrator or narrative medium (actors, book,

⁶ Griffith and Conrad are quoted repeatedly in books on screen adaptations of literary text, as, for example in Robert Giddings, Keith Selby and Chris Wensley: *Screening the Novel: The Theory and Practice of Literary Dramatization*. Houndmills: Macmillan 1990. P. 1. For Joseph Conrad, see his preface to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*. London: Dent 1897. For D. W. Griffith see Lewis Jacobs: *The Rise of American Film*. New York: Harcourt 1939. P. 119.

⁷ However, their proximity can just as well be matched by their difference, beginning with the fact that compared to the rather lonely creative process that leads to the production of a novel, films are usually collaborative projects that rely not only on the vision of a director but the technical and artistic expertise of an entire crew. See Robert Stam: Introduction. P. 20.

film, etc.) and the absence of the events narrated. These events are present as fictions but absent as realities".⁸ What is projected onto the cinema screen is an illusion – one that is, however, experienced as a presence. The viewing of a film might present itself as entertainment, or it may take root and create a space in which we measure ourselves, to borrow Roland Barthes' thought, determining our humanity.⁹ This, of course, is true for works of art in general and not specific to film or screen adaptation. The question of art, however, is a pertinent one in this context. Film inspired Walter Benjamin to write his essay "Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter der technischen Reproduzierbarkeit" ("The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", 1935/36) in which he addresses the meaning and uniqueness of an 'original' work of art and the challenges but also opportunities generated during this age of technological reproducibility. Absorbed in technology and commerce, film struggles to be art. Within the context of adaptation for the cinema screen, the aspect of reproduction or reproducibility is, at least, doubled. Any serious adaptation simultaneously strives to resemble its literary source and yet endeavours to function entirely independent of it as a work of art. In this respect it is not that dissimilar to a translation, which "operates first of all under the constraint of the original [...]"¹⁰ as André Lefevere tells us, while creating a seemingly original text. An original, however, that is based on another, adapted to a screenplay, filmed, copied and projected. It is only in the experience of the spectator, and possibly in the hermeneutic labour of the critic, that a film becomes entirely unique.

The issue of film as art has been raised persistently but was especially evident in early criticism of adaptations for the cinema screen. Time and again, questions of independence of an adaptation from its literary source as well as queries regarding the independence of the film as work of art and/or the film-maker as artist take centre stage: If the original literary text or novel is a work of art, can the cinematic adaptation of that novel ever match its artistic quality? Can

⁸Robert Scholes: Narration and Narrativity in Film and Fiction. In: Robert Scholes: *Semiotics and Interpretation*. New Haven and London: Yale UP 1982. Pp. 57–72, here: P. 58. The quote continues: "Given this situation, it is possible to distinguish different kinds and qualities of narration by the varying extents to which they emphasize either that immediate process of narration (as an actor may draw attention to himself as performer or a writer to himself as stylist) or those mediated events themselves. Using our common critical terminology, it is possible to say that a narration is more fictional as it emphasizes the events narrated, more lyrical as it emphasizes its own language, and more rhetorical as it uses either language or events for some persuasive end".

⁹Roland Barthes: The World as Object. In: *Calligram*. Ed. by Norman Bryson. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988. P. 107.

¹⁰André Lefevere: Why Waste Our Time on Rewrites? The Trouble with Interpretation and the Role of Rewriting in an Alternative Paradigm. In: *The Manipulation of Literature. Studies in Literary Translation*. Ed. by Theo Hermans. London: Croom Helm 1985. Pp. 215–243, here: P. 235.

the film-maker ever live up to the original genius of the writer? The notion of adapting a literary text for the screen seemed to imply the film-maker's willingness to forsake his or her autonomy in order to create what could at best be labelled a mediocre product. As if a film-maker who chooses to adapt a novel for the screen must by implication lack the independence of mind and spirit required for the production of a work of art. All too often it was the outstanding quality of the novel that seemed directly to question the value of the film.

In his 1948 article "A daptation, or the Cinema as Digest"¹¹ André Bazin discusses the frequency of acts of adaptation and summary in the creation of modern art, including cinema. He views the act of adapting a novel to film as highly problematic and most efforts to transforming an excellent novel into a film of equal quality as doomed to failure. But at the same time, Bazin identifies the demand of "faithfulness" of the adaptation with respect to its literary source as misleading:

'Form' is at most a sign, a visible manifestation, of style, which is absolutely inseparable from the narrative content, of which it is, in a manner of speaking and according to Sartre's use of the work, the metaphysics. Under these circumstances, faithfulness to a form, literary or otherwise, is illusory: what matters is the *equivalence in meaning of the forms*.¹²

To prove his point, Bazin argues that the *style* of André Malraux's film *L'Espoir*, which Malraux directed in 1945 and which is based on his 1937 novel of the same name (trans. *Man's Hope*, 1938) "is completely identical to that of his book, even though we are dealing here with two different artistic forms, cinema on the one hand and literature on the other".¹³

By praising Malraux's "identical" versions of *L'Espoir*, Bazin implicitly defines the 'perfect' adaptation. He assumes an essence of the novel that can be reconstructed on the cinema screen firmly embedded in corresponding particulars of style, thereby creating a mirror image of the 'core' of the literary text. But is an identical re-presentation in the medium film, a mirror image in style albeit in a different artistic form, really what an adaptation should be expected to accomplish? Can an adaptation ever achieve that kind of "equivalence in meaning of the forms", unless, perhaps, author and film-maker are one and the same person, as in the case of André Malraux or, as discussed in this book, Doris Dörrie? Does not the duplicity inherent in all literary discourse, be it the duplicity of the message, context or codes in general or that of the sender or

¹¹ André Bazin: L'Adaptation ou le cinéma comme digeste. In: *Esprit* 16.146 (1948). Pp. 32–40. The text appears in English translation in the first part of *Film Adaptation*. Ed. by James Naremore. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press 2000. Pp. 19–27.

¹² Bazin: *Adaptation*. P. 20.

¹³ *Ibid.*

receiver, equip any text with an ambiguity that renders similitude between literary source and cinematic representation impossible? Even if a novel and film resemble one another down to allusions or small hints of irony, the privilege of abundance and flexibility of time in a novel does not normally correspond to the facilities commonly associated with the time frame of a feature film. Unless, perhaps, one looks at adaptations such as Rainer Werner Fassbinder's 930 minute screen version of Alfred Döblin's 1929 novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1979/80), which captures Döblin's world in compelling detail, tempting its viewers to believe, just one more time, in the possibility of the notion of similitude. Fassbinder's translation of Döblin's literary style is in numerous instances entirely convincing both in terms of the adaptation's faithfulness to the source novel and with regard to the equivalence in meaning of the two forms or media – in more than fifteen hours of film. In this case, fidelity becomes a rather time-consuming affair and, perhaps, while not betraying the medium film, as a television series in thirteen parts and one epilogue, Fassbinder's work here clearly circumvents the demands regarding the consumer-friendly length of feature films usually placed on adaptations for the cinema screen.

So can this "equivalence" in meaning of the two forms ever be achieved by a film-maker who is not at the same time the author of the literary text as well as the screenplay? It seems real equivalence is impossible to achieve¹⁴ and most film adaptations recapitulate the basic plot but differ essentially from the multifaceted materiality of the novels or short stories they are based on.¹⁵ Bazin labels adaptations as "digests", as "condensed versions" and "summaries" of the literary texts – usually novels – that provided the narrative springboard for the film.¹⁶ This process of condensing and summarising implies choice, and Bazin indicates a prevalence of commercial considerations when he writes: "To be sure, one must first know to what end the adaptation is designed; for the cinema or for its audience. One must also realize that most adapters care far more about the latter than about the former".¹⁷

The consideration a film-maker might pay to the audience is often judged detrimental to the adaptor's efforts in creating a work of art. Already in 1923, Walter Benjamin articulated a related thought in his essay "The Task of the Translator":

In the appreciation of a work of art or an art form, consideration of the receiver never proves fruitful. Not only is any reference to a certain public or its representatives misleading, but even the concept of an 'ideal' receiver is detrimental in the theoretical consideration of art, since all it posits is the existence and nature of man as such. Art, in the same way, posits man's physical and spiritual existence, but in none of its

¹⁴"There is no such transferable 'core'". Robert Stam: Introduction. P. 15.

¹⁵See Robert Stam: Introduction. P. 18.

¹⁶Bazin: Adaptation. P. 21.

¹⁷Ibid.

works is it concerned with his response. No poem is intended for the reader, no picture for the beholder, no symphony for the listener.¹⁸

No doubt a work of art can be commercially successful, but a film that is shaped and driven by the potential demands of its target audience will rarely be considered art. Yet film production is a costly business and the pressure to ensure large audiences is enormous. Commercial considerations in the realm of filmmaking often become blatantly obvious when a novel is turned into film, not just since Tom Tykwer's adaptation¹⁹ of Patrick Süskind's *Das Parfum* (*Perfume. The Story of a Murderer*, 1985) headed for a price tag of 50 million Euro. Film has been a commodity from its inception and commercial interests have shaped its productions throughout its history. Margarete Böhme's best-selling novel *Tagebuch einer Verlorenen* (*Diary of a Lost Girl*, 1905), for instance, tells the story of the bourgeois teenager Thymian Gotteball and her social descent after having been raped by her father's pharmacy assistant and becoming the bourgeois family's worst nightmare: an unwed mother. Böhme's compassionate novel is a biting social commentary that juxtaposes bourgeois society's hypocrisy and Victorian bigotry with the morality, intelligence and compassion of prostitutes. In the novel, the tragic heroine and victim of society's duplicity, young Thymian, dies a prostitute, despite her best efforts to determine for herself a different path based on and achieved through education.

Within the first twenty-five years after the publication of Böhme's hugely successful novel, the literary text was adapted twice and commercial considerations not only prompted the choice of this particular narrative, but also significantly shaped the screenplay. In both adaptations of the novel for the cinema screen – by Richard Oswald in 1918 and G. W. Pabst in 1929 – the grim ending of the untimely death of an intelligent, kind and caring young woman is turned into a romantic tale of survival as Thymian is being 'rescued' by an elderly

¹⁸ Walter Benjamin: The Task of the Translator. In: *Illuminations*. Trans. by Harry Zohn. Glasgow: Collins 1973. Pp. 69–82, here: P. 69. "Nirgends erweist sich einem Kunstwerk oder einer Kunstform gegenüber die Rücksicht auf den Aufnehmenden für deren Erkenntnis fruchtbar. Nicht genug, daß jede Beziehung auf ein bestimmtes Publikum oder dessen Repräsentanten vom Wege abführt, ist sogar der Begriff eines 'idealen' Aufnehmenden in allen kunsttheoretischen Erörterungen vom Übel, weil diese lediglich gehalten sind, Dasein und Wesen des Menschen überhaupt vorauszusetzen. So setzt auch die Kunst selbst dessen Leibliches und geistiges Wesen voraus – seine Aufmerksamkeit aber in keinem ihrer Werke. Denn kein Gedicht gilt dem Leser, kein Bild dem Beschauer, keine Symphonie der Hörschaft". Walter Benjamin: Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers. In: *Illuminationen*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 1977. Pp. 50–67, here: P. 50.

¹⁹ *Perfume. The Story of a Murderer* (2006), directed by Tom Tykwer, screenplay by Andrew Birkin, Bernd Eichinger and Tom Tykwer, starring Dustin Hoffmann, Alan Rickman, Corinna Harfouch, etc.

aristocrat. Especially Pabst's 1929 film was not only a success due to the sex appeal of its star Louise Brooks as Thymian, but also because the film foregrounds the audience's desire for a happy ending. The novel's subtitle and claim of (anonymous) authorship is omitted: "Von einer Toten" (By a Dead Woman), as Thymian lives and Böhme's social, moral and political criticism is reduced to easily consumed cinematic entertainment. But the success of Pabst's silent film was short-lived, due to the introduction of the talking picture in the late 1920s.

The question of art and the function of adaptation, however, continued to resurface. Four decades later, the study of film and, especially, adaptation began to change direction, prompted chiefly by the French film theoretician Christian Metz, who focused his semiotics of film on cinematic specificity based on filmic discourse and image discourse. In his *Essais sur la signification au cinéma* (1967) Metz uses semiology as an analytic tool in order to understand better the relationship between art (representation) and ideology, and clearly demonstrates the vigorous kinship between film and narrative. Especially after the publication of his *Essais* in English (as *Film Language*, 1974), this discourse gained popularity and was moved forward by critics and theorists such as Robert Scholes. In his work on semiotics, and more specifically his essay on "Narration and Narrativity in Film and Fiction" (1976),²⁰ Scholes writes:

As Christian Metz has made abundantly clear, film and narrative have such a powerful affinity that their relationship assumes a supreme naturalness. When, in the eighteenth century, Lessing sought so elaborately to contrast the mimetic possibilities of verbal narration and pictorial representation, he neatly (doubtless too neatly) divided the world between them – assigning to the sequential, arbitrary signs of fiction the narration of actions, and to the simultaneous, motivated signs of painting the description of objects and persons. If he were brought back to life today he would recognize in cinema the reconciliation of the parts of his divided world, for the motion-picture film gives us objects and persons moving and enacting in a visual system of narration that combines the powers of poetry and painting in an extraordinary synthesis.²¹

The fascination with the medium cinema among scholars of literature is surely due, in part, to this merging of Lessing's divided worlds. In his *Laokoon oder über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie* (*Laocoon: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, 1766), Lessing emphasises the mimetic capacities of both

²⁰ Robert Scholes essay was originally published as "Narration and Narrativity in Film" in the *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* (August 1976) and gained wide attention when it appeared in a slightly revised form in Scholes' highly acclaimed *Semiotics and Interpretation*. New Haven and London: Yale UP 1982. Pp. 57–72.

²¹ Robert Scholes: *Narration and Narrativity in Film and Fiction*. Pp. 65–66.

poetry and painting, as both make present that which is absent and tender appearance as reality.²² What divides them however, and thus separates the diachronic unfolding of meaning in poetry from the – at time shocking – immediacy of an image, is brought together in the sequentially unfolding visual tapestry of film. It is this overlapping of narrative structure and visual composition, of plot and *mise-en-scène* in film, which seemingly takes the mimetic capacity of art further still and perhaps accounts for the ongoing fascination with the medium of cinema. In light of this thought, any writing *about* filmic adaptations of literatures broadly construed can perhaps be understood as retrograde steps in the canon of film criticism: they reintroduce a purely narrative element into reflections on a medium that has, theoretically at least, moved past such singular marks of distinction. Any notion of an “original”, of “adaptation” or “fidelity” thus potentially misses what makes film distinct as a medium: the fusion of mimetic faculties within the broader horizon of art.

But can cinematic representation fill our imagination in the same way as the force of vision that Lessing experienced while gazing at the monumental sculpture of *Laocoon and his Sons* in the Vatican museum in Rome? *Laocoon* is both a work of art and representative of narration. Not unlike film, the sculpture tells its own story, but its interpretation depends on the viewer’s knowledge and awareness regarding the iconography and contexts of this specific representation. When we compare a novel and a film, the mode of narration also clearly differs, but both the written text and the cinematic flow of images (with or without sound) represent narratives. Indeed, each presentational style (reading a text as a book, enacting it on the stage, filming and projecting it onto a screen) intensifies in Scholes’ view “the literariness of the experience by its own artifice: language plus enactment plus photography. And the achieved fiction is *there* on the screen with a specificity that the printed text alone can never hope to match. The price for this intensity is a reduction in the interpretive richness of the written text – and this happens as every level is added”. The difference between the performance of a play on stage and an adaptation of a literary text for the cinema screen is one of interpretive choice. Both narrative forms make choices for the audience, but in Scholes’ view, in a play performed on stage, new or different choices are potentially made each night. No two performances of a play will ever be identical, but “[w]hen the story is filmed, all choices are final, which suggests that one ought to be very careful about confusing interpretive richness with the quality of literariness in any given work”. Once again, questions of interpretation, representation and, most of all, art are

²² Gotthold Ephraim Lessing: *Laokoon oder über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie. Werke I*. Berlin: Volksbühnenverlag 1925. P. 389.

central to this line of thought. An adaptation might be art if it captures not only the essence of the literary text it is based on, but connects this essence in the context of an always particular here-and-now with the experience of a viewer and thereby makes it relevant – again. Or, as Robert Scholes puts it: “Life itself, with all its quotidian contingency, provides the richest possible field for interpretation. Art reduces this field – drastically. And that is why we value it – not the only reason, but perhaps the main one”.²³

Keith Cohen picked up on this idea in his book on *Film and Literature: the Dynamics of Exchange* (1979) in which he focuses on the word to image transfer in film adaptation. He insists that although words and images in film and literature are sets of signs that belong to different systems, they still use similar perceptual, referential and symbolic codes. And his assertion that “the same codes may re-appear in more than one system”, as Cohen states, “makes possible, then, a study of the relation between two separate sign systems, like novel and film [...]”.²⁴ This view, however, was soon disputed by Dudley Andrew, who according to Kamilla Elliott is “one of the most widely reprinted scholars of literary film adaptation”.²⁵ In his book on *Concepts in Film Theory* (1984), Dudley Andrew writes of “the absolutely different semiotic systems of film and language” that can nevertheless contain “equivalent narrative units (characters, events, motivations, consequences, context, viewpoint, imagery, and so on)”.²⁶ Here, the study of adaptation logically turns to the narrative, as this is in itself a semiotic system that is, as Andrew states, “available to both and derivable from both”²⁷ literature and film. Therefore, according to Andrew, an examination of “the strictly separate but equivalent processes of implication which produced the narrative units of that story through words and audio-visual signs”²⁸ will inevitably move to the centre of any analysis of a film as adaptation.

Since the mid-1970s, scholars such as Michael Klein, Gillian Parker, Geoffrey Wagner and Dudley Andrew have tried to classify certain types of adaptations and create categories according to how ‘faithful’ the adaptation is in relation to the original text. They all identify three different groupings: the first category contains “transpositions” (Wagner) or films that resemble the original narrative or “give the impression of being faithful, that is, literal

²³ Ibid. P. 59.

²⁴ Keith Cohen: *Film and Literature. The Dynamics of Exchange*. New Haven: Yale UP 1979. P. 4. Quoted by Robert Giddings et al.: *Screening the Novel*. P. 8.

²⁵ Kamilla Elliott: *Rethinking the Novel/Film Debate*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP 2003. P. 13.

²⁶ Dudley Andrew: *Concepts in Film Theory*. Oxford: Oxford UP 1984. P. 103.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

translations"²⁹ (Klein/Parker) of the literary text. Dudley Andrew identifies this rather "tiresome" group of adaptations with "fidelity and transformation".³⁰

The second category according to Michael Klein and Gillian Parker "retains the core of the structure of the narrative while significantly re-interpreting, or in some cases de-constructing the source text". This category is identified by Geoffrey Wagner as a "commentary" and by Dudley Andrew as "intersecting", i.e. "the uniqueness of the original text is preserved to such an extent that it is intentionally left unassimilated in adaptation".³¹

The third category of adaptation "regards the source merely as raw material, as simply the occasion for an original work" (Klein/Parker). It is an "analogy" and "fairly considerable departure for the purpose of making another work of art" (Wagner). The act of "borrowing" (Andrew) of a narrative, an idea, a myth, of some material from an earlier text is, according to Dudley Andrew, the "most frequent mode of adaptation",³² and he tells us, when studying this mode of adaptation, "the main concern is the generality of the original, its potential for wide and varied appeal; in short, its existence as a continuing form or archetype in culture".³³

While these categories are helpful, they are also problematic due to the generalisation, which they demand. An adaptation might fit into more than one category and, while slavishly transposing one particular scene onto the screen, merely intersect or comment on the original text as a whole. From the mid-1980s onwards the post-colonial discourse has entered discussions on screen adaptations. As Derrida has convincingly argued in his essay on "Les Tours de Babel" (1985), the process of translation creates another original text. This is true for both translation and adaptation. As a translation, a cinematic adaptation of a literary text can be (and often is) read as a violation, a penetration and even demolition of the 'original' text. An adaptation is never a mirror image of the literary source, it is always already a refraction and remains a process of manipulation, potentially not only within the literary/verbal and visual systems, but also with regard to the wider political, social and historical contexts.

The outstanding German pioneer of animation and silhouette film-maker Lotte Reiniger described the manipulation she undertook while adapting the

²⁹ See Michael Klein and Gillian Parker: *The English Novel and the Movies*. New York: Ungar 1981. Pp. 9–10. Geoffrey Wagner: *The Novel and the Cinema*. Rutherford, N.J.: Dickinson UP 1975. Pp. 222–231. Dudley Andrew: *Concepts in Film Theory*. Pp. 98–104. A summary of these categorisations can be found in Robert Giddings, Keith Selby and Chris Wensley: *Screening the Novel: The Theory and Practice of Literary Dramatization*. Houndmills: Macmillan 1990. Pp. 11–12.

³⁰ Dudley Andrew: *Concepts in Film Theory*. P. 100.

³¹ *Ibid.* P. 99.

³² *Ibid.* P. 98.

³³ *Ibid.*

adventures of Prince Achmed from *Arabian Nights* for the first German feature-length animation film entitled *Die Abenteuer des Prinzen Achmed* (*The Adventures of Prince Achmed*, 1923–26) as follows:

For centuries, Prince Achmed had been leading a comfortable life as a fairy tale figure in the book *Arabian Nights*; he was happy, loved and content. One day, a silhouette maker who wanted to use him for a film tore him from this peaceful existence. For this purpose, he needed to be reborn, just like many others of his colleagues from other literary areas. This change had to take place in a much more drastic manner than is normally required for manipulations of this kind. It was not enough to write a part for him that fit him like a glove and entrust an actor of similar stature to play it. [...] He had to be physically invented, drawn, cut, wired, lit, moved and shot.³⁴

In Lotte Reiniger's *Die Abenteuer des Prinzen Achmed*, the stories of the *Arabian Nights* are broken apart and connected anew, others ignored or reinvented to provide the film-maker with the narrative structure suitable to her film. However, her choice was determined to a lesser degree by the narrative itself, but rather by both technical opportunities and challenges and the desire to explore the boundaries of early film-making. In her effort to show the possibilities of animation in comparison to live-action film, Reiniger first of all isolated a number of magical events from the *Arabian Nights* and began to weave them around Prince Achmed as the main character. It was magic, that which live-action film could at the time impossibly represent, which commanded the structure and diegesis of Reiniger's film. When looking at her film as adaptation, there are plenty of similarities with regard to the content but also the form of the literary source. Reiniger borrowed from the original, transposed some scenes and ignored others, and in the end created a story in its own right, an analogy perhaps, and surely a work of art.

As these pages are meant to introduce a volume of essays primarily focused on film adaptations of German literature, I would like to conclude with a few remarks pertaining to adaptations related to the German language environment.

³⁴Lotte Reiniger: *Die Abenteuer des Prinzen Achmed*. Tübingen: Wasmuth 1970. P. vii: "Seit Jahrhunderten hatte der Prinz Achmed als Märchenfigur in dem Buche *Tausend und eine Nacht* ein behagliches Dasein geführt und war glücklich, geliebt und zufrieden. Aus diesem Frieden wurde er eines Tages aufgeschreckt als eine Filmgesellschaft auf die Idee kam, seine und viele weitere Abenteuer aus derselben Quelle zu einem Trickfilm zu verwenden. Zu diesem Zweck musste er, wie viele seiner unglücklichen Kollegen aus anderen literarischen Gebieten, 'umgeboren' werden. Und zwar noch gründlicher als dies sonst bei anderen Verfilmungen üblich ist, wo man Darsteller zu finden sucht, die einigermaßen dem Charakter, um den es in der Geschichte geht, entsprechen und sie mit der Rolle betraut. Denn es sollte ein Silhouettenfilm werden, weil der Hersteller, der von dieser Idee besessen war, nämlich ich, nichts anderes konnte als Silhouettenfilme machen. [...] Prinz Achmed selber musste zunächst körperlich erfunden, gezeichnet, geschnitten, beweglich gemacht [gedrahtet], beleuchtet, bewegt und aufgenommen werden".

Adaptations of German texts went hand in hand with the birth or infancy of cinema. During the first few decades of the history of cinema, Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805) was the most popular among German poets and dramatists whose works were adapted for the silent cinema screen. Already in 1898, less than three years since the first public screening of a moving picture in Berlin's Wintergarten theatre in November of 1895, George Méliès, one of the most outstanding French pioneers of early silent cinema, adapted Friedrich Schiller's play *Wilhelm Tell* (1804). Among the Schiller adaptors that followed were Alice Guy who presented her own version of *Guillaume Tell* only two years later; Lucien Nonguet and Albert Capellani released their adaptations of the same play in 1903 and 1908 respectively. Italy produced its first *Guglielmo Tell* for the screen in 1911, the USA followed in 1913 with J. Searle Dawley and Walter Edwin's adaptation of Schiller's drama *Die Räuber* (*The Robbers*, 1781). In Germany, 1913 proved extremely productive with regard to cinematic Schiller adaptations. Phil Jutzi directed *Fiesko*, starring Wilhelm Dieterle; and Friedrich Fehér – best known for playing Francis in Robert Wiene's *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (1919) – directed and played the lead in both *Kabale und Liebe* (*Intrigue and Love*) and *Die Räuber*. In 1914, Fehér's adaptation of Schiller's *Tell* – according to archival records the fourth *Tell* already on German cinema screens – premiered as *Die Befreiung der Schweiz und die Sage von Wilhelm Tell* (*The Liberation of Switzerland and the Legend of Wilhelm Tell*).

How much adaptations – as much as any other cultural product – may be shaped by political concerns and ideological constraint can be easily illustrated when examining Schiller adaptations produced during the Third Reich. Already in 1934, Hanns Johst – one of the co-founders of the *Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur* and known for his revanchist poetry and nationalist prose³⁵ – adapted Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell* (together with Hans Curjel, Wilhelm Stöppler and Heinz Paul) and provided the screenplay for a first Schiller film that catered to the Nazis' desire to appropriate the German poet for their nationalist agenda: *Wilhelm Tell – Das Freiheitsdrama eines Volkes* (*Wilhelm Tell – A People's Struggle for Liberation*). In total, three of Schiller's plays were turned into Third Reich films in big budget and high profile productions: *Wilhelm Tell*, *Die Jungfrau von Orleans* (*Jeanne d'Arc*, i.e. *Das Mädchen Johanna*, 1935) and, indirectly in Herbert Maisch's Schiller biopic of 1940, his play *Die Räuber*, turning Friedrich Schiller into a flaccid collaborator within the Nazi's expert propaganda machine.

³⁵ See, for example, Hanns Johst's volume of revanchist poetry: *Rolandsruf*. München: Langen 1919; or his drama: *Schlageter* (München: Langen-Müller, 1933), which tells the story of Nazi martyr Albert Leo Schlageter and is dedicated to Adolf Hitler "in liebender Verehrung und unwandelbarer Treue". In his powerful position as director of the Reichsschrifttumskammer, Johst was responsible for the persecution of all non-Aryan and anti-Nazi literatures.

When interpreting these adaptations, the political context in which the film production took place is as important as the original source. André Lefevere writes:

All writing of literature takes place under the two constraints [...] patronage and poetics, to which two more constraints must be added. One is what linguists often call 'universe of discourse' these days, i.e. the knowledge, the learning, but also the objects and the customs of a certain time, to which writers are free to allude in their work. The other is the natural language in which the work is composed. For rewriters a fifth constraint must be added, namely that of the original work itself. The original is the locus where ideology, poetics, universe of discourse and language come together, mingle and clash. All rewriting of literature, be it interpretation, criticism, historiography, the putting together of anthologies, or translation, takes place under at least one of the constraints mentioned, and implies the others.³⁶

The making of an adaptation is a form of rewriting of literature, and any interpretation of an adaptation requires awareness of these 'constraints' mentioned as well as those of our own history and culture.

Just as the adaptation performs a movement away from its literary root, the film is projected onto a screen and therefore performs the double movement towards and away from the object (of desire).³⁷ The relation between the literary text and the film adaptation is one based on representation not resemblance. In the history of film criticism, an effective adaptation, however, was all too often judged on the basis of resemblance. With regard to pictorial art, this battle was already fought by artists such as Courbet or Monet during the second half of the 19th century. Modern art habitually challenged the notion that pictorial representations could only be considered effective if they resembled the objects they seek to represent.

Within the context of adaptation, judging any representation in terms of resemblance is, of course, highly problematic. While resemblance is reflexive and symmetrical, representation is usually neither. Even near-perfect resemblance between two objects doesn't guarantee representation. It is the ability and the desire to interpret that provides us with the essential precondition that enables understanding. With regard to adaptation, the viewer or critic interprets a film-maker's representation of his or her interpretation of a specific literary text. As in the essays in this book, our assessment of a film adaptation necessarily originates between the pages of a book and remains, therefore, for the most part, within this binary opposition to the literary text.

³⁶ André Lefevere: Why Waste Our Time on Rewrites? The Trouble with Interpretation and the Role of Rewriting in an Alternative Paradigm. In: *The Manipulation of Literature. Studies in Literary Translation*. Edited by Theo Hermans. London: Croom Helm 1985. Pp. 215–243, here: Pp. 232–233.

³⁷ See Kline: *Screening the Text*. P. 4.

But the illusion cinema creates, the absence inevitably inherent in the adaptation of a literary text and in cinema itself, also marks a stage of continued life for the original source. Walter Benjamin's idea of *Fortleben*,³⁸ the afterlife of a literary text, "usually refers to the posterity of a work of literature after dissemination through translation"³⁹ but seems also true for adaptation and dissemination through the cinema screens. In this afterlife of a work of art, however, change is inevitable. The original work is renewed via its translation – or adaptation – and this renewal persistently demands modification and adjustment: "For in its after-life – which could not be called that if it were not a transformation and a renewal of something living – the original undergoes change".⁴⁰

By changing, by being adapted to the screens of multiplex cinemas, literature is often injected with a new lease of life, and successful screen adaptations habitually lead to new editions and increased sales of the literary text in question. And as André Bazin believes: when the cinematic adaptation is a work of art in itself, the novel is "multiplied by the cinema".⁴¹ Or as George Linden told us: "A successful adaptation of a novel should not be the book. Nor should it be a substitute for the book. If it is truly successful, it should be a work of art in its own right which excites the reader to go re-experience that work in another medium: the novel".⁴² Perhaps the essays to follow can help to contribute to the continued life or *Fortleben* of both German literature and its adaptations by encouraging readers to, once again, experience the wealth of narratives and their countless textualities in both media.

³⁸ See Walter Benjamin: *The Task of the Translator*. P. 71.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* P. 73. "Denn in seinem Fortleben, das so nicht heißen dürfte, wenn es nicht Wandlung und Erneuerung des Lebendigen wäre, ändert sich das Original". Benjamin: *Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers*. P. 53.

⁴¹ Bazin quoted by Robert Giddings, Keith Selby and Chris Wensley: Introduction. In: *Screening the Novel: The Theory and Practice of Literary Dramatization*. Houndmills: Macmillan 1990. P. 13.

⁴² George Linden: *The Storied World*. In: *Film and Literature: Contrasts in Media*. Ed. by Fred Marcus. New York: Chandler 1971. P. 169. Quoted in Robert Giddings, Keith Selby and Chris Wensley: *Screening the Novel: The Theory and Practice of Literary Dramatization*. P. 10.