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Griffiths, Kate and Andrew Watts. *Adapting Nineteenth-Century France. Literature in Film, Theatre, Television, Radio and Print*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013. Pp. 235. ISBN: 978-0-7083-2594

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The subject of this well-researched and extremely engaging volume is how French literary texts have been transposed and translated in some odd yet effective ways. Given the seemingly obvious title, and the lengthy subtitle, one might well ask what in nineteenth-century France is being adapted in the five media named. The authors explain in successive chapters the specific aesthetic strategies of each medium and how adaptations must yield to and yet benefit from these differing aesthetics. Through successive case studies the authors seek to show how possible linkages between the adapted authors and adaptive strategies are evident in the respective medium; to emphasize the “intertextual dialogues at play in the best of these adaptations” (14); and to reveal within the adapted canonical texts their implicit questioning of authorship and originality, as if anticipating the legacy of adaptation that many nineteenth-century literary works would engender.

Chapter one explores the contrast between the radio medium’s emphasis on voice (and silence), specifically radio adaptations of Zola’s novel of vision, *Germinal*, aired on BBC, written by David Hopkins (1928) and Diana Griffiths (2007). Despite this apparent contrast, Kate Griffiths shows how both the panoramic vision of the external world and the confined space of the mine lend themselves to translation through spoken words, and she argues that both adaptations combine the mythical elements of Zola’s novel as well as contemporary art and reality. In chapter two, taking on the medium of silent cinema, Watts shows, first, that Balzac’s tales were a favorite of the silent era, with eighty-two silent adaptations either produced or planned between 1906 and 1927. Second, he shows that the tactic of appropriation is evident both in Balzac’s own texts and in the filmmakers’ transformations of *L’Auberge rouge* (by Jean Epstein, 1923) and *Engénie Grandet* (by Rex Ingram, 1921). In chapter three Watts discusses two of the many written re-treatments of Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*, particularly Posy Simmonds’s graphic novel, *Gemma Bovary* (1999), and Philippe Doumenc’s detective thriller (on Emma’s possible murder), *Contre-enquête sur la mort d’Emma Bovary* (2007). What all three texts—Flaubert’s and those studied—share is their fascination with temporality and memory, and Watts maintains that an examination of adaptations in relation to the origin text yields a better understanding of the dynamics of the literary process.

In chapter four Watts studies *Les Misérables* at the hands of theater producers—the Boubil-Schönberg West End and Broadway musical (originally at London’s Barbican Theater, 1985) as well as José Pliya’s *Le Complexe de Thénardier* (Paris, 2001). Although both productions necessarily strip away much of the Hugo novel, Watts maintains that these plays “provide valuable case studies through which to explore the relationship between adaptation and excess” (115). Whereas the musical expresses excess via its production values and broader cultural appeal, the Parisian play examines “excess as a dramatic theme [. . .] violence, selfishness and the desire for power and control” (116). In chapter five Griffiths turns to an eight-part television anthology adapting selected Maupassant *contes* and *nouvelles* for France 2; she argues for the particular aesthetic concerns necessary to adapt fiction for television (instead of assuming that cinematographic strategies are the same for both media). Just as producers and directors found in Maupassant’s works sufficiently fragmented texts allowing for considerable creative license, these textual qualities also lend themselves to the nature of the televisual medium, such that “*Chez Maupassant* engages with the fractured

space of its source author and that of its medium” (147). Cinematic adaptations of the Jules Verne classic, *Le Tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours*, are Griffiths’s focus in chapter six, paying particular attention to “ghosts” (specifically, Verne’s) or “spectral afterlives” that inhabit the successive films. Griffiths argues that Verne’s novel “contemplates the ghosts of the textual voices from which it writes itself and those of its own authorial identity” (185), while for Michael Todd’s 1956 adaptation, the “spectral afterlives” arrive from “the producer’s influence on any given adaptation and that of the star personalities of its cast” (185). As for Coraci’s 2004 adaptation, Griffiths explains that rather than adapt Verne’s novel as such, Coraci sought to focus on “Verne’s mythical persona . . . [as] prophet of the future” (197), but influenced by the spectral presence of Michael Todd’s production.

While I can only praise the masterful arguments, insightful analyses, and admirable scholarship of this volume, I cannot help but wonder why the authors, and their editors, did not prepare an edition accessible to Anglophone readers by providing translations of the many French texts cited. Given the importance of the issues argued here, deliberate limitation to a French-reading audience curtails the volume’s impact and scope. Nonetheless, Griffiths and Watts make important statements about the power of translation in and through adaptation across different media. Such statements deserve the widest possible recognition, particularly in an era when the very existence of material deemed readable is threatened by adaptation onto screens of various shapes and sizes.