

Brigitte LE JUEZ, Nina SHIEL, Mark WALLACE (eds.), *(Re)Writing Without Borders. Contemporary Intermedial Perspectives on Literature and the Visual Arts*, Champaign, IL: Common Ground Research Networks, 2018, ISBN 9781612299938, 207 p.

Review by Cătălina ADAM

Faculty of Letters, “Babeş-Bolyai” University

Cluj-Napoca, Romania

s.catalina.adam@gmail.com

How does the *longing* for something new, for that what is to come, for the future, reconcile with the need to be part of a tradition, to *belong* to a community sharing the same history or the same values? More specifically, is it possible to merge the traditional media with the contemporary and the emerging forms of new media, in order to benefit from their development? The debates between the traditionalist and the progressive advocates are not to be considered totally inadequate or useless, but there could be a way to propitiate both the need for belonging – a rediscovery of identity and community – and the longing for novelty – as an aspiration toward the undiscovered. *(Re)Writing Without Borders* explores this possibility, offering plain examples of how different media interact and how they develop, taking new forms and facing new challenges as they constantly cross the borders.

The essays selected in this volume stem from presentations that took place on the 6<sup>th</sup> Biennial Congress organised by the European Network for Comparative Literary Studies in Dublin and Galway in August 2015, on the theme *Longing and Belonging*. The volume consists of two parts, each containing six chapters. The first part deals especially with intermedial adaptations in a comparative manner, whilst the second part focuses on the thematic area of longing and belonging, within the same framework. The common ground for the articles included in the volume is that they all address issues on interstice, on transgression, or interrelations, on subjects like time, space, media and art.

In the first chapter, Mark Wallace suggests dividing Linda Hutcheon’s concept of *transcultural* into two different terms, bearing distinct implications, namely *transtemporal* – “source distant in time from production of adaptation” (13) and *transspatial* – “source distant in space from production of adaptation” (13). Studying

Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* and the television series directed by Coky Giedroyc and adapted by BBC in 2007, he unfolds the way in which the distance in time between the two discourses reflects relevant aspects of the socio-political contexts. Even if the narrative itself is independent – as he believes, following the argument of Slavoj Žižek – it functions as a transmitter of ideologies. He proves this by noticing the changes that occur in the composition of a Jew character, that of Fagin, in the BBC series without changes being made to the plot, or to the character himself, but only by omission or by the emphasis of some of his words or actions. In “Going Back to Gorki's Ideas: Donskoi's Film Adaptation of *Mother*,” Panayiota Mini tries to explain, on the same basis of ideological incongruences, the failure that Mark Donskoi's adaptation of Maxim Gorki's (first version of the) novel *Mother* experienced. Integrating Gorki's novel back into the author's socio-political background, Panayiota Mini remarks that the narrative was representative for the God Building movement, which tried “to marry religion and socialism, by conceiving of socialism as a secular religion” (30), and that it was attributed to Social Realism only later. Donskoi, trying to make a faithful adaptation (1956), in contrast to Pudovkin's *Mother* (1926), remained loyal to the idea of socialism as secular religion in his version, but gave up on Gorki's heroic manner of depicting the characters, pleading for simpler people (39). His choices were finely nuanced, but his movie integrated the transitional spirit of his time in a harmonic way, which was, for that particular case, unfortunate, unlike the above-mentioned adaptation of *Oliver Twist* on BBC, where the ideologies of the source narrative and those of the adaptation remained in a tensioned relation.

Chapter 3 introduces the dichotomy obedient/disobedient regarding adaptations, Carlinda Fragale Pate Nuñez examining the disobedience not only as a theoretical approach of cultural translation but also as a theme in the Brazilian adaptations of the Orphic myth. Following Bachelard, she recognizes that infidelity and disobedience are “agents of significant changes” and admits the adaptability potential of the myths as “image vehicles” (43). Her statement about disobedient myths is also valid for the exchange that takes place between the source and the adaptation, describing this form of communication as “to look back in order to change the future, to move from the bottom up and vice-versa, to evaluate that which is near and that which is distant, to attune art criticism to other aspects of culture” (46). Chapter 4 exploits further the “mutual illumination” (59) that takes place in the

*interspace* of adaptation from literature to cinema, but also in the *intertext* linking *Father Against Mother* (1906), Machado de Assis's short story, with Sergio Bianchi's film *How Much is it Worth or is it per Kilo?*, and in the *intertime* connecting the two discourses: 1906 (*Father*) – 2005 (*How Much*).

History, irony, portraits and pictures interlink to build a comparison between the oppression caused by slavery and that found in contemporary society. Bianchi's goal is to critique the marketing consultants and non-government organizations that profit from the oppression of the lower classes as slave owners reaped returns from their human property. He draws a comparison between the times of slavery and the pseudo-benevolence of some charitable groups set up to deal with poverty in Brazil (68).

The same idea is to be found in Beata Waligorska-Olejniczak's article, as she urges us to recognize in Tarantino's eclectic style a strategy to bring into consideration topics that would be difficult to depict otherwise. Chapter 6 brings together narrative fiction and moral philosophy as a dialogue that takes place in the reception of artistic discourse, a dialogue that also carries the features of mutual illumination, in the sense of reader-response criticism.

In the first article of the second part, Narvika Bovcon and Aleš Vaupotič write on adaptation studies, beginning with Bakhtin's idea of intertextual dialogism. Afterwards, they criticize the closeness of intermediality in the English language theory comparing it to the European studies, where adaptation studies open "to all possible communication media in all combinations" (101). Citing Peter Weibel, they insist on removing the borders of media, of art forms or disciplines, in order to push the media hybridity to the limit (102). The examples that follow the short theoretical backgrounding are striking indeed, as they bring together nonconventional structures: the genre/media hybrid – the book *Eis* by Gerhard Richter, the allusion to Shakespeare in the Slovenian film *Guardian of the Frontier*, the mutual influences between Dicken's novelistic technique, Griffith's modern film and Simon's *The Wire*. But of particular interest are the projects lead by Narvika Bovcon and Aleš Vaupotič, namely *RII*, *VideoSpace*, *Friedhof Laguna* and *Jaques*, which merge digital media with analogue media, installation art with Shakespeare citation, digital animation with the Internet of Things, paintings and 3-D printed objects. The three projects embody different levels of media integration resulting in various levels of immersion

and interactivity potential, culminating with a disparate reality: “The world has disintegrated into a mass of bordering and permeated archives, forming a space that is not homogenous. This space is inhabited by people and objects, both of which exist simultaneously in the real world as well as in cyber reality” (116).

The next two chapters further experiment the opening of all communication media, showing the benefits that modern technology can bring upon literary works. In “The Tweetbook as a New Frontier of Literary Retellings,” the literary production is being re-evaluated through the emerging participatory reading of the “prosumer” (120), which gave birth to the new fandom phenomenon. Moreover, Nina Shiel draws a comparison between programming languages and the poetic language, claiming that code and poetry are the new Sister Arts, as painting and poetry used to be, both making use of “code”, “language” and “writing” in the process of meaning making. Massimo Fusillo investigates in the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter how art catalogue, criticism, historiography, narrative, autobiography and essayistic reflections hybridize in Goncourt’s *La Maison d’un artiste*, enriching the intermedial field with non-discursive elements belonging to the domain of description, while Ana Lúcia Beck exemplifies the subject of *longing and belonging* in the unconventional artworks of two artists: José Leonilson (Brazil) and Louise Bourgeois (France). This two artists make use of their childhood memories to create works of art that are both verbal and visual, represented on painted canvas or on textile, as “their represented emotions carry poetic values that rely on the intricate connection and interdependency between the memory of yesterday and the perception of today, as well as on the correlation and balance between absence and embodiment” (175).

The last chapter of *(Re)Writing Without Borders* reaches again the problem of the current debates on traditionalism and progressist ideas, giving the whole volume a somewhat closed appearance, despite all the loose threads and disparate ideas that cross the book. Oscillating between vinyl/printed books and mp3/e-books as symbols for tradition/heritage and future, the (post)digital (wo)man must learn to appreciate the imperfections and limitations of a medium as nostalgia bearer. Anna Notaro declares that the solution for *longing and belonging* lies in a “hybrid recalibration” (190) of past and future media and themes. There remain some open questions, which arise out of Notaro’s conclusion: How does this hybrid recalibration have to happen and what does it imply? Therefore, the ideas discussed in this book

lead to further research opportunities, open tracks to forthcoming inquiries and explorations that are to be led on this border(less) zone.