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Introduction

All great texts contain their potential translation between the lines.[10]

Classics as adaptations

Most reflections on what characterises a 'classic' work of art contain a paradox. Contributions to the discussion over the last fifty years have continued to stress the controversy in attempts to award classic status to literary works by a readership torn between retromania and a hunger for novelty, reluctant to accept arbiters of taste, but at the same time avid consumers of ratings and rankings.[11] According to Anders Olsson, the concept of a 'classic' is, indeed, encapsulated in a hierarchy of contradictions.[12] Not only do we speak of major classics and minor classics, great classics and modern classics, but, in the name of the frequently invoked quality of 'timelessness', a classic work of art is expected to be stable and unchanging, while at the same time capable of striking a chord with new generations of readers because of its 'relevance' and 'contemporaneousness'. In Frank Kermode's words, 'It seems that on a just view of the matter the books we call classics possess intrinsic qualities that endure, but possess also an openness to accommodation which keeps them alive under endlessly varying dispositions.'[13] J.M. Coetzee, pondering his individual experience and appreciation of Bach contra the composer's historical constitution, similarly concludes that a classic work of art defines itself precisely by 'surviving' hostile interpretations; a classic, he claims, survives 'the criterion of testing'.[14] Bach, suggests Coetzee, survived 'the kiss of death, namely being promoted during the nineteenth-century revival as a great son of the German soil'.[15]

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Both Coetzee and Kermode thus resolve the potential conflict embedded in 'the relation of permanence and change' by turning it into the touchstone of classic status.[16] According to Kermode, 'the only works we value enough to call classic are those which, and they demonstrate by surviving, are complex and indeterminate enough to allow us our necessary pluralities.'[17] A classic copes with this paradox, triggers a variety of responses, and tolerates an infinity of interpretive readings. In Coetzee's words:

> So we arrive at a certain paradox. The classic defines itself by surviving. Therefore the interrogation of the classic, no matter how hostile, is part of the history of the classic, inevitable and even to be welcomed. For as long as a classic needs to be protected from attack, it can never prove itself classic.[18]

This tolerance for semantic fluctuation makes the classics particularly interesting for the practice of adaptation. 'Adaptations suggest', Joe Grixti argues, 'that what makes the … classics "timeless" or "universal" is that their stories and characters can be made to look familiar and relevant to a contemporary audience'.[19] In their introduction to *Adapting Greek Tragedy*, Vayos Liapis and Avra Sidiropoulou note of the adaptation process's capacity to confront and reread the classics that 'adaptation often contests the notion of the classic as an inviolable, authoritative model, one relying on (or imposing) specific cultural, semantic, or interpretive assumptions'.[20] When originating in other cultures and linguistic areas, which is the case of most adaptations considered here, the freedom to alter or supplement accredited readings of the classics is perhaps greater, while readers with a familiarity with what has become customary to say about the adapted texts are privileged when it comes to detecting the ways in which the adaptations challenge interpretive traditions.

Around the act of rereading revolve other proposals for a definition of a classic work of literature. 'Rereadability' is the criterion that a book needs to fulfil in order to obtain the status of a classic, according to Olsson. In the essay 'Värdet av att läsa om eller Vad är en klassiker?' ('The Value of Rereading, or, What Is a Classic?'), Olsson argues that

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a classic must stand the test not so much of individual rereadings as of rereadings by generation after generation.[21] Several of Italo Calvino's fourteen proposals for a definition of a classic work of literature in the essay 'Perché leggere i classici' ('Why Read the Classics?'), first published in 1981, similarly depart from rereadability.[22] First on Calvino's list of definitions is an apparently simple statement according to which 'The classics are those books about which you usually hear people saying: "I'm rereading…", never "I'm reading…"'.[23] If Calvino argues that a classic is a book 'worth' rereading, the phrase also suggests the social importance of being well read: either you read the classics or you feign the need to refresh forgotten knowledge, similar to the sardonicism generally attributed to Mark Twain that holds that a classic is something everyone wants to have read and no one wants to read.

In all seriousness, rereading is above all about the pleasure of books. The classics, according to Calvino, take readers down untravelled paths with every new reading: 'A classic is a book which with each rereading offers as much a sense of discovery as the first reading', 'Classics are books which, the more we think we know them through hearsay, the more original, unexpected and innovative we find them when we actually read them'.[24] If rereading can change the understanding of a text and heighten perception, there is also enjoyment and comfort in retelling, rereading, and rehearing the same stories. As a form of rereading, the process of adaptation merges the act of repetition with elements of novelty and variation. In *A Theory of Adaptation*, Hutcheon speaks of the 'comfort of ritual combined with the piquancy of surprise'.[25]

From another viewpoint, as 'narratives of nostalgia', the avalanche of transpositions drawn from the classics could be framed in a general trend of 'retro' and 'musealisation', and as objects of interest for cultural memory studies. In this latter sense, the adaptation's reactualisation of stories from the past ultimately gives the lie to the appetite for absolute innovation presumed to characterise our contemporary age. Like musealisation, the process by which an object is detached from its original context and exhibited to be contemplated as to its meaning, transmedia rereadings of the classics may arguably compensate for what Kristian Handberg calls 'the acceleration of history and its changes and the quick

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obsoleteness of objects and ideas', in his discussion of the retro trend, arguing against 'the reading of retro as a depthless and inferior practice'.[26]

Calvino's suggested definitions moreover point to the network of intertexual relationships and influences that will surface in a classic. As his fifth and seventh definitions have it, 'A classic is a book which even when we read it for the first time gives the sense of rereading something we have read before' and 'The classics are those books which come to us bearing the aura of previous interpretations, and trailing behind them the traces they have left in the culture or cultures (or just in the languages and customs) through which they have passed.'[27] Here, Calvino is saying that no book is an island, and, fortuitously, points to the concept of 'originality' calling attention to a key controversy in the discourse about adaptations, where the tendency has been to view the adapted text as 'original' and the adaptation as 'imitative'.

In order to consider 'originality' and 'imitation' without taking up the cudgels in a strenous defence of the outstanding oneness and anotherness of adaptations, Robert Hutchins's and Mortimer Adler's idea of a 'great conversation', binding together texts in a dialogue that criss-crosses eras and nations, looks to intertexual influence to determine classic status. Where in his essay 'The Great Conversation' Hutchins speaks of canonical works of literature as examples that by their inspiration have 'lifted' their readers down the ages, and of the 'drive and creativeness' that the classics can spark, Adler builds in *The Great Conversation Revisited* on the idea of interchange between writers to strip these connections of any connotations of dispute or rivalry, and presents them as authors 'listening to what their predecessors have had to say … They not only harken to the thought of their predecessors, but also respond to it by commenting on it in a variety of ways'.[28] In the present book, the adapted texts will variably be spoken of in terms of 'forerunners', 'predecessors', 'precursors', 'source texts', 'hypotexts', or 'prototexts', although the intention is never to rank the adaptation as subordinate to a 'classic original', which chronologically came first, but similarly has its own networks of influences.

In the field of adaptation studies, Sanders further underlines the close interdependence and the two-way communication between the

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canon and the practice of adaptation. While 'Adaptation and appropriation are dependent on the literary canon for the provision of a shared repository of storylines, themes, characters and ideas upon which their creative variations can be made', it remains true that 'adaptation becomes a veritable marker of canonical status; citation infers authority.'[29] Through the process of adaptation, the adapted text increases its impact and prestige and, in the case of a classic, affirms its status as an evergreen, while also giving cachet to the adaptation. Whether the adaptation reads as a homage to, an assault on, or a pastiche of the source, it is keeping the adapted text alive – echoing Coetzee's admiration for Bach's capacity to survive use and abuse. Manipulation and variation may prove necessary for the vitality of the source text, a phenomenon compared to biological evolution by Bortolotti and Hutcheon, as we will see.[30] With reference to cinematographic transposition, Robert Stam similarly points to the literary works' dependency upon the practice of adaptation and appropriation for survival, even at the expense of their own metamorphosis: 'if mutation is the means by which the evolutionary process advances, then we can also see … adaptations as "mutations" that help their source … "survive".'[31]

Following up on the idea of a 'great' conversation, it is fair to assume that the bond between the adapted text and the adaptation is rarely an exclusive 'one-to-one relationship'.[32] As the case studies in the present book show, adaptations often extend the 'two-way' communication to conversations involving more than two specific texts. Many of my examples form 'mosaics of citations that are visible and invisible', and can be read as palimpsestic patchworks in which the adaptation not only connects to the adapted text, but establishes webs of relations, in particular to iconographical sources.[33] A *fil rouge* in the analysis is therefore the concept of visual intertextuality – else known as intericonicity, art quotes, interpictoriality, or pictorial quotation – describing the interconnectedness between images.[34] In adaptations into a visual medium such as comics, the reader is often asked to look beyond the relationship to the adapted text and address the use of intericonic referencing – images, or iconic artworks, copied, sampled, changed, transformed or recombined to fit the flow of the narration, where they

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produce new meaning. According to Thierry Groensteen, the practice of intericoncity in comics activates a process of reflection that calls on the readers to look deep into their personal image bank and identify the source image, the period, and the artist, and think about what function those references serve in the narration.[35] Whether extensively or occasionally, art quotes and references to iconic models and items external to the source narrative are visible in many of the adaptations investigated here: the visual language of Crepax's *La storia immortale* makes no secret of quoting the aesthetics that distinguish *Une Histoire immortelle*, Orson Welles's cinematographic transposition of Blixen's tale; in the adaptation *Bianca in persona*, Crepax likewise improvises on the relationship between the two women at the core of Ingmar Bergman's film *Persona* by using archetypal characters of his own creation while at the same time adapting his distinctive style to the recognisable aesthetics of the film. While Bim Eriksson taps into comics classics (Mickey Mouse, Wonder Woman) when creating the characters in *Baby Blue*, Bo Vilson reproduces emblematic history paintings from the Swedish nineteenth century in his comic-strip feuilleton of *Fältskärns berättelser*. In the two adaptations of Andersen's *Historien om en Moder*, there are allusions to the art of Edvard Munch and Gustav Klimt respectively, and the many references to the representation of women in art history are the backbone of Cinzia Ghigliano's visualisation of Ibsen's Nora. In such a way, comic art adaptations not only engage with stories from the past, but also with pictures from the past. They prove capable of continuing the great, intertextual conversation in a dimension where not only literature produces literature by 'writing back', responding to, and commenting on predecessors, but where visual art generates visual art by 'drawing back'.

Choice of primary sources

This book considers comic art adaptations that build on a body of key texts in the Nordic tradition spanning various genres, media, and eras. Andersen's *Historien om en Moder* (*The Story of a Mother*) and *Den lille Havfrue* (*The Little Mermaid*), Karen Blixen's *Den udødelige Historie*

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(*The Immortal Story*), Jon Fosse's *Nokon kjem til å kome* (*Somebody Is Going to Come*), Ingmar Bergman's *Persona*, Karin Boye's *Kallocain*, Zacharias Topelius' *Fältskärns berättelser* (*The Surgeon's Stories*), and Henrik Ibsen's *Et Dukkehjem* (*A Doll's House*) are fairy tales, long and short prose, plays, and a film. They cover a period of almost 150 years, from Andersen's *Historien om en Moder* of 1848 to Fosse's *Nokon kjem til å kome* of 1996.

The reasoning behind this choice of hypotexts is threefold.[36] It springs out of the desire to produce a study with a pan-Scandinavian approach, in line with the Italian tradition of Scandinavian studies I share. It also relates to the method adopted in this book. Since comparative readings, systematically measuring the adaptation against the adapted text, have given way to a focus on multidirectional intersections – especially on the intericonic dialogue with other artworks – and to the adaptation's medium-specific qualities, a familiarity with the source work (regarded as likely with the 'classics') is, to a certain extent, expected of the targeted audience. Last, a source material made up of adapted texts conceived in many genres offers the opportunity to look at the capacity of comic art adaptations to confront a variety of encounters. The discordance between the presumed 'innocence' of a literary genre such as children's fairy tales and their remediation into stories of horror and nihilism, or between the 'high-brow' status of a canonical work and a medium often routinely associated with popular culture and escapist literature is approached. We will see how this distance can both be confirmed and shortened, for example through the comics creators' often extensive use of visual intertextuality.

The choice of hypertexts has been influenced by different criteria. One was to gather case studies to support the underlying theoretical frame: to what extent did a potential example of analysis reflect one of the three approaches to adaptation illustrated in this study? The choice was made intending to represent all three of the established categories – medium, fabula, discourse – and in order to offer heterogeneous variety as to the differences in the transpositional process. The adaptations chosen thus use the medium of comics with different intentions, they are more or less closely connected to the storyline in the source work,

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they engage more or less overtly with ideological discourses and issues regarding their own cultural and contextual environment.

A second criterion is aesthetic: artistically complex and formally inventive adaptations have been favoured because of their capacity to provide information about how the formal resources of comics are used to create meaning. Medium-specific narrative strategies, for example aspects such as panelling, framing, braiding, visual intertextuality, and reverse ekphrasis, are my focus throughout the book.

The third and last criterion is seemingly at odds with the choice of hypotexts. While the adapted texts represent the Danish, Norwegian, Swedish, and Finland-Swedish culture canon, the adaptations chosen for closer scrutiny are more widely cross-national, with a majority stemming from traditions outside the comics mainstream. Some are lesser-known publications by acclaimed artists; many have been published by small independent presses or in magazines. To some extent they have been selected on the principle of 'dig where you stand'. Four adaptations are the output of Italian *fumettisti*: *Storia di una madre* by Gabriele 'AKAB' di Benedetto; *La storia immortale* and *Bianca in persona* by Guido Crepax; *Nora* by Cinzia Ghigliano. Three adaptations have been conceived by Scandinavian comic art creators, *Historien om en mor* by the Dane Peter Madsen; *Baby Blue* and *Fältskärns berättelser* by the Swedes Bim Eriksson and Bo 'Bovil' Vilson, respectively. The last two works, *Quelqu'un va venir* and *Reflets d'écume*, were conceived by two artists based in France, Pierre Duba and Alberto Varanda. The wish to give priority to little-known comic art adaptations – all unresearched or under-researched – and bring them to a larger audience prompted my decision to produce a fully illustrated study.

Previous research

In the introduction to the book *Comics and Adaptation*, Benoît Mitaine, David Roche, and Isabelle Schmitt-Pitiot trace the history of the rising interest in comics studies.[37] They argue that the publication of Eco's 1962 essay 'Il mito di Superman' ('The Myth of Superman') and the foundation – by influential artists and intellectuals such as Alain Resnais,

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Jean-Claude Forest, Francis Lacassin, Pierre Couperie, and Alain Robbe-Grillet – of the French association for devotees to comics, Le Club des bandes dessinées (the Comics Club), also in 1962, marked the start of a new era in which comics were to become culturally significant and academically acceptable.[38] While earlier studies mainly strove to map the history of the 'ninth' art, subsequent decades saw the publication of critical and pedagogical writings in the field before professional scholarship erupted in the early 1990s with Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics*, famously presented in the form of comics.[39] The rise of comics scholarship in the 1990s must also be considered in the light of the huge success of works of graphic literature such as Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, or Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons's *Watchmen*, to name but two.[40] By the end of the century, Groensteen's *Système de la bande dessinée* had appeared, and John Lent's *International Journal of Comic Art* had been brought into being, only to be followed in the early twenty-first century by an avalanche of works on comics theory and criticism, and of new venues for academic work on comics, specialised journals such as *Image [&] Narrative* (2000–), *ImageTexT* (2004–), *Deutsche Comicsforschung* (2005–), *Mechademia* (2006–), *SIGNs – Studies in Graphic Narratives* (2007–), *European Comic Art* (2009–), *Studies in Comics* (2010–), *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* (2010–), *Comicalités: Études de culture graphique* (2010–), *Inks: The Journal of the Comics Studies Society* (2017–).[41]

If the appearance of specialised reviews mirrored a growing interest in the art of comics, the Nordic countries can claim to have been at the forefront in the early days. The Swedish magazine *Bild och Bubbla* ('Image and Balloon') saw the light of day in 1968, and the Finnish *Sarjainfo* ('Comicsinfo') followed in 1972. The Danish review *Seriejournalen* ('Journal of Comics') was established in 1990, while the *Scandinavian Journal of Comic Art*, a peer-reviewed academic journal, was launched in 2012 by, among others, the founding members of the Nordic Network for Comics Research, an association born in 2011 to strengthen comics research across (and beyond) the Nordic countries. In an article in 2016, Fredrik Strömberg took the pulse of comics research in the Nordic countries and concluded the field was small (as to the number of scholars, publications, conferences, and PhD theses) and young (if

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compared to the international scene, France and Belgium, in particular), and not yet institutionalised as a discipline.[42] The inference is also that few comics scholars in the Nordic countries were doing research on 'homegrown' sequential art. In the years following Strömberg's first study, the scholarly interest in Nordic comics has steadily increased, with conferences, publications, and research projects dedicated to the Scandinavian scene, something especially evident in Sweden.[43] In his 2022 publication, *Comics and the Middle East: Representation, Accomodation, Integration*, Strömberg could speak of a 'fast-moving field … in all Nordic countries', even on the level of academic instruction.[44]

As we have begun to see, efforts have also been made in the Nordic countries to contribute to the theoretical reflection on comics.[45] One reason for the volume *De tecknade seriernas språk*: *Uttryck och form* was to offer perspectives on method in comics studies.[46] With Groensteen as the most high-profile theorist, the contribution of Christiansen, whose work draws on methods and a critical vocabulary from the field of film studies, and articles by a majority of scholars with a background in linguistics and literary studies, *De tecknade seriernas språk* can, on the whole, be positioned among those studies that take a literary and formalist approach to comics. This theoretical approach, which has dominated the field in Europe, is represented by Franco-Belgian scholars such as Groensteen, Philippe Marion, and Benoît Peeters, among others, and draws on semiotics and theories of visual literacy. It is countered – or supplemented – by what is sometimes thought of as a North American perspective, according to which comic art is rather seen as an object of interest in the field of cultural studies and focus is on how comics connect to social and historical structures, and incorporate issues of politics, power, and context.[47]

When studying comics as adaptations, any of these two ways blends with theories of adaptation. The adaptation of literary texts into comics is nothing new to the medium; as Mitaine et al. assert, 'Adaptation has … been an integral part of the history of comics from the very beginning', and is still very much an ongoing process.[48] Among the reasons commonly cited to explain the popularity of the phenomenon is the will to raise the status of a low-brow medium by recruiting it to the service

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of 'great literature'. Will Eisner, on the subject of the routinely lamented 'poor status' of comics in his book *Comics and Sequential Art*, marvels at the fact that this 'unique combination' of 'design, drawing, caricature and writing' has been so slow to win acceptance, yet individually each discipline has found its way into scholarly consideration.[49] In this, Eisner attributes part of the responsibility to the practitioners themselves, and to their resistance to engage with what he calls 'subjects of greater moment' and 'cerebral topics'.[50]

The yearning to legitimise a popular medium through the appropriation of source works with a valuable 'symbolic capital' has been challenged in the era of cultural studies, which has seen the levelling of the hierarchy of the arts.[51] Stam again reminds us of the fact that acquiring 'status' should be seen as a form of bilateral exchange, for 'In a Derridean perspective, the aureatic prestige of the original does not run counter to the copy; rather, the prestige of the original is created by the copies'.[52] Likewise, the idea that comic art adaptations offer an easy way into 'great classics' also needs to be reassessed by anyone aware of the fact that the reader of comics has to master the complex trade of unravelling both visual and literary codes in the reading process.[53]

Given the long, rich history of comics as adaptation, it is perhaps surprising that its specificities have been overlooked by even the most influential adaptation scholars. In *A Theory of Adaptation*, Hutcheon only briefly brings the art form of comics into the general discourse, partly owing to her choice to posit the 'process' of adaptation, rather than a specific medium, as point of discussion.[54] Hutcheon's view is that transpositions from and into any medium engage with their sources on three basic levels: by allowing readers to recognise the source; by functioning as creative, interpretive acts of a past *oeuvre*; and by creating intertextual relations between works.[55] Likewise, in *La Transécriture*, a collection of essays on the theme of adaptation curated by André Gaudreault and Groensteen, the attention paid to comics is only marginal.[56] These two scholars' view on the possibilities of classifying different approaches to adaptation has inspired the method used in the present book.

I set out in this book to contribute to the growing body of critical literature and to go beyond the individual case study to investigate

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what adaptation has to say about the medium of comics. The issue has been discussed in a collection of essays entitled *Drawn from the Classics: Essays on Graphic Adaptations of Literary Works*, edited by Stephen E. Tabachnick and Esther Bendit Saltzman and presented, on its back cover, as the 'first ever collection of essays focusing on graphic novel adaptations of various literary classics'.[57] The aforementioned Mitaine et al. volume *Comics and Adaptation*, which first appeared in French, is a collection of essays on comics both as the source for cinematographic adaptations and as adaptations of literary works.[58] It boasts a preface introducing the general and theoretical issues in adaptation studies, accompanied by an exhaustive bibliography. Single essays in more broadly drawn works also concentrate on adaptations into the comics medium: Rocco Versaci's volume on 'comics as literature' has a chapter titled 'Illustrating the Classics: Comic Books vs. "Real" Literature', and Karin Kukkonen's *Studying Comics and Graphic Novels* has a few pages on the question.[59] In *The Routledge Companion to Comics*, Henry John Pratt contributes an essay on 'Comics and Adaptation'.[60] Paul Ferstl's 'Novel-based Comics', Dirk Vanderbeke's 'It Was the Best of Two Worlds, It Was the Worst of Two Worlds: The Adaptation of Novels in Comics and Graphic Novels', and Jan Baetens's 'Adaptation: A Writerly Strategy' are all examples of insightful essays concerned with strategies in comic art adaptations.[61] In an article co-authored by Frank Pointner and Sandra Eva Boschenhoff, the transposition of literary texts into comics is treated in terms of what 'advantages' pictures may have over words.[62] Boschenhoff's book-length study, *Tall Tales in Comic Diction: From Literature to Graphic Fiction*, investigating how the works of Wilde, Shakespeare, Poe, Kafka, Dostoyevsky, and others have been treated by comics creators, is a contribution both to the study of comics and to the discourse of intermediality.[63] Baetens's volume *Adaptation et bande dessinée: Éloge de la fidelité*, which will be discussed in the following section, is a recent contribution to the field which trains a searchlight back onto the persisting 'fidelity discourse' in adaptation studies.[64]

Fidelity is a towering presence in adaptation criticism and a common topic in all discussions about adaptation, regardless of the medium. It was first invoked as a moral parameter establishing, in no uncertain terms,

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that 'faithfulness [to the source material] is good, infidelity is bad and a form of betrayal'.[65] Subsequently it was applied to mean quite the opposite: faithful adaptations are boring and banal, unfaithful adaptations creative and clever. In this spirit, by siding viewpoint, the fidelity discourse has been considered 'helpful' to determine the quality of an adaptation. Until the rather recent 'pro-fidelity turn' in adaptation studies, the debate favoured positions which, in their most radical forms, come across as declarations of independence on behalf of the art of adaptation, negating the request for 'truthfulness' to a source as the *bête noire* of adaptation processes and strategies. In the Bruhn et al. volume *Adaptation Studies*, Regina Schober consistently speaks up for freedom from faithfulness in the following way: 'as soon as an adaptation has been created, it is automatically emancipated and disconnected from its source medium'.[66] Commenting on this state of affairs in the same publication, Lars Elleström concludes that 'fidelity has become anathema', obsessively and regrettably monopolising the field of adaptation studies, and taking time and energy away from more important lines of enquiry.[67] However, the persistence of the question, mirrored in the revival of the fidelity debate around 2000, prompts us to stop and consider recent developments, and to take a view on the place of fidelity in the present study.

Casie Hermansson's article 'Flogging Fidelity: In Defense of the (Un)Dead Horse' summarises the critical positions during the fidelity discourse history, focusing on its developments in the decades following Dudley Andrew's 'anti-fidelity' manifesto 'The Well-worn Muse: Adaptation in Film History and Theory', where faithfulness was dismissed as an irrelevant concern in adaptation theory.[68] However, with several strings to its bow – such as comparative stylistics, the case-study method, or meta-criticism – fidelity criticism never quite went out of fashion with scholars and the general public, and the 'pro-fidelity' discourse is enjoying renewed popularity; so much that being 'against' fidelity is seen as retrograde.[69] The pro-fidelity turn has also left its mark on adaptation studies specifically concerned with comic art. A recent example is Baetens's volume *Adaptation et bande dessinée: Éloge de la fidelité*, in which the scholar staves off 'fidelity-as-demon', while working towards 'a new appraisal of fidelity' by returning to the practice of comparative readings.[70]

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Hermansson argues that the old 'fidelity horse', which she wishes to exhume in her title, can still prove useful if admitted in the company of other creatures to the green fields of adaptation studies. As she writes, 'It is time to include fidelity – aporias and all – in the intertextual toolbox of adaptation criticism. It is one tool among many, and sometimes not the right tool for the job. But at other times, and perhaps combined with other tools, it is the only one that will do.'[71] Hermansson thus suggests that adaptation studies remain open not only vertically – in relation to the source material – but also horizontally, by broadening the perspective to include different interconnections between texts, remembering however that 'intertextuality exclusive of fidelity discourse is also a form of impoverishment to adaptation'.[72] Elaborating on these ideas, Shannon Brownlee concludes that while 'the rejection of fidelity may lead to an overvaluation of *in*fidelity', our view is likewise restricted 'if we only look for insights and transgressions in overtly unfaithful adaptations'.[73]

'New' fidelity criticism has also occupied itself with problematising the idea of 'originality', 'authenticity', and 'completeness' proper to the adapted text, pursuant to 'old' fidelity discourses. In Glenn Jellenik's words:

> A close look at the act and performance of adaptation offers the critical opportunity … to grapple with the thorny questions of just what constitutes originality. That necessitates a move away from well-landscaped definitions of originality that rely on binary rhetoric: source/copy, original/derivative, pure/contamined.[74]

Jellenik supports the ability of an adaptation to engage with a forerunner, which should not be seen as definite, by furthering its subtexts, unearthing its hidden elements, and completing its 'narrative urges'.[75] Instead of considering distance as a space in which the adaptation manifests its infidelity to a stable, inviolable original, adaptations may be seen 'as a form of dialogue with the original, as variants, as comments or as "revisitations"', a view which has found a place in theoretical discourses.[76] Distance can thus translate as room for manoeuvre, a space for creative commentary where new understandings of the source text are

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allowed entry. In a chapter on 'Novels and Graphic Novels: Adaptations', Kukkonen, in her *Studying Comics and Graphic Novels*, explains this approach to the study of comic art adaptation in the following terms:

> Creators might indeed decide to foreground their own interpretation by changing details of the setting, the appearance of the characters or the way they communicate. This approach considers an adaptation as a translation of the classic, or perhaps even as a challenge to the classic and our assumptions about it, rather than as a reproduction in a different medium. An adaptation which translates a classic for a new audience places it into a new context and thereby suggests new perspectives on a well-known text.[77]

Lastly, another part of the 'new' fidelity discourse concerns the fresh emphasis not on textual fidelity but on the 'fidelity of reception', meaning the relationship between texts and their audiences. In the essay 'Adaptation, Fidelity and Reception', Dennis Cutchins and Kathryn Meeks celebrate the reader's subjective experience of a text as a 'brand of fidelity … both inescapable and utterly invaluable to adaptation studies', and put in a word for more personal interpretations and linguistic expression in scholarly writing about adaptation, too:

> we are talking about a fidelity of reception: a faithfulness to the experiences with texts and fragments of texts that are embedded in our lives, and which actually help structure our lives. The reason audiences sometimes choose to describe adaptations with words like 'faithful', 'true', or 'betrayal', is because their personal experiences with texts are potentially very powerful. These emotionally loaded words are not too strong to express the feelings that one is being personally attacked by an adaptation.[78]

Bête noir, (un)dead horse, or Jellenik's zombie: the fidelity discourse continues to haunt adaptation theory.[79] To address it head on, I will conclude my discussion of fidelity by explaining its presence here.

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Since adaptations, like translations, 'owe their existence' to a past work, Schober's declaration of independence on behalf of the adaptation seems too radical to function in a discourse like ours, which departs from the idea that the nature of adaptations is translational.[80] An exclusive focus on the comic art adaptations under scrutiny as completely 'emancipated' and 'disconnected' from their source material would lead to a one-sided discussion of their capacities and qualities only as comic art, and make their identities as adaptations irrelevant. Whether we speak of adaptations, appropriations, transpositions, rewritings, rereadings, revisitations, or *transécritures*, we are undeniably dealing with works that engage with forerunners on multiple levels, most of the time making no secret of this connection. An adaptation will always bear the memory of the source it builds on, which is the reason the fidelity discourse cannot be erased without ruinous effect. It can, however, be reconsidered in the wake of the pro-fidelity turn. Hutcheon has sensibly reminded us of the 'double nature' of adaptations: derivations but not derivative, second but not secondary. For Hutcheon, an adaptation is 'created and received in relation to a prior text' but is also an 'aesthetic object in its own right'.[81] Excluding any of these innate features by either considering the adaptation only in terms of its dependence upon the adapted text or radically disconnecting it from its predecessor will lead to an equally partial and incomplete analysis. If acknowledging the relevance of the source remains important in the study of adaptations, what Casie Hermansson and others have brought to the discussion is the realisation that other sources – intertextual, interartistic, intercultural – are likewise significant; the dialogue, as we have seen, is vertical, horizontal, multidirectional. The relationship to the adapted text is but one of many possible trajectories in understanding the adaptation. It might not always be the best critical route, but it is worth exploring in order to understand the nature of the connection and negotiation between the adapted text and the adaptation.

A useful analytic approach might then be to begin with the selection undertaken in the adaptation process. Certainly, the comic art adaptations under scrutiny here are not evaluated as more or less 'successful' because of some hard-to-define 'closeness', 'distance', or 'likeness' to the

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adapted text. I consider the question of fidelity mainly in terms of the adaptation's faithfulness to a chosen 'dominant', and explore how the choice of dominant orients a narration working with the means and properties specific to the medium of comics. Rather than privileging what could, if possible, identify as the 'original' dominant, the adapter and the reader take charge. In this view, the adapter is on a par with the translator who, having singled out the aim of the adaptation/translation, works to produce a text faithful to the desired outcome and dependent on the constraints and possibilities of the medium. This is yet another way of looking at the question of fidelity, formulated by Brownlee as '(in)fidelity criticism drained of its moralising' as 'questions of fidelity and medium are crucially linked in their attention to formal similarities and differences in the communication of narratives'.[82] In this sense, the process of adaptation can be likened to the act of translation, carried out at the cost of losing elements in the process, but with the bonus of finding, and making visible to the reader, other parts that sustain the translator's/adapter's view of the source work. It is this approach to the affinities between translation and adaptation as processes that will guide us.

Theory

> Anyone who has ever experienced an adaptation (and who hasn't?) has a theory of adaptation, conscious or not.[83]

In the etymological sense of the term, both dedicated consumers of adaptations and committed adapters 'theorise'. 'Theory', from the Greek *theōrein* (θεωρεῖν), in fact denotes an idea stemming from the act of considering, speculating, or looking at. To encompass this activity of observing and reflecting on adaptations into a theory, I will turn back to those voices that have questioned the appropriateness of founding a discourse about adaptations on a comparative perspective by systematically measuring the adaptation against the adapted text. The aim is to hit on a way of looking at adaptations which merges with a concept well-known to the field of translation studies: the 'dominant'.

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In the 1990s Gaudreault and Groensteen edited the volume *La Transécriture*, coining the neologism *transécriture* to circumvent the lack of autonomy that the term 'adaptation', in their eyes, seemed to suggest and, with that, the long, limiting tradition of comparative analysis in adaptation studies. The term *transécriture* was conceived to capture the transformations that adapted texts undergo when transposed into a different medium. While a change in terminology does not on its own change mindsets, the prefix 'trans-' brings with it an idea of movement from one state to another, and suggests variation rather than accommodation. Gaudreault and Groensteen's point is that *transécritures* reincarnate, in a different form, what their creators envision as the central 'icon' of the adapted text. This line of reasoning resonates with adaptation as a translation process, in which the decision-making largely depends on the adapter–translator's view of the text. Gaudreault writes that 'every reading of a text, every unique reading of a text, produces in the reader's mind what one could call an "icon" of the text … it is this icon of the text that the adapter will adapt by putting it through the "mill" of another medium.'[84] The 'icon' thus translates as the adapter's individual reading, and emphasises the role of the receiver – be it the creator or the consumer of adaptations. So the interest in the adapted text raised by the adaptation lies in this subjective interpretive act rather than in the distance created, whether large or small, between the transposition and its source material.

Groensteen and Gaudreault's definition of an 'icon' closely resembles the notion of 'dominant', which has migrated from the Russian Formalist school to the field of translation studies thanks to mediators such as Roman Jakobson, Peeter Torop, and Bruno Osimo. The conceptual device of the dominant is best known from the lectures given by Jakobson, who, in 1935, spoke of it as 'the focusing component of a work of art, it rules, determines, and transforms the remaining components'.[85] In Jakobson's theorisation, the 'dominant' is seen as an umbrella term for a wide range of textual parts related, but not limited to, form (rhyme, metre, or intonation may be the dominant in verse), function (for example, aesthetic or informative), and epoch (different genres of art

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'dominate' different historical eras).[86] Thanks to its flexibility, the term has proved a useful tool in translation studies, where the prototext's lead device, as singled out in the translator's unique reading, can guide the translation choices. In the field of translation studies, however, scholars such as Elin Sütiste, Maria Lotman, and Kristiina Lotman have drawn attention to how the use of this term has shifted in a poststructuralist context, where the emphasis formerly awarded to the role of the author has undergone a change:

> while for formalists and Jakobson [the] dominant is rather an objective quality of a text, which determines it and holds its structure together, then in accordance with [a] poststructuralist approach the dominant of a reader and hence also that of a translator can be completely different from the author's intended dominant.[87]

If the 'dominant' was a concept with blurred edges already in Jakobson's theorisation, the poststructuralist use of the term fuelled its indistinctiveness by pointing out that a text's dominant can be determined from at least three directions: that of the producer–author; that of the mediator–translator; and that of the receiver–reader. The possibility of identifying the dominant in a text lies not only in the eyes of these different beholders, but also depends on focus – on the textual level any specific analysis operates – which adds to the flexibility of the concept. In his article 'Change of Dominant from Modernist to Post-Modernist Writing', Brian McHale turns to the detractors who judge it too vague to be useful, showing that the blurred boundaries of the term are precisely what makes it functional:

> Jakobson's critics have sometimes complained that his dominant is not a single unified concept, but more like a *bundle* of concepts. I agree; in my view, however, this is not a flaw but on the contrary, a virtue. The flaw in Jakobson's lecture if there is one, lies in its failure to state explicitly that there is no *one* dominant, but rather that the dominant is a 'floating' concept, applicable at different levels of analysis and over

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> different ranges of phenomena. Confronting one and the same text, we may discern quite different dominants depending upon what question we are intent on answering. If we approach the text synchronically and in isolation, we may identify one dominant; if we approach it from the point of view of its position in the evolution of the literary system, we may identify a different dominant; if we analyse it as an example from the history of verse, we may discern yet another one; if as an example of verbal art in general, a fourth; and so on. In short, the dominant is a strategic category, and a good deal of misunderstanding might have been avoided if Jakobson had said so in so many words.[88]

'Dominant', just as 'icon', is a term indicating a personal vision and an individual reading of a source. To identify an element, at any textual level of the adapted work, which is instead maintained in the *transécriture*, Gaudreault uses the word 'loan' (*emprunt*).[89] In conclusion to the volume, Groensteen endorses a reading strategy that pays attention to how the *transécriture* approaches fabula (plot, narrative structure, time and place, characters), discourse (cultural, social, historical, or ideological contexts in which the new version is born), and medium (formal solutions proper to the target medium).[90] These conclusions fit with Brian McFarlane's considerations on the adaptation process, where a distinction is made between those elements which are transferable because they are not chained to one or other semiotic system and others 'which involve intricate processes of adaptation because their effects are closely tied to the semiotic system in which they are manifested'.[91] These are the elements that need to be run through the 'adaptation machine' or the 'mill' of another medium to be transferred.[92]

The process of translation, like the art of adaptation, is concerned with carrying a message from one language into another. Similar to the tendency in discourses on adaptation, ongoing debates in translation studies still often revolve around the polarised ideas of freedom and fidelity, although this was already declared obsolete a century ago. In 1921, Walter Benjamin invited his readers to look at translation as a form of artistic writing that goes above and beyond the derivative imitation of sense:

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> The traditional concepts in any discussion of translation are fidelity and license – the freedom to give faithful reproduction of the sense and, in its service, fidelity to the word. These ideas seem to be no longer serviceable to a theory that strives to find, in a translation, something other than reproduction of meaning.[93]

Following Benjamin, the primary task of a translation is not to communicate or inform, but to interpret its source material, choose a certain take on it, and act on this decision in the freedom to boost, disregard, and alter textual elements to express an *intentio*:

> The language of a translation can – in fact, must – let itself go, so that it gives voice to the *intentio* of the original not as reproduction but as harmony, as a supplement to the language in which it expresses itself, as its own kind of *intentio*. … A real translation is transparent; it does not cover the original, does not block its light, but allows the pure language, as though reinforced by its own medium, to shine upon the original more fully.[94]

The view on adaptation theory put forward in the present study thus aligns with Benjamin's 'intentio', Jakobson's 'dominant', and Gaudreault and Groensteen's 'icon'. The identification of an intentio, a dominant, or an icon behind the adaptations to be analysed will to a certain extent result from a subjective experience and depend on personal knowledge. There will always be alternative interpretations to be had, guided by the singling out of a different dominant, icon, or intentio in these adaptations. Thus, the fluidity of the three concepts reminds us that there are infinite possibilities of looking at the same text, and that the questions we ask depend on the viewpoint we assume. Kamilla Elliott's advice to anyone embarking on adaptation studies is to be open to conforming their theory and tools to what the examples they encounter demand:

> Adaptations teach us that theories cannot predict or account for adaptations in all times and places, not only because the field is too large, but also because adaptations are always changing and adapting. Any

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> theory of adaptation must therefore incorporate process and change. Adaptations admonish us to move continually beyond our present ideas and methodologies.[95]

Method

> Any exploration of intertextuality, and its specific manifestation in the forms of adaptation and appropriation, is inevitably interested in how art creates art.[96]

The variety of expression in the works of the comics creators considered in this book made it plain at an early stage that a checklist model would not be the best method to study such a kaleidoscopic collection of adaptations. Writing about cinematographic transpositions of literary works in his *Fra bok til film*, Arne Engelstad suggests an analytical grid encouraging a systematic confrontation between the adaptation and the adapted work.[97] To track changes indicative of the adapter's perspective on the source text, Engelstad's model is broad enough to raise questions about content, form, and theme, but still urges to think of the forerunner as a ubiquitous presence that exerts its influence on all parts of the adaptation. As with translations, connections between adaptations and adapted texts exist on several levels and to different degrees. Elleström describes this issue in a finely tuned phrase: 'A media product may *hint* at, *allude* to or *refer* to another medium, it may *mention* or *name* another medium, and it may *quote*, *cite* or *comment* on another medium.'[98] The various 'kinds and degrees of adaptation' seemed of central concern considering the heterogeneity of narrative strategies observed in the comics.[99] What each adaptation revealed about the adaptation strategies at work required not a universal, one-size-fits-all model, but a method that could be adjusted from case to case. The overriding question then became 'how'. How was the transcoding accomplished? By concentrating on the specific potential of comics to retell the same subject matter? By challenging the plot-as-we-know it, charging the source with new meaning and paying little attention to the storyline in the adapted text? By leaving the core narrative unchanged,

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but making it speak to the cultural or historical context in which the adaptation came into being?

These queries thus provide us with three ways of looking at adaptation: (*i*) a medium-oriented approach, focusing on the specific narrative properties of comics; (*ii*) a plot-oriented approach, concentrating on the transformations that the storyline has gone through in the process of adaptation; (*iii*) a context-oriented approach, probing adaptations that use the mainly unaltered plot of the adapted text to comment on their own historical, ideological, or cultural context. The formal, narrative machinery of comic art dominates the analyses in the first part, 'Medium', but is also central to the discussions in 'Fabula' and 'Discourse'. Because of their 'double nature', these objects of investigation are approached both as comic art and as adaptations.[100] When studying the connection between the adaptation and the adapted text, this relationship is treated as one of several hermeneutical tools, not to mourn 'losses in translation', but to attempt an understanding of the adapter–translator's choice of 'dominant' by looking at elements that have been modified or emphasised to fit the new context.

I assume some knowledge of the source works; equally, I have not written exclusively for students and scholars of Scandinavian studies. I hope anyone interested in adaptation strategies and in the medium-specific operations of comics, even if not primarily in Scandinavian literature, will find things of interest.

The theoretical concepts of the 'dominant', the 'icon', or the 'intentio' are fluid and depend on the position and subjective focus of the observer. 'As always', following Patrick Cattrysse, 'analytical relevance depends on the researcher's (inter-)subjective points of interest [and] the purpose of the investigation', inevitably, the approach to the adaptations in this book is not exclusionary, but rather encourages other ways of looking at the same works.[101]

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