

An Age of Adaptations: The Eighteenth Century

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1 Rethinking Adaptation in the Eighteenth Century

In the introduction to a recent collection of essays titled *The Scandal of Adaptation*, Thomas Leitch, a leading authority in the field of adaptation studies, presents the concept of 'scandal' as the key to interpreting adaptation practices and their common reception. Adaptation, whether from novel to film, theatre to television, or across other media, has long been accused of 'betraying' its source, and it is precisely this accusation that renders it scandalous. To adapt means inevitably to adulterate, to contaminate, to bend a text to new historical, social, or medial contexts. Leitch emphasises that audiences and critics react with outrage not simply when adaptations are mediocre, but when they dare to subvert, overturn, or reveal what was implicit, hidden, or repressed in the source text. Scandal, therefore, is not an accidental effect but the very engine of cultural reception and renewal. Leitch insists that there are no 'pure' adaptations: every transposition is a hybridisation that destabilises



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cultural hierarchies, aesthetic canons, and dominant values. For Leitch, acknowledging scandal as the constitutive principle of adaptation means accepting that creativity lies not in fidelity but in the ongoing potential for rewriting, contamination, and even cultural betrayal (Leitch 2023).

Adaptation studies reveal themselves as a field marked by a plurality of definitions and conceptual frameworks. Scholars have approached adaptation not as a single, stable phenomenon but as a multifaceted practice that can be understood in several complementary ways: as a process through which texts, stories, or cultural forms are reconfigured in response to new contexts; as a product, the concrete work that emerges from this process and enters into a network of relations with its sources; and as a mode of reception, in which audiences actively reinterpret and reshape meanings across media and historical circumstances (see Corrigan 2017). These perspectives have been articulated and refined by several theorists in the field. Linda Hutcheon famously described adaptation as both a process and a product while also emphasising the role of audiences and the “pleasures of adaptation” (Hutcheon 2013, 114-20); and other scholars have pushed the field beyond moralistic debates about fidelity toward models of intertextuality and dialogism (for an overview, see Leitch 2017). Together, these approaches connect adaptation studies to broader theoretical paradigms, from biological and evolutionary models of change to debates about intertextual and transmedial frameworks that emphasise circulation, transformation, and cultural negotiation.

Yet, long before the emergence of modern adaptation studies, eighteenth-century literary culture had already developed a rich repertoire of adaptive practices. As Timothy Corrigan notes, the conceptual roots of these discussions reach even further back. Reflections on adaptation can already be traced to the eighteenth century, when Giambattista Vico, in *The New Science*, described the emergence of poetry and myth as a form of adaptive translation of the natural world into human language and narrative (Corrigan 2017, 17). Glenn Jellenik, too, emphasises the importance of eighteenth-century practices and ideas in shaping the modern notion of adaptation. He argues that the category of “adaptation as such”¹ emerged during the early Romantic period, when texts began to be consciously read and evaluated in relation to identifiable sources. In this context, adaptation came to signify the deliberate reworking of an existing text for new audiences, genres, or media, a practice encouraged by

1 Jellenik uses the term ‘simple abstraction’, borrowing it from Michael McKeon who had adapted it from Karl Marx. It denotes “a stabilization of terminology, the point at which a term becomes a portable, reliable signifier in a culture” (Jellenik 2017, 50).

the rapid expansion of the literary marketplace and the growing circulation of novels and theatrical productions. At the same time, critics began to formulate what would become the dominant framework for evaluating adaptations: fidelity criticism, which assessed an adaptation according to its faithfulness to the source text. Jellenik traces the origins of this critical approach to the debates surrounding George Colman's 1796 play *The Iron Chest*, adapted from William Godwin's novel *Caleb Williams*, and John Litchfield's comparative analysis of the play and its source (Jellenik 2017).

Comparable anxieties about textual borrowing were already visible in the long eighteenth-century literary debates. Literary magazines and scholars denounced imitation or 'plagiarism' to construct literary hierarchies (Brandtzæg 2015). John Ferriar's famous investigation of Laurence Sterne's borrowings in *Tristram Shandy*, published at the turn of the nineteenth century, confirms the suspicious attitude towards novelistic imitation and adaptation. At the same time, those debates illuminate the narrative practices of eighteenth-century novelists themselves. *Tristram Shandy* exemplifies a mode of writing that freely recombines earlier texts while transforming them through irony and narrative self-reflexivity (Keymer 2002). As Richard Terry notes, Sterne's reputation eventually came to embody the paradox that an author might be both a 'plagiarist' and a creative genius (Terry 2010, 159-64). The very 'afterlife' of Sterne's fiction in the many adaptations it inspired illustrates how eighteenth-century texts rapidly entered a wider culture of imitation and transformation. As Mary Newbould's extensive study of *Sterneana* demonstrates, *Tristram Shandy* and *A Sentimental Journey* generated an extensive body of sequels, parodies, theatrical pieces, visual images, and other cultural responses from the 1760s onwards, revealing how adaptation functioned as a central mechanism through which readers and writers engaged with popular texts, extending beyond simple transtextuality into broader forms of transmedial reception and recreation (Newbould 2016).²

Concerns about imitation, transformation, and the relation between originals and derivatives were already central to early modern and Enlightenment criticism. Kamilla Elliott observes how adaptation, which was widely accepted in earlier artistic traditions as a legitimate and productive artistic practice, from the middle eighteenth century onward increasingly came under suspicion as theories of originality,

2 As Ariane Hudelet observes in her discussion of recent screen adaptations of Austen and Sterne, contemporary metafictional works such as Emma Campbell Webster's and Guy Andrews's *Lost in Austen*, or Michael Winterbottom's *A Cock and Bull Story*, similarly play with the conventions of adaptation itself, reflecting on reception, mediation, and the impossibility of producing a definitive or 'faithful' version of a literary text (Hudelet 2012; see also Seager 2018, Nagle 2021, and Monaghan, Hudelet, Wiltshire 2009).

medium specificity, and aesthetic autonomy gained influence. Modern adaptation studies are, in fact, revisiting problems that were already being discussed in the long eighteenth-century criticism (Elliott 2020, 33-88). A particularly visible field for eighteenth-century debates on the role of transformation of original texts was the adaptation of Shakespeare on the Restoration and eighteenth-century stage. As Jean I. Marsden has shown, between 1660 and the late eighteenth century Shakespeare's plays were repeatedly rewritten, expanded, or reshaped by playwrights such as Nahum Tate, Colley Cibber, David Garrick, and others, producing many adaptations that altered plots, characters, and endings. Those transformations, far from indicating irreverence toward Shakespeare, reveal a period in which dramatic texts were treated as flexible materials that could be reworked to suit new theatrical conventions and critical expectations (Marsden 1995).

Sharon R. Harrow and Kirsten T. Saxton (2020), too, relocate adaptation within a longer cultural history, by insisting that 'adaptation' is not a late-twentieth-century media phenomenon so much as a persistent mode of cultural production. They begin from the observation that we now live in a conspicuously adaptive environment, made of 'remix culture', transmedial storytelling, proliferating digital genres, alongside revived analogical objects. This emphasis on contemporary practices is counterweighted by a historical claim: eighteenth-century England and France were themselves a "golden age of adaptation", in which texts and forms routinely moved across genres and platforms: classical epics were remade as mock-heroic poems, life writing was refashioned into novels, novels were transformed into plays, and unauthorised sequels started to multiply in the new literary marketplace. What contemporary audiences sometimes condemn as adulteration or contamination (the 'scandal' of adaptation, as we have seen) is, in their framing, also a constitutive feature of eighteenth-century literary culture. This is why, for Harrow and Saxton, the extraordinary modern visibility of eighteenth-century source material – from consumer products and comics to films, streaming series, mashups, fan fiction, theatre, and web serials – does not mark a rupture with the past but constitutes a historical repetition. They underline that certain works from the period have become so endlessly reworked that they function as cultural referents even for readers who have never encountered the 'original'. In other words, adaptation can be understood as a mode of cultural memory, in which repeated retellings can make an earlier narrative structure 'legible' as a shared template, available for reuse and dispute. As Marsha Kinder and Beverle Houston suggest, adaptation may itself function as a form of historical criticism, simultaneously preserving elements of the source, exploiting the affordances of a new medium, and reinterpreting the work for a different historical moment (1977, 484-92).

Thus, Harrow and Saxton's most forceful justification for returning to the eighteenth century is not only aesthetic but also historical: the age supplies archives of modernity that continue to shape Western institutions and imaginations. They list, among other transformations, scientific and technological innovation, revolutions and resistance, capitalistic and imperial enterprises, expanding and contracting regimes of rights, widened access to authorship and reading, and changing accounts of selfhood and the limits of the human (on which see Nussbaum 2003). On this view, adaptation is not only a matter of aesthetic variation but a means of making historical continuities visible: many contemporary adaptations refer to eighteenth-century writing to locate genealogies of present concerns, such as free speech, gender, identity, nationalism, race, rights, sexuality (see Brett, Coker 2020). Harrow and Saxton also align themselves with the strand of adaptation studies that displaces fidelity as the central question of the relationship between source and target texts, as we have seen. Following Hutcheon, they emphasise the need to liberate adaptation from the moral language of infidelity and to treat adaptation as promiscuous, multigeneric, and multilevel, operating not only in literature/film pairings but across a variety of media. Yet, they add a historically suggestive twist: they point out that eighteenth-century writings already demonstrate adaptation as a vital site of scholarly inquiry, implying that some of what modern theory presents as new - especially the move away from purity/fidelity and toward adaptation as a pervasive mode - has a prehistory in Restoration and Enlightenment aesthetic practice (Harrow, Saxton 2020).

Alexandra Hultquist's chapter in Harrow and Saxton's collection locates adaptation as a critical and aesthetic practice *within* the long eighteenth century, where creativity and alteration in translation and adaptation were often taken for granted as necessary for clear communication. Hultquist extends and substantiates Harrow and Saxton's historical framing by showing that, in the long eighteenth century, adaptation (especially through translation) was widely understood as a legitimate form of authorship grounded in purposeful alteration rather than literal transfer. Drawing on Georges L. Bastin's portmanteau notion of "tradaptation" (Bastin 1997, 8), Hultquist treats translation and adaptation as a continuum in which 'faithfulness' often required re-creation: reshaping idiom, tone, incident, and even structure to make a work intelligible and effective in a new linguistic and cultural setting. John Dryden's influential description of translation as 'metaphrase', 'paraphrase' (or 'translation with latitude'), and imitation represented a contemporary framework for understanding adaptation as a spectrum ranging from close rendering to overt re-making (Hultquist 2020, 130-1). This framework reframed 'infidelity' not as betrayal but as method.

Translation discourse is also a discourse of gender and authority. The trope of *belles infidèles* feminises translation/adaptation as aesthetically seductive but morally suspect, revealing how cultural ideas of defect, dependence, and propriety shape what counts as legitimate textual labour. Yet women writers were central adaptors, and Hultquist foregrounds how their prefaces and dedications articulate an alternative standard: the goal is not slavish adherence to the letter but access to the author's 'spirit' or 'soul'. Eliza Haywood, in the preface to *The Virtuous Villager* (1742), rejects "slavish adherence" and argues that translation demands capacity, judgement, and imaginative entrance into the author's mind, making translation an interpretive expertise (Hultquist 2020, 132). Eighteenth-century texts often existed in serial adaptive chains: Behn's *Oroonoko* moved rapidly into stage versions (notably, by Thomas Southerne), and narratives such as *Abelard and Heloise* proliferated across poetry and drama. Together, those examples show how eighteenth-century adaptation became routine cultural production: creative, theory-aware, and openly premised on transformative change. If translation and imitation reveal adaptation at the level of linguistic and textual practice, the circulation of fiction in the eighteenth-century literary marketplace shows how adaptation also functioned as a mechanism of cultural reproduction and expansion.

A closely related emphasis on eighteenth-century adaptation appears in Daniel Cook and Nicholas Seager's 2015 collection of essays, *The Afterlives of Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, which approaches eighteenth-century writing not as a stable set of originals but as works whose meanings and cultural force are continually produced through what they call their 'afterlives'. This notion names a field that is wider than reception in its narrow sense, as it includes the ways texts persist by being taken up, reshaped, and repurposed in new forms and contexts, often through creative transformation rather than passive or critical response. This matters for an argument about eighteenth-century adaptation, because Cook and Seager treat rewriting, imitation, abridgement, dramatic conversion, and other forms of reuse as evidence of a text's ongoing vitality, not as secondary or merely derivative phenomena. Their examples repeatedly show fiction generating a proliferation of "uninvited appropriations" and rival versions (notably, with Richardson's *Pamela*, as we shall see below), while also inviting metaphors of lineage and literary offspring. Southerne, in the dedication to his rewriting of Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* for the theatre, imagines the stage as a means of reviving her prose, so that adaptation becomes a mode of cultural promotion as well as transformation. Moreover, they confirm that adaptation works also in terms of cultural memory, when they quote Clara Reeve's statement that "Mrs. Behn will not be forgotten, so long as the *Tragedy of Oroonoko* is acted" (Cook, Seager 2015, 6).

Daniel Cook carries on the argument that the eighteenth century is the age of appropriation and adaptation: he begins from the premise that the long eighteenth century “abounded in appropriative texts” (Cook 2015, 20) and immediately frames that abundance as both cross-generic and cross-medial: Pope’s *The Rape of the Lock* is smuggled into bawdier parody (Giles Jacob’s *The Rape of the Smock*); unfinished plays are absorbed and re-voiced (Cibber with Vanbrugh’s *The Provok’d Husband*); Burney’s *Evelina* reworks an earlier, destroyed draft; and works like *Gulliver’s Travels* are followed by “Lilliputian verses” in the periodical press (on this, see also Goring 2015). Most tellingly, Cook treats the ‘Pamela phenomenon’ as a concentrated demonstration of eighteenth-century adaptive energy. Within a year of Richardson’s novel, a significant number of rewritings appeared (*Shamela*, *Anti-Pamela*, *The True Anti-Pamela*, *Pamela Versified*), followed by rapid movement across performance forms, as theatrical *Pamela* was adapted again as an opera (see Kreissman 1960). Adaptation here is not a late afterlife but an almost immediate mode of participation in the fiction’s multiple meanings and in its market.

Cook connects these practices to the period’s unstable author-function. Anonymity and pseudonymity were not exceptions but norms. Marketing frequently employed phrases like “By the author of ...”, fostering an environment where texts could be easily expanded, modified, and even misattributed. In contrast to the contemporary view of authorship as ownership, fiction consistently defied finality and welcomed sequels, continuations, and editorial contributions. In a competing “economy of scarcity”, in which authors imagined their works under threat, adaptations provided an “economy of abundance”, in which plots and characters “circulate[d] freely” (Cook 2015, 22). Read in these terms, eighteenth-century adaptation was a contested cultural mechanism that kept texts alive by making them disputable and permanently available for further writing. The competitiveness of this mechanism made the notion of adaptation itself multifarious, multitasking, and inherently ambiguous. This ambiguity is reflected in the “terminological slippage, theoretical unsettledness and methodological uncertainty” of the eighteenth-century appropriative notions, a situation that partly reflected the wide range of adaptive practices characteristic of the period (see Jones, Løfaldli 2015).

A book such as Kevin L. Cope and Samara Anne Cahill’s *Citizens of the World: Adapting in the Eighteenth Century* (2015) extends the scope of adaptation beyond textual rewriting toward what Linda Hutcheon describes as processes of “transculturation”, in which a story or cultural object moves from one cultural context to another, often changing language, setting, historical moment, and political meaning as it enters a new interpretive environment

(Hutcheon 2016, 145-53). From this perspective, eighteenth-century adaptation cannot be confined to literary rewriting alone but appears as a broader cultural strategy of transformation and survival. As Samara Anne Cahill notes in the preface to the volume (Cope, Cahill 2015, xiii-xxiv), adaptation represents a dynamic negotiation between preservation and innovation, a process through which knowledge and cultural forms remain viable by responding to changing historical and environmental pressures. David Fairer's introductory essay in the same collection situates this dynamic within an ecological and intellectual history of the Enlightenment, arguing that eighteenth-century writers increasingly moved away from earlier theological notions of 'fitness' toward a conception of adaptation as active responsiveness to circumstance. Satirists and artists such as Jonathan Swift and William Hogarth, for instance, challenged the complacent belief in a harmonious natural order by exposing the instability and moral malleability of human society, while georgic and pastoral poetry imagined human labour as a continual process of adjusting to the rigours of nature. In these works, adaptation becomes a form of creative labour: a way of negotiating between continuity and change, between inherited forms and new historical realities (Cope, Cahill 2015, xxv-xlvi). In his concluding essay, Kevin Cope pushes this insight further by portraying the Enlightenment as an age that repeatedly transformed crisis into adaptive creativity. His survey moves across literary forms, architecture, religion, and natural philosophy: the mock-heroic mode, for instance, demonstrates how epic conventions could be adapted to ordinary subjects, blurring the line between parody and formal homage; architectural innovations associated with figures such as Christopher Wren, Nicholas Hawksmoor, and John Vanbrugh show how English architecture adapted classical models to the dramatic dynamism of the baroque and of the new environments; and eighteenth-century reflections on natural disaster and environmental instability encouraged thinkers to view catastrophe itself as a stimulus to new forms of inquiry (Cope, Cahill 2015, 127-50).

Taken in this broader perspective, these examples suggest that adaptation in the eighteenth century was not merely a literary technique but a broader cultural disposition, a mixture of optimism and determinism that treated instability, experimentation, and hybridisation as conditions of intellectual survival. Adaptation was rarely a single, isolated act, such as a later text based on an earlier one. More often, it worked as a system: a set of compositional routines and cultural expectations that made writing, reading, and even consuming objects feel like forms of rewriting or repurposing. The essays collected in this journal approach these dynamics from various angles, moving from Scriblerian satire to Quixotic reader-education, lexicographical compilation, serial print culture, and

finally the migration of narrative into furnishings. They propose that adaptation is both a practice of textual reuse and an aesthetic-poetic-cultural attitude that structures how knowledge, taste, and ideology circulate.³

2 The Essays in This Journal's Monograph Section

This monograph section opens with Judith Hawley's "Petty Differences: Hobby Horses, Pacing Saddles, Cane Chairs, and The Transmission and Transformation of Knowledge in *Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus* and *Tristram Shandy*", whose subject matter is the Scriblerus Club and its afterlives; continues with Alfredo Moro's "Towards an Enlightened Readership: *Don Quixote*, the European Cervantean Tradition and the Novel of the German Enlightenment", which considers the English Cervantean tradition as it feeds into German Enlightenment fiction; then Giovanni Iamartino's "Adapting and Rewriting in Eighteenth-Century British Lexicography", which relocates adaptation into the period's 'age of dictionaries'; Mary Newbould's "Serialization as Adaptation in Later Eighteenth-Century Magazines and Newspapers: Sternean Sentimental Journeys", which shows how late-century magazines and newspapers made adaptation feel native to the press, with serial fiction beginning in 1770 and flowering through the 1780s; and it closes with Helen Williams's "Literary Adaptation and the Fabric of Colonialism: *Paul et Virginie* on Printed Textiles", according to which the late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century are the key periods in which narrative was adapted into domestic objects, such as printed cottons that 'read' like political and aesthetic arguments.

What binds these essays is not only that each explores rewriting, but also how each redefines 'originality' as something born of adaptation. Adaptation is not merely derivative but a technique for critiquing rival knowledges, training readers, packaging authority for new users, meeting the commercial and formal demands of serial publication, and domesticating colonial politics in material form. Together, the essays portray the eighteenth century less as a culture anxiously protecting originality and uniqueness, and more as one that sees creativity as strategic transformation. This change

3 All five essays were originally presented by their authors at the conference "Adapting and Rewriting in the Age of the Enlightenment", organised at Ca' Foscari University, Venice, in November 2024. The conference was part of the Department of Linguistics and Comparative Cultural Studies' programme on Adaptation, supported by the Italian Ministry of University through its 'Department of Excellence' programme. It was curated by the author of this Introduction together with Benedetta Burgio, Magda Campanini, Emma Quiriconi, Alice Tartari, and Erica Vianello.

is sometimes open, sometimes masked as compilation, imitation, editorial improvement, or simply as the medium's affordance.

Judith Hawley's essay begins by narrowing the scale at which we usually imagine adaptation. Her argument does not concern large-scale rewriting but the minute acts of transformation, such as changes in punctuation, phrasing, attribution, or context, which nevertheless recast meaning. These "petty differences" allow Hawley to connect Scriblerian satire and Sterne's fiction as two forms of what she calls copious intertextuality. Both the *Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus* and *Tristram Shandy*, loosely indebted to *Don Quixote*, incorporate a wide range of earlier materials, from Renaissance writers such as Rabelais and Burton to contemporary scientific discourse, transplanting forms of knowledge into comic narrative where their claims to authority can be tested and mocked.

Hawley frames this process through a productive tension between continuity and transformation: adaptation preserves the recognisability of its source while altering its function through recontextualisation. Sometimes the source text changes very little, yet its new placement radically shifts interpretation, a phenomenon she illustrates through Jorge Luis Borges's fictional essay "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*", in which a twentieth-century writer reproduces passages identical to Cervantes's text but acquiring entirely new meanings, because they are written in a different historical moment. The essay thus traces two related adaptive logics. Scriblerian satire works through comic re-attribution, turning scholarly texts or editorial interventions, such as Bentley's 'improvements' to Milton, into evidence of pedantry or intellectual absurdity. Sterne, by contrast, adapts his sources 'in the spirit' rather than against them: through minute modifications, he transforms inherited material into new comic-philosophical arguments.

Ultimately, Hawley shows that such small-scale acts of textual adaptation serve as instruments of epistemic critique. By appropriating and reshaping the language and formats of scientific discourse, Scriblerian writers expose the entanglement of knowledge, authority, and power. An example of this is their treatment of projects such as William Petty's "pacing saddle", a lightweight carriage designed by the seventeenth-century economist and political theorist as part of his wider schemes of 'political arithmetic'. Adaptation thus emerges not merely as literary borrowing but as a means through which eighteenth-century literature absorbs and reconfigures contemporary intellectual practices.

Alfredo Moro expands the frame to Europe, presenting adaptation as both a transnational current and a form of cultural pedagogy. Focusing on the eighteenth-century Cervantean reception, he argues that Quixotism was adapted not simply to depict delusion but to dramatise the dangers of misguided reading. In this perspective,

adaptation becomes a means of cultivating what Moro calls an “enlightened readership”: readers capable of recognising narrative mediation, resisting naïve immersion in romance, and approaching fiction with reflective awareness.

Moro develops this argument through the case of Christoph Martin Wieland’s *Die Abenteuer des Don Sylvio von Rosalva* (1764), often regarded as a foundational work of the modern German novel. Rather than accepting the idea of a single origin, Moro situates Wieland’s novel within a wider European network of Cervantean adaptations, including earlier German works such as Wilhelm Ehrenfried Neugebauer’s *Der teutsche Don Quichotte* (1753) as well as French and British influences. English fiction plays a particularly important mediating role in this circulation: writers such as Henry Fielding and Sterne refined Cervantes’s narrative strategies – intrusive narration, playful mediation, and self-conscious commentary – into techniques for guiding and correcting the reader’s response to fiction. Within this tradition, Quixotism became a narrative device for exploring how readers learn to distinguish imaginative pleasure from critical judgment. Wieland’s novel, Moro suggests, operates through a “double educational pattern”: while the protagonist learns to overcome his delusive reading habits, the narrative simultaneously trains its audience to read more critically through the metafictional devices Wieland absorbed from the Cervantean tradition of reception and adaptation. Moro’s chapter shows how the Cervantean archive functioned on a larger cultural scale: not only as a repertoire of motifs but as a narrative technology for shaping Enlightened reading practices.

After Hawley and Moro have established adaptation as both small-scale technique and transnational tradition, Iamartino expands the field to lexicography. His essay begins from the striking observation that adaptation studies have rarely considered dictionaries, even though dictionary-making is one of the genres most systematically shaped by adaptive practices. Iamartino first revisits the debate over plagiarism and originality, which, as we have seen, lies at the heart of late eighteenth-century theoretical discussions of adaptation. As earlier historians of lexicography observed, the best lexicographers were often “the most discriminating plagiarist[s]”, assembling and refining materials drawn from earlier works (Starnes, Noyes 1946, 183). Iamartino reframes lexicographical borrowing not as theft but as compilation. English lexicography developed through cumulative reuse: early dictionaries such as Robert Cawdrey’s *Table Alphabeticall* (1604), Thomas Blount’s *Glossographia* (1656), and Nathan Bailey’s *Universal Etymological English Dictionary* (1721) provided successive models that were repeatedly expanded, translated, and reorganised. Dictionaries, Iamartino argues, therefore grew by accretion rather than innovation: new works built on earlier compilations, reshaping inherited lexical material for new users.

Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary* (1755) provides the essay's central case study. Rather than treating Johnson's work as a final authority, Iamartino shows how it quickly entered a dynamic economy of adaptation. Across the later eighteenth century, the *Dictionary* was repeatedly revised, abridged, expanded, and repurposed for new audiences and markets, from Johnson's own revised editions to smaller 'common reader' dictionaries, annotated copies, pronunciation guides, and bilingual lexicons. Johnson's name itself became part of this adaptive economy, functioning as a commercial brand that guaranteed authority even when the text had been substantially altered. Iamartino's essay thus broadens the scope of adaptation studies by showing that eighteenth-century culture did not only adapt stories and genres but also the tools through which language itself was organised, standardised, and taught. Thus, lexicography becomes a revealing model of the century's adaptive logic: cumulative, practical, and deeply invested in transforming inherited material for new readers and new uses.

Mary Newbould's "Serialization as Adaptation in Later Eighteenth-Century Magazines and Newspapers: Sternean Sentimental Journeys" moves the discussion into the world of magazines and newspapers. Its central claim is that serialisation itself constitutes a form of adaptation: each instalment builds on the previous one, while serialised fiction in the press often absorbs and reshapes material already circulating elsewhere. In this sense, the serial does not simply disseminate a finished work but generates an ongoing adaptive process shaped by anonymity, reader feedback, commercial rivalry, and the proximity of fiction to other forms of print such as news, advertisements, and shipping reports.

Challenging the common assumption that serial fiction belongs primarily to the nineteenth century, Newbould shows that eighteenth-century authors such as Richardson and Sterne already exploited serial publication both strategically and aesthetically. Issuing works in instalments could shape narrative pacing and suspense, while also allowing authors to respond to readers' reactions. The press environment intensified this adaptive process: magazines encouraged writing that was simultaneously familiar and new, borrowing recognisable styles or titles while developing them in unexpected directions; widespread anonymity and pseudonymity made authorship fluid, reinforcing the dynamics of extendable authorship described earlier by Daniel Cook, and fierce competition among periodicals fostered practices of imitation, continuation, and piracy.

Newbould illustrates these dynamics through two examples. The first is *A Sentimental Journey, By a Lady*, the longest known serialised fiction in the *Lady's Magazine* (1770-77). Initially modelled closely on Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey*, the narrative gradually moved away from its source, using Sterne less as a template than as a stimulus

for further invention. The serial form thus turned adaptation into a process of gradual divergence and creative independence. Her second example, Leonard MacNally's journey narrative, inspired by Sterne's *Sentimental Journey*, highlights the competitive context of newspaper serialisation. In fact, MacNally's instalments published in the *Public Ledger* were quickly copied and reprinted in rival papers such as the *Morning Herald*. Newbould's essay therefore reveals adaptation not simply as a relation between stable texts but as a process generated by the material conditions of eighteenth-century print culture. If Hawley emphasises minute textual transformations and Iamartino traces cumulative compilation, Newbould shows adaptation unfolding in real time, issue by issue, within a participatory print community where readers, editors, and rival publishers all shape the evolving text.

The final chapter in this section, Helen Williams's "Literary Adaptation and the Fabric of Colonialism: *Paul et Virginie* on Printed Textiles", shifts attention from print to fabric in order to trace the adaptation history of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's *Paul et Virginie* (1788-89) across three printed textile designs (c.1795, 1802, 1818). Drawing on Jean-Michel Racault's description of an iconographic tradition that becomes practically autonomous from its literary source, Williams treats these textiles as part of the broader transmedia 'legend' of Paul and Virginie. Her central question is sharply political: as the narrative moves from text to fabric, does it preserve, amplify, or suppress the novel's ambiguous critique of slavery?

Williams argues that such objects must be included in literary history because material adaptations often function as important sites of reception and canon formation. Printed textiles, displayed as curtains, hangings, and upholstery, were encountered in domestic interiors and could be 'read' visually even by those who had not read the novel itself. In this way, they participated in shaping the cultural understanding of the story beyond the printed page. Her analysis focuses on three designs that reinterpret the narrative in distinct ways. The first, produced in Nantes probably around 1795, foregrounds scenes associated with enslaved fugitives and Maroon communities, visually emphasising themes of resistance and freedom. Williams reads this design as aligning the narrative with the revolutionary moment in which abolition had briefly become official policy, while also noting the paradox that the same textile industry was deeply entangled in the economic circuits of empire and the slave trade. A second design by Jean-Baptiste Huet, produced at Oberkampf's manufactory in 1802, presents a markedly different vision. Here the imagery removes slavery almost entirely from view: scenes of pastoral harmony, maternal tenderness, and tropical landscape transform the story into an idyllic colonial tableau, a "settler paradise" in which the violence of plantation society disappears. The third design, produced in 1818, partially restores

the presence of enslaved figures but recasts them within a stable colonial order, emphasising loyalty and service while obscuring the structures of coercion that underpin the narrative.

Williams's essay therefore demonstrates that objects beyond the book can reshape literary meaning. By translating Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's narrative into decorative fabric displayed within domestic interiors, those textiles represented and domesticated colonial experience, integrating the imperial ideology into everyday sociability. Adaptation here becomes tactile, spatial, and political: a process through which narratives are not only read but materially inhabited.

These five essays make a strong claim: adaptation is one of the eighteenth century's most characteristic ways of interpreting and re-creating. It appears in satire's petty textual tweaks and playful re-attributions (Hawley), in transnational genre forms that re-educate readers (Moro), in the accretive compilation of linguistic authority (Iamartino), in the serial press that generates texts through iterative rewriting (Newbould), and in transmedial domestic objects that translate and reinterpret ideology through what they display, and what they omit (Williams).

Together, these studies suggest that adaptation in the eighteenth century was not merely a secondary literary practice but a pervasive cultural logic through which texts, ideas, and objects circulated, transformed, and endured. Thus, the 'scandal' of adaptation appears, from an eighteenth-century perspective, less a scandal than a normal condition of cultural creativity.⁴

4 The author used AI-assisted tools during the preparation of this article for limited stylistic revision and to improve clarity of argumentation. All interpretations, arguments, and final wording remain the author's responsibility.

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