

Afterword

In his introduction to *The Routledge Companion to Adaptation*, Dennis Cutchins observes that ‘To study texts as adaptations ... requires the scholar to hold multiple things in his or her mind’.⁴⁵⁹ Here, multidimensionality has been taken to mean not only the consideration of at least two texts at once, but also the numerous intersections to be found between literature and visual sources, comics studies and adaptation theory, as well as the presumed demands and supposed interests of a varied readership made up of both experts and non-experts in different fields. With their richness and heterogeneity, these research objects are naturally centrifugal in effect, eschewing an exclusively binary focus on the relationship between adapted text and adaptation, and revealing instead connections that sprawl in many directions – intericonic, intertextual, (auto)biographical, transcultural, historical, geographical. The common thread that has held such a varied assemblage of interpretive routes together is a curiosity for the formal and narrative machinery of comic art. It is my hope that the attention awarded to the medium-specific aspects of comics has worked as an opposing – centripetal – force with a cohesive function.

In an academic landscape devoid of comprehensive studies specifically concerned with comic art adaptations of works originating in Scandinavian literature and culture, *Afterlives* set out to examine how several Danish, Norwegian, Swedish, and Finland-Swedish texts with a ‘temporal stamina’ have lived on in the art form of comics.⁴⁶⁰ The remediation of the classics is an object of investigation that has allowed us, on the one hand, to draw attention to the medium of comics itself by exploring its specific storytelling techniques and, on the other, to

sharpen and rethink the habitual observation of familiar texts. If it is true, as Groensteen puts it, that ‘Classics are, par excellence, works that should be revisited’ so their ‘shock effect’ and ‘innovation’ – his wording – can repeatedly be perceived by readers, this book has tried to show how intermedia adaptation of plots and characters, themes, motifs, and aesthetic or stylistic qualities can renew the vision of the classics and bring to the fore disremembered or previously unnoticed details.⁴⁶¹ Comparative readings measuring the adaptation against the adapted text, when undertaken, have had the principal aim to identify the ‘dominant’ in the adaptation process.

In the first part of the book, an initial four analyses set the scene by focusing on the change of medium. The discourse about comic art adaptations peculiar to the present study was here defined through a selection of case studies (Madsen, AKAB, Crepax, Duba) which operate with little or no verbal narration and remain ‘loyal’ to the plot as recognised in the source text. The closeness to the storyline of the adapted text and the absence, or near-absence, of words favoured a concentration on the visual expression as the ‘dominant’. The interest in what a comic art adaptation can do that its source cannot – because of different, medium-specific storytelling possibilities – turned the focus of evaluation to how the source narrative adapts to the specificities of sequential drawing.

The three adaptations discussed in the second part were viewed given the way their creators challenge the ‘authority’ of the forerunner by manipulating the plot. These highly personal responses to their precursors have produced adaptations discussing the adapter’s own self-reflexive dilemma (Crepax), reframing the source text in a different genre by expanding on its embedded, partly unexpressed potential (Ange and Varanda), or rewriting the story in order to establish connections to contemporary anxieties (Eriksson).

This last point has raised issues also relevant to the discussion in the third part of the book, focusing on works particularly suited for investigations from a historical and contextual perspective. By examining the motivations behind the two adaptations (Bovil, Ghigliano), the

role played by the new local and contemporary reality was highlighted. This time, the strategy of reconnecting with themes and messages of the adapted text is not achieved by changing its plot or moving it into an updated, present-time or futuristic setting, but by finding other ways to familiarise a new audience primarily made up of young readers with the source. Again, the observation of the formal inventiveness of both adaptations shows how these two nineteenth-century classics were made to address their new readerships with the medium-specific means of comics.

The examples discussed in this study give credit to it being not only uninspiring, but also unproductive to ‘treat the role of the precursor text with equal priority in considering all adaptations’, as McFarlane has reminded us.⁴⁶² Rather than systematically comparing the adaptation to the adapted text, I have proposed an analytical model that on one level singles out the dominant in the adaptation process from the viewpoint of the reader–receiver, yet on another level examines the adaptation by trying to reveal the different grids and lenses through which the adapted text has been reconceived by the adapter–translator. With no fixed meaning, the classic travels through the hands of readers and adapters, through different times, different places, and different media, new interpretations are advanced, and diverse (sometimes hidden) parts are foregrounded. As the case studies are understood as translations of the source texts, the interpretations presented are likewise possible translations of meaning, which can, and should, be countered with subjective experiences of the notions of ‘icon’, ‘dominant’, ‘intentio’.

As objects of investigation, comic art adaptations also invite consideration of the afterlives of images. Various instances of visual intertextuality mean that most of the adaptations discussed in this book should to an extent also be seen as ‘art about art’: while Bim Eriksson’s characters, referencing Mickey Mouse and Wonder Woman, find themselves quite comfortable in the company of the classic comics, other comics creators combine their work with the mechanisms of poetry (Duba), the aesthetics of art-house cinema (Crepax), or painterly traditions (Bovil, Ghigliano). The repeated art quotes in the adaptations examined have brought us to

consider the use and function of the referenced artworks in relation to their new environment. Removed from their original context they prompt resemantisation, which also depends on the 'spatio-topia' of the image in the sequence. There are examples of pictures manipulated to produce new meanings and of others, literally 'quoted' and more recognisable, which function as comments on the narrative in which they are inserted. In line with what Heydemann has called a 'strategy of subtraction', the gaps present in the art quotes in the stripped feuilleton of *Fältskärens berättelser* trigger interpretations that subvert former perceptions of the same visual sources and sustain the dominant in the adaptation. True to Heydemann's idea of the 'strategy of combination', AKAB's fusion of two of Klimt's most iconic paintings, *The Three Ages of Woman* and *The Kiss*, into a single image not only underlines the relationship between the two artworks, but also delivers an understanding of the comics creator's personal reading of the adapted text. As Heydemann writes, 'the reference to something else, forces to express something of the self at the same time' in an 'interplay between creation and recreation' that resonates with the adaptation of the classics.⁴⁶³

One of my first aims with this study was to locate comic art adaptations based on Scandinavian sources and survey the existing work in the field. The reading list of adaptations is far from exhaustive – and presumably growing – but has been included hoping to offer inspiring material for further research.

If translation, according to Walter Benjamin, is 'midway between poetry and theory', it is fitting to round off with a few lines from a poem by the Finland-Swedish scholar and writer, Lars Huldén (1926–2016), who habitually teamed up with the classics.⁴⁶⁴ As a translator, he worked on Shakespeare's and Molière's *oeuvres*, and co-authored a prize-winning revisitation of the Finnish national epic *Kalevala*. As a poet, he was knowledgeable about classic verse and used pastiche and allusion to give oblique nods to the ancient tradition of epitaphic poetry and pastorals. As an academic, he wrote extensively on the masters of Swedish verse, Bellman and Runeberg, to name but two. In an untitled poem about 'the classics', he writes:

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En klassiker är en vit kanin	A classic is a white rabbit
i trollkarlarnas hatt.	in the magicians' hat.
Så snäll, så med om alla	So good, so compliant to all
förvandlingar.	transformations.
Simsalabim.	Abracadabra.
Det är inte alla	Not everyone is
som är så döda	dead enough
att de kan bli klassiker.	to become a classic. ⁴⁶⁵

With the wit and irony characteristic of so much of his poetry, Huldén puts his finger on at least two crucial themes in this book: the touch of the adapter–magician, by which the white rabbit inside the top hat can be transformed into an infinite variety of restive creatures, and the compliancy of the classics. In the very essence of a ‘classic’ work of art lies a tolerance for transformation, remediation, appropriation, compression, amplification, popularisation, relocation, and even abuse, which is a strategy of survival and a guarantee of a long afterlife.