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978-1-107-05468-4 - The Afterlives of Eighteenth-Century Fiction

Edited by Daniel Cook and Nicholas Seager

Excerpt

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Introduction

Daniel Cook and Nicholas Seager

*An adaptation is not vampiric: it does not draw the life-blood from its source and leave it dying or dead, nor is it paler than the adapted work. It may, on the contrary, keep that prior work alive, giving it an afterlife it would never have had otherwise.*¹

Linda Hutcheon

*The choice of this metaphor [afterlife] creates a relation between the source-text and its avatars that is quite different from those considered in the study of influences, sources, or intertextual echoes, which give priority and power to the source-text; speaking in terms of afterlives shifts the balance further down the line towards new figures, new openings, new chances.*²

Terence Cave

Hutcheon's insistent nots and nors attest to a lingering defensiveness in what has become a seminal study in its field, *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006, revised 2013). After all, adaptation theorists continue to grapple with critical questions that seem old-fashioned in an age of fervent fan fiction, multimedia crossovers, mash-ups, remakes, and swedings: Is it faithful to the source? Is it as good as the original? Although it is a wide-ranging and increasingly diverse field, adaptation studies still privileges investigations into the transfer of novels (typically in the realist tradition) to films (typically in the narrative tradition), a sign of the continued influence of studies such as Brian McFarlane's *Novel to Film* (1996) and Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan's anthology *Adaptation: From Text to Screen, Screen to Text* (1999).³ But the second edition of Hutcheon's study, which includes a timely epilogue on new media by Siobhan O'Flynn, makes a powerful case for the importance of pursuing creative adaptation across a range of platforms alongside film and theatre, such as video games, pop music, and theme parks. Bakhtinian theorists like Robert Stam have compellingly argued for the dynamic flux of adaptation as an ongoing process within a larger matrix of allusion and

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invocation rather than a product, a move away from its treatment as one-directional, the simple ‘transport of form and/or content *from* a source *to* a result, such as from novel to film’.⁴ The expansiveness opened up by the intertextual turn in adaptation studies is highly appealing, but it circles back to an important, disquieting question posed by Hutcheon: ‘What is *Not* an adaptation?’⁵

The term ‘afterlives’, as Terence Cave suggests, helps us to move beyond axiological defensiveness, inhibiting taxonomy, and simplistic linearity because it levels distinctions of value and priority, takes as its object of study the set of mutual relations between ‘versions’ of works, and flexibly accommodates a range of creative and other efforts by which works persist and are transformed. Afterlives, Anna Holland and Richard Scholar assert, ‘do not suggest a series of increasingly etiolated existences, or shadow-lives, but rather an astonishingly vital sequence of incarnations or lives made anew’.⁶ *The Afterlives of Eighteenth-Century Fiction* addresses the range of ways in which novels originally published in the century from Haywood and Defoe to Austen and Scott were adapted, appropriated, and otherwise re-presented. These novels were transferred into new genres and fora, in the eighteenth century and beyond, including stage versions, visual texts, and film. They have been modified and re-presented in different textual states, occasioned by anthologization, abridgement, serialization, and continuation. And the motifs, conventions, and techniques of eighteenth-century fiction have been taken up by later artists, including subsequent novelists.⁷ This aspect of the early novel, its susceptibility to creative responses across time and genre, has received only limited attention, largely focused on eminent examples: typically *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), *Pamela* (1740), *Tristram Shandy* (1759–67), *Frankenstein* (1818), and of course Jane Austen’s novels. The diffuse nature of the subject – and its delving into ‘non-canonical’ genres (staged melodramas and graphic novels), ‘derivative’ works (opportunistic sequels and screen adaptations), or ‘debased’ versions (bastardized texts or irreverent pastiches) – might account for the relative critical neglect of imaginative responses to eighteenth-century fiction. They have certainly received less attention than the influence of the nineteenth-century novel – the persistence of Dickens, the Brontës, and Hardy in modern culture, their influence on the genre’s development, and of course reworkings of their novels are much better known than those of Richardson, Fielding, and Sterne.

This collection begins to redress this state of affairs. Daniel Cook’s essay interrogates eighteenth-century conceptions of authorship in order

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to re-orient our understanding away from the rise of the proprietary, original author. Mimicry, vamping, and other techniques borrowed from the theatre, along with the pervasive collaborative practices of the period, he argues, agitate any serious claims to absolute or singular ownership over literary property. Michael McKeon similarly revisits the origins of the novel in his contention that a longstanding convention of romance – the trope of discovered noble parentage – had a varied afterlife in *Pamela*, *Joseph Andrews* (1742), *Evelina* (1778), and *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), which cumulatively marks the move from nobility as an outward manifestation of rank to an interior signifier of merit.

Leah Orr is also concerned with the afterlife in the eighteenth-century novel of traits from older forms of fiction. She provides a new explanation for the novel's picaresque heritage through publication and reading practices, contending that chapbook abridgements of rambling, plot-focused picaresque in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries provided a market for criminal and rogue narratives focused on a charismatic central character, such as *Moll Flanders* (1722) and *Captain Singleton* (1720). Sarah Raff considers the influence of a model of guardianship and authorship advanced in Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753–54), picked up by Dickens a century later in *Bleak House* (1852–53). *Bleak House*, Raff contends, extended Richardson's model of author/reader relations, in which an author is imagined as 'living on in the affective experiences of his readers, appropriating their love lives as part of his own afterlife'.⁸

Continuing the attention to publication practices and shifting reading tastes, Nicholas Seager charts the early novel's post-publication history in early-century newspapers. He argues not just that this episode in the history of serial fiction extended the readership for prose fiction, but that readers became accustomed to the pleasures of reading digressive, interruptive, and episodic fiction through such protraction. M-C. Newbould moves our focus to the second half of the century with a detailed look at *Beauties* anthologies of Sterne and Fielding. These collections outwardly repackaged two bawdy and irreverent authors (by reputation, at least) for a specific audience: young, sentimental readers of the 1780s and 1790s.

In addition to issues of genre, authorship, audience, and influence, the essays that follow explore fictional afterlives in terms of remediation: the textual (poetry, prose, and playtexts), the performative (film, opera, and theatre), and the visual (caricatures, illustrations, and photographs). Original poetry published in 1790s novels, Dahlia Porter suggests, went

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places that prose sometimes could not. These poems were subsumed into collections of the author's verse, separating if not always divorcing them from the 'source' novel; reviews of novels often quoted the poetry as representative, meaning that it stood, by synecdoche, for the larger work. The novel's poetic afterlife continued into the nineteenth century, providing specific afterlives for the original novels. David A. Brewer, meanwhile, considers ways in which the concept of fiction as non-referential discourse (developed in the novel's movement from depictions of 'Somebodies' to depictions of 'Nobodies') is complicated by puppet theatre, an often overlooked entertainment on which novelists like Fielding and Haywood were regular commentators. The dizzying games puppet theatre played with referentiality challenge basic assumptions about how the category of fiction was worked out in this period. Turning his gaze to seemingly more legitimate theatre, Michael Burden traces some of the notable trends in the reworking of prose fiction for stage musicals, including opera. He takes *Pamela*, William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794), Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1819), and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* as his examples to show how the adapters rendered the novels' themes of sentimentalism, politics, history, and horror. Shifts in taste, gauged by reviews and viewers' accounts, indicate that the afterlives of these and other novels on stage can reveal much about contemporary audiences, as well as the techniques used to appease them, including the use of spoken dialogue, all-sung recitative, melodrama, and ballad.

David Francis Taylor next attends to an important period in graphic satire by contextualizing James Gillray's retrieval of Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) in a caricature depicting George III holding a belligerent Bonaparte in the palm of his hand. Caricatures, Taylor argues, became an important vehicle for the expression and consolidation of patriotism amid the hostilities between Britain and France, and Swift's narrative provided a potent and versatile frame of reference for political propaganda. Whereas Taylor examines Swift's posthumous influence on visual culture in a specific medium, Robert Mayer traces the enduring cultural influence of Defoe's novels by looking primarily at screen versions, but also at exhibitions, photography, and travel books. As Mayer demonstrates, Defoe's novels have been put to a variety of uses by modern artists and filmmakers across the world, including Anglo-American feminism, protesting against government responses to the SARS epidemic in Asia and AIDS in the West, and exposing the social consequences of Britain's post-industrial decline. Jillian Heydt-Stevenson extends the examination of filmic adaptations of canonical

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authors by comparing the embodiments of happiness in two screen versions of *Sense and Sensibility* (1811). Recovering Austen's conception of happiness as more proximate to virtue than self-fulfilment or pleasure, Heydt-Stevenson shows that revisions to major characters like Edward and Marianne represent a fundamental reconceptualization of Austenian happiness. Peter Sabor, in our final chapter, extends our reach further still in his account of the reception of Austen's juvenile 'The History of England', a parodic national history. As Sabor argues, Austen's work had a notable influence on the early twentieth-century mock-history *1066 And All That*, by W. C. Sellar and R. J. Yeatman, indicating that Austen's influence extends beyond the novel to include fictive history.

Further studies might move beyond these textual, performative, or visual boundaries to consider in detail the use of fictional works in marketing, tourism, merchandise, and other facets of modern living, drawing indeed on the appropriation of fiction in the eighteenth century by makers of printed handkerchiefs, commemorative busts, pottery, and other forms of souvenir. The contributors to this collection build on the principle that eighteenth-century fiction is inherently adaptive both in the sense that it adopts other forms (romance, travel writing, conduct books, poetry, and the like) and lends itself to remediation in other formats (films, theatre, graphic novels, and so on). Future investigations into popular culture's absorption of literary works will need to move away from what we might call narrative and narrative qualified media and develop a grammar of immersive experience in order to make sense of theme parks, apps, gaming, toponymy, fan culture, museums, stately homes, and themed bars and restaurants.⁹ In any case, we advocate an inclusive approach to literary afterlives. 'Afterlife' is a capacious term that includes critical reception, remediation, and creative appropriation. Accordingly, the following essays touch on the impact of eighteenth-century authors on writers from the period itself through to the twenty-first century, but more remains to be said. Defoe and Sterne in particular have attracted the attention of graphic novelists, while Fielding and Austen continue to influence writers of comedy and satire. Adaptation still carries connotations of authorial hierarchy and legitimacy, notwithstanding Hutcheon's appealing assertion that even if adaptations arrive *secondarily*, they must not be treated as *secondary*. 'Afterlife' as a term extends Hutcheon's challenge to the tyranny of the original insofar as it gestures towards the extended, open-ended legacy of a work – what Cave calls 'new openings' and 'new chances'.

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Afterlives of ‘long’ eighteenth-century works of fiction are not always concerned with straightforwardly keeping the original alive. Many reworkings of *Gulliver’s Travels*, from nineteenth-century versions for children to the Gulliver’s Land theme parks and the most recent studio film (directed by Rob Letterman in 2010), tend to limit themselves to the first two voyages, jettisoning the third and fourth voyages. John Moore’s *Zeluco* (1789) had a major influence on Byron’s *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* (1812–18) via popular stage productions, but it fell out of print between 1827 and 2008. But even when a novel’s reputation is not especially high, its afterlives may keep it in the larger cultural consciousness, allowing for a later recuperation. Acknowledging his ‘Debt’ to the late Aphra Behn in the dedication to his 1695 stage adaptation of *Oroonoko* (1688), Thomas Southerne wrote that ‘She had a great Command of the Stage; and I have often wonder’d that she would bury her Favourite Hero in a *Novel*, when she might have reviv’d him in the *Scene*.’¹⁰ At this point in history, adaptation seemed able to save a good story from the still-disreputable genre of prose fiction. Behn’s noble slave is figuratively killed (buried) in fiction but brought back to life (‘reviv’d’) on stage. Southerne’s *Oroonoko* became one of the most frequently printed and performed – and in turn reworked – plays of the eighteenth century, leading Clara Reeve to declare in 1785 that ‘Mrs. Behn will not be forgotten, so long as the Tragedy of *Oroonoko* is acted.’¹¹ Indeed, Southerne’s decision to change Imoinda to a white woman made that character a popular figuration for Behn herself, just as the homodiegetic narrator of the novel has served this biographical function in Behn’s afterlife. Biyi Bandele’s 1999 play based on *Oroonoko* retained the black Imoinda but wrote out the white female character, whereas Joan Anim-Addo’s libretto *Imoinda, or She Who Will Lose Her Name* (2008) concentrates on the experiences of the female slave from Behn’s narrative. Before these postcolonial revisitations, as Jane Spencer has shown, *Oroonoko* was ‘[c]o-opted for the abolitionist movement’, such as in James Ferriar’s 1788 play, *The Prince of Angola*.¹²

The eighteenth-century novel’s afterlives are often politically motivated, then, as writers revisit its identity politics from postcolonial and feminist vantages. One example is Erica Jong’s ‘mock-eighteenth-century novel’, *Fanny* (1980), an audacious retelling of John Cleland’s *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (1747–48) – often referred to as *Fanny Hill* – that references much else along the way, as its Defovian *faux* title page suggests:

THE TRUE HISTORY
OF
THE ADVENTURES
OF
FANNY
HACKABOUT-JONES

IN THREE BOOKS

COMPRISING HER LIFE AT LYMEWORTH, HER
INITIATION AS A WITCH, HER TRAVELS WITH
THE MERRY MEN, HER LIFE IN THE BROTHEL,
HER LONDON HIGH LIFE, HER SLAVING VOYAGE,
HER LIFE AS A FEMALE PYRATE, HER EVENTUAL
UNRAVELLING OF HER DESTINY, ET CETERA.

Printed for G. Fenton in The Strand

MDCCLI

Fanny's name conjures Tom Jones and Moll Hackabout, as well as Fanny Hill. The mimicry continues with the orthography, typography, style, and diction of the narrative, and its synoptic chapter titles and imitation of eighteenth-century fiction's formal features. *Fanny* comprises rambling, miscellaneous adventures, interpolated life stories, and a stand-alone history

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of piracy spliced into the narrative; and the final three chapters playfully play out a protracted conclusion. Fanny finds time for some ‘Animadversions’ on ‘the dastardly Mr. Cleland’, whom she says stole her story, ‘but being a Man . . . he could not but sentimentalize my History’. ‘Only a Man’, Fanny reflects, ‘(and an indifferently-endow’d one at that) would dwell so interminably upon the Size and Endurance of sundry Peewees, Pillicocks, and Pricks – for a Woman hath better Things to do with her Reason and her Wit’. In her Afterword, Jong actually defends Cleland, but that hardly neutralizes Fanny’s criticisms of the heroines created by male novelists: ‘Neither Pamela Andrews, with her incessant Scribbling of her “Vartue,” nor tiresome Clarissa Harlowe, with her insuff’rable Weeping and Letter-writing, nor yet the gentle Sophia Western of whom Mr. Fielding so prettily writes, nor the wicked Moll Flanders of whom Mr. Defoe so vigorously writes, shines out as an Example upon which a Flesh-and-Blood Female can model her Life.’ Jong’s *Fanny* pays homage to eighteenth-century sexual candour, revelling in the self-determinacy available to a woman before more constrictive domestic ideology took shape; but Jong subjects to the critique of second-wave feminism the attitude that ‘Men see us either as the Embodiment of Virtue or the Embodiment of Vice’.¹³

Fanny Hill received fairly sanitized BBC treatment in a television mini-series in 2007, with a screenplay by Andrew Davies, whose credits include *Pride and Prejudice* (1995), *Moll Flanders* (1996), and *Northanger Abbey* (2007). In Martin Rowson’s graphic novel, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, *Gentleman* (1996) and Michael Winterbottom’s movie *A Cock and Bull Story* (2005), the conventions of the ‘heritage’ film adaptation associated with Davies are gently mocked, a tendency also evident in some recent film versions of the genre’s perennial favourite, Jane Austen.¹⁴ These recent versions of *Tristram Shandy* mark a self-conscious, postmodern return to remediations of Sterne’s novel, which had lain dormant as far as adapters were concerned for about 150 years. And yet, as recent studies have established, *Tristram Shandy* and *A Sentimental Journey* (1768) were extensively adapted for the stage and appropriated by visual artists in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and they elicited a wide variety of textual responses.¹⁵ The recent versions replicate the famously self-reflexive qualities of Sterne’s novel to reflect on the art of adaptation. Rowson’s is a graphic novel about the writing of a graphic novel about a novel about the writing of a novel; it subversively plays with the linear progression demanded by pictorial frames and mimics artistic styles from Albrecht Dürer to Aubrey Beardsley. Equally, Winterbottom’s is a film about adapting Sterne, somewhat in

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the vein of Terry Gilliam's Quixotic *Lost in La Mancha* (2002); it depicts a film crew making *Tristram Shandy*, with Steve Coogan portraying a burlesqued version of himself playing both father and son, Walter and Tristram. Both Rowson's and Winterbottom's works respond to the challenges of 'rewriting' Sterne, making inventive use of the 'media affordances' of the comic and the movie, respectively. So in the novel the indescribable beauty of the Widow Wadman remains undescribed, as the reader is invited to 'call for pen and ink' and 'paint her to your own mind — as like your mistress as you can — as unlike your wife as your conscience will let you — 'tis all one to me — please but your own fancy in it'.¹⁶ The film within the film of *A Cock and Bull Story* pleases its own fancy by casting the established Hollywood actress Gillian Anderson, but we see Anderson's consternation when it turns out her scenes have not made the final cut. Rowson meanwhile follows Sterne's refusal to describe the Widow by drawing her with a fan concealing her face, a nice hint at her modesty. *Tristram Shandy* stages a tension between the described and the depicted, between the verbal and the visual; the primarily visual forms of cinema and graphic novel engage with that tension in roundabout ways.

Film adaptations of eighteenth-century novels have been treated most fully in *Eighteenth-Century Fiction on Screen*, edited by Robert Mayer, containing essays on screen versions of such major works as *Moll Flanders*, *Gulliver's Travels*, *Tom Jones* (1749), *Clarissa* (1747–48), and *Rob Roy* (1817). Mayer makes an important case for getting beyond evaluative approaches to film adaptations that assess them against the 'original' by using theories of reading that conceive of reception as an act of 'concretization', by which readers creatively reconstruct a text afresh.¹⁷ The point extends beyond film to all creative responses to prior works. Adaptations, Mayer reminds us, are themselves context-bound, responding to pressing social questions of their moment, and engaging with the aesthetic norms of their own medium, genre, and era. For example, Ernest C. Warde's 1917 silent film of *The Vicar of Wakefield*, produced by the American company Thanhouser, is committed to the construction of a pastoral and pleasant England at a time when that idyll was threatened by an industrial war to which America had just committed; its use of direct quotations from Oliver Goldsmith's 1766 novel on its caption cards indicates that it places a premium on fidelity. This is not to say that the film is to be judged by that standard alone: it of course makes use of affordances germane to film, not literature, including music, acting styles, and mise-en-scène. The point to be made here is that viewers' horizons of expectation and the filmmakers' aims determine the nature of its intertextual relation to the novel, in this case privileging fidelity.

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Patricia Rozema's 1999 film of *Mansfield Park* (1814), by contrast, is an instance of licence being taken with a 'source': in the film, Tom Bertram's illness is a consequence not of his dissolute lifestyle, but of trauma following his experience on his father Sir Thomas's slave plantation in Antigua. Sir Thomas's Caribbean interests are a 'silence' within Austen's 1814 novel brought to critical attention by Edward Said's 'contrapuntal' reading in 1993.¹⁸ Rather than her cheerful questions about Antigua ominously receiving no reply, as in Austen's novel, a horrified Fanny Price discovers Tom's sketches of abused slaves, including William Blake's print 'A Negro Hung Alive by the Ribs to a Gallows'. This is a significant moment, not just because it marks a newly politicized take on Austen in adaptation, moving away from the more submerged politics of nostalgia embodied in heritage films, but also because an iconic anti-slavery image is conscripted in a rather complex manner. To some degree, Jane Austen (Rozema's Fanny is a figuration of the young Austen, a budding writer whose efforts include Austen's own 'History of England') is situated in the abolitionist movement more obviously represented by her contemporary Blake. But if the viewer recognizes the image as actual, Tom's sketches may or may not be taken as derived from his experience: wrenching the book from Fanny, Sir Thomas announces that Tom is mad. It is a moment that exemplifies Mayer's insistence, following Harold Bloom, that adaptations can take the form of 'creative correction' and even wilfully misconstrue a precursor, and it illustrates the emphasis Mayer and others place on context-bound audiences as complicit in the construction of meaning.

An instance of such creative re-reading and response comes in *The Fan. A Heroi-Comical Poem* (1749), which describes a misplaced fan depicting affecting scenes from *Tom Jones*. The pretence is that the 'fair Lydia' has lost this 'favourite Fan', which is particularly regrettable because she is a devotee of the recently published novel: 'She lov'd the Toy, because she lov'd the Tale.' *The Fan* is an ekphrastic poem, 'In Imitation of ACHILLES's Shield, so nobly describ'd by HOMER', so follows the spirit of Fielding's mock-epic style. These stanzas take us from the fan's graphic rendering of Tom's banishment to an early escapade on the road:

The painter next a mournful Tale had wrought,
Where colours labour'd with expressive thought.
An awful foe to vice *Allworthy* stands;
Jones pale and trembling hears his fixt commands,
Acquits his judge, himself accuses most,
Grieves at his fate, but more *Sophia* lost.