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TRAVELING COMPANIONS:

BICENTENARY LITERARY ADAPTATIONS OF H. C. ANDERSEN TALES

Adaptation is broadly defined, encompassing the re-working of virtually any kind of text into virtually any other kind of text. Moreover, it frequently involves the re-mediation of texts into entirely new forms. Even so, seemingly simple text-to-text adaptation of texts already frequently subject to adaptation can challenge both traditional and theoretical concepts of adaptation. Such was the case with a major Danish literary project undertaken in 2005.

Danish State Railways, *Dansk statsbaner* (DSB) commissioned a series of adaptations of Hans Christian Andersen tales to be published in the DSB onboard magazine *Ud & Se* [Out & See] to commemorate the two-hundredth anniversary of H. C. Andersen's birth. Resulting from the project were twelve original stories by twelve Danish authors: Pia Juul, Jan Sonnergaard, Ib Michael, Iselin Hermann, Preben Major Sørensen, Suzanne Brøgger, Bent Vinn Nielsen, Peter Laugesen, Kristian Ditlev Jensen, Lars Frost, Erling Jepsen, and Naja Marie Aidt. Each author adapted a different Andersen work, ranging from classics including "Den grimme ælling" [The Ugly Duckling], "Den lille havfrue" [The Little Mermaid], and "Kejserens nye klæder" [The Emperor's New Clothes], to more obscure works such as "Dandse, dandse dukke min!" [Dance, Dance, My Doll!]. Issued in book form as *Reisekammeraten og andre H. C. Andersen-historier i nye klæder* [The Traveling Companion and Other H. C. Andersen Tales in New Clothes] (Copenhagen, 2005), the collection demonstrates a wide range of approaches to adaptation that seem to stretch the definition of adaptation to its limits.

Keywords: adaptation, Hans Christian Andersen, Denmark, Danish literature.

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ДОРОЖНЫЕ ТОВАРИЩИ:

ЛИТЕРАТУРНЫЕ АДАПТАЦИИ СКАЗОК АНДЕРСЕНА

К ДВУХСОТЛЕТИЮ ПИСАТЕЛЯ

Адаптация в широком смысле слова означает переработку практически любого типа текста. Более того, адаптация порой допускает преобразование текстов в совершенно иные художественные формы. Тем не менее на первый взгляд простая адаптация одного текста может бросить вызов как традиционному,

так и теоретическому пониманию данного термина. Именно это наблюдается в случае широкомасштабного датского литературного проекта, предпринятого в 2005 г. В год двухсотлетия Андерсена Датские государственные железные дороги (ДГЖ) предприняли издание переработок его сказок в своем журнале *Ud & Se*, предназначенном для чтения пассажирами поезда. В результате мы можем прочитать двенадцать совершенно новых рассказов двенадцати датских писателей: Пии Юль, Яна Сонергора, Иба Микаэля, Иселин Херман, Пребена Майора Сёренсена, Сусанне Брёггер, Бента Вина Нильсена, Питера Лаугсена, Кристиана Дитлева Йенсена, Ларса Фроста, Эрлинга Йепсена и Найи Марии Айдт. Каждый из них взял за основу ту или иную сказку Андерсена, от таких знаменитых, как «Гадкий утенок», «Русалочка» и «Новое платье короля», до малоизвестных, как, например, «Танцуй, танцуй, моя кукла!». Эти рассказы, изданные в сборнике «Дорожный товарищ и другие сказки Андерсена в новом платье» (Копенгаген, 2005), демонстрируют широчайший диапазон подходов к понятию адаптации, которые расширяют его до всех мыслимых пределов.

Ключевые слова: адаптация, Андерсен, Дания, датская литература.

In 2005, Denmark celebrated the two-hundredth anniversary of Hans Christian Andersen's birth. Amid the flood of works published that year to mark the occasion, one literary project reached an unusually large audience as a result of its somewhat unique mode of dissemination. The project received little critical attention, despite the questions that it raises regarding the nature and limits (or lack thereof) of adaptation, a phenomenon closely associated with Andersen's legacy. To celebrate the enduring influence of Andersen on Danish authors and artists, Danish State Railways, *Dansk Statsbaner* (DSB), sponsored a series of “*gendigtninger*” [retellings or adaptations] of Andersen tales. Twelve contemporary Danish authors were invited to select an Andersen tale to adapt into a new story, and over the course of the Andersen anniversary year, these adaptations appeared, one by one, in the monthly issues of *Ud & Se* [Out & See] magazine. Each adapted story was two to five pages long, and bore the title of the Andersen original it sought to adapt. A different Danish artist provided illustrations for each adaptation; both the stories and the illustrations varied widely in style. The audience for the project was large because *Ud & Se* is the free high-quality DSB publication available on all trains in Denmark, including regional commuter trains around Copenhagen. At the time of the project, *Ud & Se* had an estimated circulation of 800,000 (Jan 2005, 6).

The near-total neglect of the project by scholars, not to mention the press, would seem remarkable given the number of Danes exposed

to it. Perhaps it was lost in the flurry of Andersen commemorations. Perhaps it was a victim of its drawn-out length, or perhaps it simply seemed insignificant to Danes so familiar with Andersen and his work. His tales have been inexhaustibly adapted. The cultural products inspired by Andersen range from Antonin Dvorak's 1901 opera *Rusalka*, based on the "*Den lille havfrue*" ["The Little Mermaid"], to Salvadore Dali's 1966 painting of "*De røde skoe*" ["The Red Shoes"]. As a part of this long tradition, the DSB adaptations may not seem particularly radical, but they nonetheless stretch the possibilities of adaption by taking what are often highly oblique approaches to the tales. This leads to the question: What is an adaptation? Does fidelity to a source text matter? With respect to the relationship between literature and film, the critical focus is typically on how well a film represents (or, more often, fails to represent) an adapted text. The film scholar Robert Stam has taken an inventory of the negative terminology typically used in these comparisons: "infidelity, betrayal, deformation, violation, bastardization, vulgarization, and desecration" (3). Stam complains that critics are often so busy lamenting what has been lost in the translation from text to screen that they do not look for what may have been gained. Indeed, a certain degree of freedom from the constraints of a source text is fundamental to adaptation. In comparing adaptations to translations, for example, the translator Robert Wechsler argues that translations are burdened by the "Platonic ideal" of a perfect translation, "and wherever there are ideals, there is the impossibility of attaining them." Adaptations, on the other hand, exist on their own terms. In the case of an adaptation, "the original is not destroyed," writes Wechsler, "it is not even harmed." (53–54).

Linda Hutcheon, meanwhile, has defined an adaptation as "an extended, deliberate, announced revisitation of a particular work of art" (2006, 170). By "extended," she means for example that an adaptation is not embedded within another text. It is "deliberate" in the sense that its relationship to the source text is intentional rather than accidental or unconscious, and its intention is "announced." The stories in the *Ud & Se* collection meet these criteria. Nonetheless, they demonstrate that even within the context of a coherent project with the explicit purpose of producing adaptations, the concept of adaptation remains elusive and ambiguous. And it remains so even when the texts in question are the tales of Hans Christian Andersen.

The Copenhagen publishing house, People's Press, published the stories and illustrations featured in *Ud & Se* as a book in June 2005. Sold at DSB train station kiosks and in bookstores throughout Denmark, it was called *Reisekammeraten: H. C. Andersen i nye klæder* [The Traveling Companion: H. C. Andersen in New Clothes], a title that cleverly alludes to two of the Andersen tales included in the collection, "*Reisekammeraten*" [The Traveling Companion] (a fitting name for a publication intended for the train) and "*Kejserens nye klæder*" [The Emperor's New Clothes]. The book's marketing blurb explained the nature of the project:

*Opgaven lød: Find en H. C. Andersen-titel og skriv en ny historie. Vi gav en række af Danmarks bedste forfattere budet, og de takkede ja på pletten. Resultatet er blevet en fantastisk samling af vitale noveller, eventyr og fortællinger, der afslører nye sider af de velkendte Andersenske motiver, men i endnu højere grad af de nutidige forfattere, der tæller store etablerede navne som Suzanne Brøgger og Ib Michael, nye talenter som Lars Frost og Kristian Ditlev og "fremmede fugle" som lyrikeren Peter Laugesen. Andersens inspirationskraft er stadig lige stærk hér 200 år efter hans fødsel. Hvem havde f.eks. troet, at Naja Marie Aidt kunne skrive socialrealistisk knyttæve-prosa, som hun gør det i *Grantræet*? *Reisekammeraten* laves i samarbejde med *Ud & Se*, hvor én historie bliver bragt hver måned i 2005. Alle historierne er illustreret af nogle af tidens hotteste tegnere og grafikere.¹*

[The assignment was: find an H. C. Andersen title and write a new story. We gave a bunch of Denmark's best authors this task, and they agreed on the spot. The result is a fantastic collection of vibrant short stories, fairy tales and narratives that reveal new sides of the well-known Andersen-esque motifs, but even more about the contemporary authors, who include great established names such as Suzanne Brøgger and Ib Michael, new talents like Lars Frost and Kristian Ditlev, and "strange birds" such as the poet Peter Laugesen. Ander-

¹ Suzanne Brøgger, Ib Michael, Naja Marie Aidt, Jan Sonnergaard, Pia Juul, Peter Laugesen, Kristian Ditlev Jensen, Bent Vinn Nielsen, Iselin C. Hermann, Preben Major Sørensen, Lars Frost, and Erling Jepsen. *Reisekammeraten og andre H. C. Andersen-historier i nye klæder* [The Traveling Companion and Other H. C. Andersen Tales in New Clothes]. Copenhagen, 2005, 130 s.

sen's power of inspiration is just as strong now, 200 years after his birth. Who, for example, would believe that Naja Marie Aidt could write a social-realistic, fist-clenching prose, as she has done in "The Pine Tree?" *The Traveling Companion* was made in collaboration with *Out and See*, where one story is being published each month in 2005. All the stories are illustrated by some of today's hottest illustrators and graphic designers.]

When published, each of the twelve stories was accompanied by a brief statement by the author. In the case of several of these adaptations, the authorial statement provides the key to understanding the relationship between the adaptation and the Andersen tale. None of the stories can claim much fidelity to the original texts. It is apparent that the authors construed "adaptation" in a very expansive sense, but that is what makes the project interesting. The stories can be divided into three loose categories: 1) stories easily recognizable as adaptations of Andersen tales because of their storytelling style and content, 2) stories not immediately recognizable as adaptations, but containing a significant phrase or image that has been transposed, and 3) stories that self-consciously subvert the original, sometimes in the form of social realism. The authors have freely mined the Andersen tales and transformed them into completely new works.

"*Hvad fatter gjør, det er altid det rigtige*" ["What Father Does, That is Always the Right Thing"] was the first story in the series, released in the January issue. The author, Pia Juul, writes "*Jeg valgte netop det eventyr, fordi jeg elsker H. C. Andersens fortrolige tone, der hvor han sier 'Du har jo været ude på landet.' Det tyvstjal jeg.*" [I chose this fairy tale because I love H. C. Andersen's confiding tone when he says 'You must have been out in the country.' I stole that] (40). This seems to be the only thing she stole, because nothing in the narrative resembles the original story. Andersen's story was itself an adapted folktale about a farmer who traded his horse for a cow, the cow for a sheep, then the sheep for a goose, the goose for a hen, and the hen for a sack of rotten apples. A traveler sees the idiocy of the farmer's decisions, and bets him a sack of gold that his wife will be angry when he returns home with a sack of rotten apples instead of a horse. The farmer bets the stranger that his wife will kiss him and say "What father does is always right." She does just this, and the "stupid" farmer proves to have cleverly outwitted the stranger and won

a sack of gold. All that Juul's adapted story has in common with Andersen's story is the fact that it takes place out in the country and contains the stolen phrase "*Du har jo været ude på landet?*" [You must have been out in the country?] (40).

Similarly, the connection between the February story, Jan Sonnergaard's version of "*Den lille havfrue*" ["The Little Mermaid"], and Andersen's tale is not immediately apparent. It is a story about Søde-Jan [Sweet Jan] and his girlfriend Pernille. The narrator goes on at length about how everyone envied them as a perfect, beautiful couple. One day Pernille thought she was gaining weight, so she joined a fitness club. "*Men det var i fitnessklubben, stop der, at tragedien startede. For det var her hun mødte Gun-Britt van den Broock, den sæk. Det var begyndelsen på enden, ide Gun-Britt van den Broock, den sæk, fra første færd gjorde alt hvad hun kunne for at give Pernille komplekser.*" [But it was in the fitness club, right there, that the tragedy began. For it was there that she met Gun-Britt van den Broock, that slut. It was the beginning of the end because Gun-Britt van den Broock, that slut, from that first moment did all she could to give Pernille complexes] (39). Gun-Britt's comments made Pernille doubt her own beauty and doubt that Jan loved her, and so she began a series of physical alterations and medical procedures in an attempt to make herself more beautiful. First she gets dental braces, then a nose job, then blue-tinted contact lenses, silicon-injected lips, several body piercings, a rounder behind, and breast implants. Søde-Jan does not seem to notice these changes, until one day his brother says "*Kan du da for himlens skyld ikke se, at HUN GØR ALT DET HER FORDI HUN ELSKER DIG...?*" [Can't you see, for heaven's sake, that SHE IS DOING ALL OF THIS BECAUSE SHE LOVES YOU?] (40). In the end, Pernille becomes depressed and drowns herself.

At first glance, this story seems to have little to do with "The Little Mermaid." There are no mermaids, princes, or witches in the story. However, Jan Sonnergaard's statement is a key to understanding the story: "*Det er Andersens mest misforståelige eventyr... Havfruen ses som en idyllisk figur, men egentlig er hun tragisk. Det er måske verdens første historie om plastickirugi.*" [It is Andersen's most misunderstood fairy tale. The mermaid is seen as an idyllic figure, but in reality, she is tragic. It is perhaps the world's first story about plastic surgery.] In Andersen's tale, the little mermaid has her tongue cut out so that the witch will turn her tail into a pair of legs. She has this "plastic surgery" done so that the

prince will fall in love with her. When she fails to win the affection of the prince, she drowns in the sea, unable to swim with her legs. Seen in this light, Sonnergaard's tale is a brilliant contemporary retelling of this heartbreaking story.

"*Skyggen*," ["The Shadow"], by far one of the darkest and most complex of Andersen's tales, was adapted by Ib Michael and published in the March issue. The original tale is about a young scholar whose shadow separates from him. When it returns months later, it has been masquerading as a human, and has gained wealth and power by stealthily spying on people. In Michael's story, the protagonist sees a man with a colorful shadow and follows him into another world: "*For jeg opdagede, at hvor skyggen havde strejft en mur, blev stenen porøs og skabte åbninger ind til en anden verden*" [For I discovered that where the shadow had reached a wall, the stone had become porous and created an opening into another world] (36). He wanders around in this alternate world, the only embodied person there, and sees things from a different perspective. He goes back and forth between the worlds, experiencing the lightness of the colorful-shadow world versus the embodied experience of the "real" world. Ib Michael is known for writing magical realism, and this intriguing adaptation certainly falls into that category. The collage-like illustrations suit the story well, and display a photo-like image of a man creeping into the hidden alternate world.

Andersen's "*Den flyvende kuffert*" ["The Flying Trunk"] is the tale of a young man who climbs into a magical trunk that flies away to Turkey. There, he tricks the royal family into believing that he is a god, by demonstrating how he can fly through the air and tell fairy tales. However, the story that he tells is a cleverly masked tale about a trickster (himself) who plans to start a revolution. Iselin Hermann, whose adaptation was published in the April issue, admitted that she turned Andersen's tale into a story about war: "*Det er ikke et af H. C. Andersens mest mindeværdige eventyr, og sant at sige kunne jeg ikke huske en dyt af det. Men billedet af en kuffert til vejrs sender jo med det samme fantasien samme vej, og sådan opstod min lille forteælling om krig og fred.*" (42) [It is not one of H. C. Andersen's most memorable tales, and to tell the truth I cannot remember a bit of it. But the image of a trunk flying in the air certainly sends one's fantasies flying as well, and so came my little story about war and peace.] She sets her story in the Cold War. Someone in Siberia detects the flying trunk as a red dot on

a radar screen and prepares to launch weapons that will begin World War III, but the dot disappears and the emergency is averted. Here, the only element of the story that was carried over to the adaptation is the image of the flying trunk. The purpose of the trunk, and the tone of the story, has been cleverly altered.

The May adaptation, “*Dandse, dandse dukke min!*” [“Dance, Dance, My Doll!”] by Preben Major Sørensen is completely different from the tale that inspired it. The Andersen tale is only about two pages long, most of it consisting of a song. In the tale, a tutor makes up a song for the little girl of the household—a song about her three dolls. Preben Major Sørensen, in his authorial statement, calls Andersen a genius. But, he adds, “*Mig er han bare ind imellem for rørstrømsk,*” [To me, he is just a bit too sentimental] (82). Sørensen subverts Andersen’s sentimentalism by turning the tale into a macabre, dark tale about a mother with a knife and the wooden dolls that the spectator-narrator mistakes for her children upon first glance. Christian Graugaard, who wrote a rare review of the series for the Danish newspaper *Politiken*, offered a metaphorical description of this particular adaptation: “*Sørensen forvandler vuggevise til morderisk death metal for infantile traumer med kannibalistisk dræberdukke*” [Sørensen changes the lullaby into murderous death metal for infantile traumas with cannibalistic killer dolls]. The result is a rather bizarre distortion that would not be recognized as an adaptation of an Andersen tale if it were published outside of the context of the magazine project.

Suzanne Brøgger, an author known for blending genres of biography, journalism, and fiction, took the largest genre jump in the series when she turned “*Den grimme ælling*” [“The Ugly Duckling”] into an essay about the little-known life of Archibald Leach (Cary Grant), an “ugly duckling” who grew up to be a swan. Illustrations by Majbritt Linnebjerg of cartoon-like swans with neckties compliment the June essay.

The July adaptation was based on Andersen’s “*Fyrtoiet*” [“The Tinder Box”], a well-known tale in Denmark. An adapted folk tale similar to the Aladdin tale depicted in the *Arabian Nights*, it tells of a boy who finds a magic tinderbox and is granted three wishes. Each time he strikes a match, a dog (with eyes that change size) appears and grants him his wish. Bent Vinn Nielsen set his story on the train. The structure of his adaptation does not resemble Andersen’s tale, but contains recognizable elements. Train passengers watch an old eccentric man who bought four

seats for himself, and they speculate about the reasons he is there. He has a dog with eyes that seem to change size each time the passengers look at it. The man disembarks at Odense (Andersen's hometown), and leaves behind a "fyrtpøiet," a cigarette lighter. A little boy discovers the (magic?) lighter, and puts it into his backpack. Here, again, all that links the original and the adaptation are the images of the "fyrtpøiet" and the dog with round eyes.

Peter Laugesen chose one of the lesser-known texts by Andersen for his adaptation published in August. "*Improvisatoren*" ["The Improviser"] was Andersen's semi-autobiographical novel about an artist traveling around Italy. It is difficult to determine how Laugesen's story is supposed to parallel Andersen's. Even the artist's statement is of little help: "*Peter Laugesen, har ladet sit eget lille prosadigt handle mere generelt om hvad det er at være improvisator*" [Peter Laugesen has made his own little prose poem be more generally about what it is to be an improviser] (40). This extremely short prose poem is about an ape that is supposedly "the artist." Graugaard's *Politiken* review sums up the story rather succinctly: "*en inciterende uforståelig korrttekst*" [an incitingly incomprehensible short text]. The only recognizable element it shares with the novel is the title.

The September adaptation, "*Kejserens nye klæder*" ["The Emperor's New Clothes"] by Kristian Ditlev Jensen, is one of the most immediately recognizable as an Andersen-inspired tale, because of the way it opens: "*For mange aar siden levede en lille Dreng, som holdt saa uhyre lidt af smukke nye Klæder...*" [Many years ago, there lived a little boy who cared so monstrously little about his beautiful new clothes....] (38). Jensen has cleverly inverted the story by making the boy the protagonist (rather than the truth-teller appearing at the end of the Andersen tale), and by making him care so *little* about his clothes.

"*Den lille pige med svovlstikkerne*" by Lars Frost, published in October, is based on "The Little Matchstick Girl," but bears little resemblance to the Andersen original. Andersen's tale is about an impoverished child trying to sell matches on a winter night. She is so cold that she begins lighting her matches to stay warm, and in the flames sees things that she cannot have: a warm stove, a Christmas tree with lights, a nice dinner. Finally, she sees her dead grandmother, who carries her away to heaven with her. The next day, passersby see the dead girl on the street. Frost's version is poetically written, containing long, associative sentences that

digress from one idea to another. He begins with noticing the scent of a stew cooling on a neighbor's balcony, which reminds him of seeing his grandmother put a pig's head into a pot to stew. The accompanying illustration is a collage-like image of an arm lifting a woman's head from a stock pot (or perhaps placing her head into the pot). The protagonist remembers buying a copper colored candlestick. While he sips a cup of coffee, a friend comes into the café and they have a conversation about differences between the sexes. He remarks that "*lighedstænkning*" [equality thinking] is the whole problem: men and women are different from each other, so expecting equality becomes a way to look for differences. Aside from the candle imagery, what joins the tale to Frost's adaptation is a sense of reminiscence.

"Reisekammeraten" ["The Traveling Companion"] appeared in November. Author Erling Jepsen writes of the Andersen tale: "*For mig handler 'Reisekammeraten' mest om tanken om det gode menneske... Det er også den tanke, som blev central i min egen novelle*" [To me, "The Traveling Companion" is mostly the idea of a good person... that is also the idea that became central in my own story] (50). The original tale is about a boy who meets a stranger, and this "traveling companion" acts a sort of guardian angel, keeping him safe on his journey. Jepsen's adaptation is about an old man who drives to his son's house for Christmas. He gets into his car, drives to the house, but when he arrives, his son asks where his wife is. They both realize that he left his wife at the door, and didn't look to see if she was beside him in the car. When the old man drives back home, he finds her patiently waiting outside the door. As they drive back to their son's house, he tells her, "*Prøv at se på det på den måde. Jeg kan ikke sætte mig ind i en bil uden at føle, at du sidder ved siden af mig.*" [Try to see it this way. I cannot set myself in a car without feeling that you are there next to me.] She replies, "*Så behøvede jeg måske slet ikke være her?*" [So then maybe I don't even need to be here?] and he says, after a pause, "*Jeg er glad for du er her*" [I am glad that you are here] (54). The core of the story, "the good person" and faithful companion, is certainly present.

The final adaptation in the series, "*Grantræet*" ["The Pine Tree"] by Naja Marie Aidt, is another story with a scarcely recognizable relationship to the original tale, the only link being that of the image of a Christmas tree. Aidt writes: "*Det er det første eventyr, jeg husker, fra jeg var barn... Det allerførste, jeg selv skrev, da jeg var sek-syv år gammel,*

var en lille historie inspireret af 'Grantræet.' Jeg syntes jo, det var en meget sørgelig historie. Det god ved Andersens eventyr er, at de har mange lag. Man bliver aldrig træt av dem." [This is the first fairy tale that I remember from when I was a child... The very first story I myself wrote, when I was six-seven years old, was a little story inspired by "The Pine Tree." I certainly thought that it was a rather sad story. The good thing about Andersen's tales is that they have many layers. One never tires of them] (50). The tale concerned a pine tree that dreamed of being a Christmas tree someday. His dream came true for one day, and then he was forgotten in the attic for years, and was eventually tossed into the fire and ceased to exist. A seemingly logical choice for the December issue, Aidt's new adaptation was one of the most scathingly social-realist tales of the project. It is a tragic story about a single mother, Maria, and how she physically abuses her son Torben. Maria's brother gives Torben a gift from his father, a snowglobe with a pine tree in it. When his mother sees that Torben is enchanted by it, she throws it out the window, and it smashes to pieces. The next day, when they go for a walk, Torben finds the smashed pieces of the snowglobe on the sidewalk, and his mother kicks the remnants under a car.

As varied as these stories are from each other, and from the Andersen originals, most still retain an essence of their source texts, although some bend the definition of adaptation almost beyond the breaking point. It should be noted that the project (or rather *Ud & Se* magazine) took adaptation a step further by making itself available as a digital publication online. In 2005, when e-readers, tablet computers, and smart phones were not yet widely available, the magazine was viewable on personal computers via a digital platform called iPaper, developed by a Danish company. Writer Johanna Drucker observed in 2008 that "few of us read with such sustained linearity in a digital environment. We may read in that way for informational purposes, but not for prolonged entertainment or scholarship" (3). Less than a decade later, her observation is quickly approaching obsolescence. The advance of technology promises new possibilities for re-mediating textual sources into new forms, which will no doubt challenge the definition of adaptation in new ways. The simple act of telling new stories based on old stories, as demonstrated by the DSB railway magazine project, offers no simple answer to the question: What is adaptation?

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