

Editor's Foreword

This special issue of *Symposia Melitensia*, now in its eighth edition, takes up the notion of 'Adaptations' as its grounding motif. It is never an inauspicious time to speak of adaptation: scholarship and debate about adaptation and its myriad forms and manifestations across the humanities, the social sciences and further afield have been sustained for many years, and with particular emphasis over the past two decades. In her book *A Theory of Adaptation* – considered by many as a luminary text that rendered the debate increasingly popular among scholarly circles in the humanities, the social sciences and beyond across the Euro-Atlantic – Linda Hutcheon reaffirms the ubiquity of *adaptations* as derivative products that in many ways structure our society and its modes of living today. Hence the cinema and television, the internet, the smart mobile, the dramatic stage, the e-text, the novel and the book, social networking facilities, digital media and technologies, even language itself – these have increasingly come to be perceived not simply as products, but, perhaps more crucially, as catalysts of adaptive processes.

Hutcheon's basic distinction between adaptation as product and as process lies at the kernel of this special issue of *Symposia Melitensia*. Our understanding of the notion of an *adaptation* will not limit itself to the "self-contained rendering", or the transcoding or the transmediation of an adapted text that results in the adaptive one. As several of the articles in this volume poignantly illustrate, adaptation is also, beyond its crucial function of rendering products and thought-structures anew across different expressive forms, an inveterately processual exercise – it entails a form of awareness of the imperative to guide oneself through the constantly transformative landscape of life – what Wilhelm Dilthey had termed *Erlebnis*, or the act of "living through" the travails of experience. As a profoundly human vista, therefore, the gesture or the exercise of adaptation entails the labour of (re)creation, the reception and the transcoding of our unrequited pasts, such that our present is born as a derived experience that is, of necessity, incommensurate to the lived experiences it adapts and, at one and the same time, different from the futures, the lives-yet-to-be-lived, that will adapt or perhaps adopt it in their turn.

This special issue is being published at a time when we continue to witness, first-hand, some major adaptations of received forms of living that, in the digital era, are evolving at an unprecedented speed in the history of modern political, cultural and scientific technologies. South of our shores, the age of the trans-dynastic transfer of power by nationalist regimes that cozied up to American hegemony is fast ebbing away, giving way to generations that clamour for dignity and freedom as much through the social media and new blogs as through their campaigning and demonstrations in the streets. The economic disparities that resulted in the recent political upheavals in our region are essentially the receiving ends of the fallout from the economic collapse across a hyper-capitalist West. Communities everywhere around our borders

are embarking on various processes of adaptation. Others have simply been forced into strenuous forms of life-adaptation. As a result, scholarly debate today is witnessing a sustained and renewed interest in the changing configurations of culture, politics and relations of power across entire swathes of the globe, as well as an increasingly cross-disciplinary debate about both novel forms of adaptation and a plethora of adaptations that continue today to modify and question the manner in which the human landscape has come to perceive itself over the years – as a constantly renewed experience of cultural, political, biological and technological difference.

As it takes off from within this context and other fraught present-day scenarios, this special issue of *Symposia Melitensia* brings together a line-up of cutting-edge scholarly articles that seek to read closely into a sequence of adaptive processes derived from across the humanities, the social sciences and further afield. Each essay brings with it its own specific extent of relation to the basic motif of adaptation. Several of the present contributions are, in their own way, the outcomes of specific reactions to other important inflections of the notion of adaptation: adaptability, adoption, adopt-ation, adoptiveness, adoptability and trans-adaptation. In a number of contributions, the incommensurate nature of the adapted subject to its originary concern elicits in turn a highly intriguing intellectual response. In their own specific ways and across their various fields of study, the exciting contributions that follow reach out in an effort to address some of the problematics that lie at the heart of their respective scholarly concerns. As such, they testify in turn to current modes of intellectual survival that are spurred ahead not only by the necessity of scholarly inquiry, but by the imperative of confronting various unrequited pasts as a means of understanding the rapidly evolving contours of the present.

In his opening essay, Sebastian Saliba offers a penetrating and thoroughly argued analysis of French film director Jacques Rivette's adaptation of a Victorian classic – Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* – while skillfully eliciting, in the process, the nuances that emerge in the examination of whether the film adaptation succeeds in evincing the basis of the great novel's sadistic qualities. Saliba's essay is followed, in turn, by Vedita Cowaloosur's intriguing analysis of the adaptability and evolution of the English language in postcolonial India, and her delineation of the trajectory of the English language from a symbol of the colonialist legacy to India's very own representative medium, adopted and appropriated across the country's social strata.

Giuliana Fenech eloquently addresses the role of adaptability in an age of "absolute connectivity" in the third essay to this volume. Fenech discusses the effect of the advent of new media and contemporary technological trends on the reconfiguration of the traditional role of the reader, asking, in the process, which aspects of the latter are amenable to translation into a future predicated upon digital technology, interactivity and speed. In the next essay – an insightful overview of adaptations in Hospitaller historiography – Paul George Pisani also takes on the fraught nature of received convention, this time in order to inquire into the manner in which the official historiography of the

Order adapted itself in order to suit the desires of an institution eager to cement its legitimacy on the international stage.

Stephen Bonanno's essay on the authorial strategies adopted in an expansive exploration of the self in Immanuel Mifsud's recent autobiographical work offers a discerning and thorough deconstructive reading. The author harnesses Mifsud's text as a labour of radical dislocation, continuous deferral and adaptation of received ontological conventions, particularly the *idées fixes* of selfhood and fatherhood. Bonanno's essay is followed by another study of yet another cutting-edge exercise of adaptation: in his essay, Jean Buttigieg makes the argument for the adaptation of the concept of the common heritage of mankind to the human genome and cyberspace, in a bid to enhance their governance in the present and future interests of humankind.

In a thoroughly-researched study of the decorated Great Siege armours for the Hospitaller knights at Valletta's Palace Armoury Museum, Franco Navarro analyses this collection of arms and armour as representative of the Hospitallers' military adaptations as well as their notions of artistic taste in the course of history, with a specific focus on the decoration of the knightly caste Armours of the mid-sixteenth century. This analysis of past aesthetic form is followed by Jean-Paul de Lucca's captivating analysis of the parallel aspects between seventeenth-century Spanish philosopher Francisco Suárez's purview of the *jus gentium* and contemporary trends in international jurisprudence, with a view to the latter adapting and deriving salutary insights from the former.

The next essay, penned by Arthur Muscat, presents an absorbing portrait of the trajectory of the self-taught Tuscan intellectual Giovanni Papini, with a focus on the latter's fraught relationship with the Futurist movement in Italy and his itinerary that constantly sought intellectual intrigue, and thereby adapted itself to novel and newly-challenging experiences. In the next and penultimate essay in this volume, Mark Debono presents a thought-provoking inquiry into the affinities between the gesture of adaptation and its often uneasy nexus with source textuality, analysed here with specific reference to Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus*, the adaptation of the Faust theme, and its loaded relation to Friedrich Nietzsche's biography. The final essay in this volume, written by Ramona Grech, offers its readers a detailed and thorough historical overview of the physical, administrative and financial state of the Hospitaller commanderies in Provence and their adaptive trajectories, with a specific focus on the commandery of Beaulieu – one among many unrequited spaces of a past that this study in itself seeks to rescue from the threat of oblivion.

On behalf of the journal's Editorial Board, I bid you welcome to a new and exciting special issue, marking another important milestone in the dynamic and adaptive trajectory of *Symposia Melitensia* over the years.

Dr Norbert Bugeja
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