The expanding field of adaptation studies finds plenty to work with when it directs its attention towards children’s literature, as it does in the lively volume, Textual Transformations in Children’s Literature: Adaptations, Translations, Reconsiderations. Adaptation scholars today work with a broad definition of adaptation. The long-standing preoccupation with novels-into-films debates that lasted through most of the twentieth century, and that emerged in systematized and theorized ways from the 1950s to the 1980s and 1990s, has shifted. Discussions and debates have been re-situated within broad cultural contexts, in the awareness that adaptation is more ubiquitous than previously thought, and repays wide-ranging investigation even as it crosses multiple registers and spheres.

In this volume from Routledge’s ongoing series on Children’s Literature and Culture, editor Benjamin Lefebvre has seen an opportunity to turn the attention of adaptation studies toward the fertile ground of children’s literature, an international field long filled with classics that have led to adaptations reaching into many forms of cultural expression for a variety of complex reasons. In his introduction, “Reconsidering Textual Transformation in Children’s Literature,” Lefebvre points out that “textual transformations have for a long time been the norm rather than the exception, and the industries that support adaptations,
abridgments, and censored editions of children’s texts are driven at once by financial, artistic, and ideological considerations” (2). It is a field that invites, for example, investigations into the mood of a culture, or into negotiations of power, opportunism, and aesthetics within a particular cultural context. In this widening landscape, even questions of fidelity—though no longer an end in themselves—stimulate investigations of the imperatives and opportunities that shape a work. The child itself provides a great opportunity to explore the dynamic in which adaptations are implicated, in which art and production mirror and push, resist and challenge, society. The outside front cover of this hard-bound book hints at the possibilities with its playful collage of four postage stamps (from the UK, the USA, and Canada). Each, with its visual rendering and design, responds in a particular way to a specific fictional work: Winnie-the-Pooh, Little House on the Prairie, and (represented by two stamps) Anne of Green Gables.

With this collection, Lefebvre deftly puts on display adaptation studies as a field marked by methodological fluidity and openness. Its boundaries are porous, with new opportunities beckoning from beyond once-fixed horizons. It expands, as Lefebvre says in his introduction, to take in abridgements, translations, parodies, and mash-ups “that occur internationally in the field of children’s literature and culture” (2). It quickly extends also, as we see in this volume (for example, in Maria Nikolajeva’s essay on classic examples of multivolume fiction for children, in which she explains the importance of distinguishing between “series fiction,” such as the Hardy Boys or Nancy Drew stories, and “sequels,” such as the Harry Potter books) to sequels, prequels, interquels, midquels, sidequels, paraquels, and pseudoquels.

Assumptions about textual hierarchies that once patrolled relationships between original texts—such as the classics of the formerly stable canon—and their related successor texts, whether sequels or adaptations or translations, have been disturbed in an era when cultural studies has intervened in our cultural habits. A traditional commitment to seeking fixed meanings in a once-sacrosanct text has lost its singular traction, and has given way to an emphasis on associative and interrogatory play among texts. Indeed, the idea of “text” is wide open, and cultural artifacts and events from a host of sites in a postmodern mélange now invite the attention of adaptation scholars. With the earlier obsessions with fidelity at least partly displaced by explorations of the pleasures of infidelity, an adaptation might still cite a precursor text; nevertheless, in negotiating its own meanings and audiences, it has let go of a compulsion to replicate that text. Of course, there is room for attentiveness to the details of the adapted text; however, such attentiveness is today assessed less with a sole emphasis on the relation of the adaptation
to a so-called original than on the relation of the adaptation to its social conditions of production and reception, and on its status among various kinds of audiences. Indeed, differences among and assumptions about audiences, societies, classes, and genders have been foregrounded by the ascendancy of adaptation studies.

With her 2006 study, *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon, as contributors to this volume remind us, has been a leading figure among those scholars who have been engaged in opening doors to contemporary adaptation studies. In her essay on “politeness and passion as *anime* paradox,” Emily Somers notes, for example, that Hutcheon drew our attention to the limits inherent in approaches that insist on the importance of fidelity and faithfulness among related texts. Hutcheon, she says, found opportunities that came from pursuing the value of differences among texts. Hutcheon’s approach recognized that “adaptation entails process and production in pursuit of a pleasure in the act of recreation that need not be judged according to assumptions of its fidelity to the source material. . . . [T]he accusation of adulteration, in regards to how the adaptor manages his or her source material, is somewhat stifling.” Somers draws our attention to Hutcheon’s emphasis on “the palimpsestuous as best particularizing the adaptive mode” (156-7). In other words, a prior and generally well-known text “shadows” the adaptation that lies before us, the latter still announcing its relationship to the former, in the process revealing “intermediary linkages” between, for example, ideology and genre. She goes further, observing that for Hutcheon, “both authorial intentions and audience attentions facilitate the outcome of the adaptive process in any transition of source to adaptation” (170).
In her own study, Somers thinks through Hutcheon’s writing to analyze the “inherent dilemmas” raised by the “transnational reframing” of a work for an audience socialized according to “specific norms and expectations” that differ from that of the source work to that of the adaptation—in Somers’s case, from L.M. Montgomery’s Canadian novel *Anne of Green Gables* (1908) to Isao Takahata’s animated television series *Akage no An* (Japan, 1979).

Malini Roy, in her essay on graphic novels for young people in contemporary India—a wide-ranging study of the particularities of seldom-noticed local efforts too commonly subsumed within sweeping and homogenizing declarations about transnational cultural productivity, but about which a questionable “generic originality” is valorized in the popular press in India—also finds Hutcheon useful to her work. She notes Hutcheon’s caution about literary conventions that place too high a value on “originality”—“a value judgment that has become a familiar Romantic cultural inheritance worldwide” (24). Roy is critical of the exploitation of this long-standing presupposition within contemporary India’s globalized economy, as exhibited, in her example, by the publisher Campfire.

In his own sensitively written essay on “adapting and readapting Laura Ingalls Wilder’s *Little House on the Prairie,*” Lefebvre joins Roy and Somers in drawing from Hutcheon’s work. Finding, with Hutcheon, that fidelity criticism as an interpretive strategy can actually be counterproductive, he states: “Hutcheon proposes instead that we examine adaptations as ‘deliberate, announced, and extended revisitations of prior works’; in order [to] locate the ‘pleasure [that] comes simply from repetition with variation, from the comfort of ritual combined with the piquancy of surprise’” (177). Indeed, Lefebvre has already acknowledged the influence of Hutcheon in his introduction, along with that of other recent and contemporary adaptation scholars such as Brian McFarlane, James Naremore, Thomas Leitch, and Robert Stam.

As editor, Lefebvre has followed a model that allows him to reflect the considerable diversity of adaptation work, but that makes it difficult to sustain the quality of his eleven-essay volume. Overall he has been successful in putting together a strong collection. A reader interested in children’s studies and/or adaptation studies will be rewarded by perusing all the essays, undoubtedly pondering some more fully or pursuing more vigorously those that either extend the reader’s already established interest, or spark a fresh curiosity. Gathering together what is essentially case-study material, Lefebvre has ended up with pieces more motley than unified, with some works more rewarding than others. To be sure, Lefebvre is quick to acknowledge in his introduction that this collection “deliberately sacrifices comprehensiveness in order to chart a range of challenges inherent in the
transformation of texts for children for new audiences” (3). In doing so, it considers texts “in a wide range of languages, times, nationalities, and media” (3).

Nat Hurley’s “Alice Lost and Found: A Queer Book History,” one of the most demanding and also most rewarding essays in the collection, brings together strands of book history—with attention to a “sociology” of books—and textual and paratextual reflexivities in an examination of Alan Moore and Melinda Gebbie’s *The Lost Girls*, “a (porno)graphic novel that narrates and illustrates the adventures of Lewis Carroll’s Alice, J.M. Barrie’s Wendy, and L. Frank Baum’s Dorothy” (101). The excitement and complexity that adaptation studies can bring to children’s studies are not only evoked but also enacted by Hurley’s enterprising analysis. Only this essay and the one that follows—Andrea McKenzie’s “Patterns, Power, and Paradox: International Book Covers of *Anne of Green Gables* across a Century”—make extensive use of illustrations. Both do so effectively. Hurley’s essay, however, is more tightly wound and more deeply engaging. McKenzie’s, moving through a series of book covers from several countries and various historic moments, spreads itself across so vast a range that, for all its considerable strengths, it appears somewhat random in its development and structure. It seems to side-step the challenge, demonstrated in Hurley’s essay, of grappling with the fundamental issues raised by adaptation and transformation. Because it tackles so much, it falls slightly short of an adequately layered analysis of the respective societies and cultures—as well as book-cover images—to which it draws our attention.

The volume opens with a strong and invigorating essay by David Whitley on “reconfiguring narratives of origin and identity” (7), which eloquently addresses two animated films from the mid-1990s, *Pocahontas* and *Princess Mononoke*, the first, American, the second, Japanese. He examines the changing shapes and functions of narratives of origin that, operating within national popular cultures, position us “within shifting landscapes of the mind” (8). Hanh Nguyen’s essay on collections of Vietnamese folktales for audiences in the Vietnam diaspora is a wide-ranging survey, introducing readers to two collections in particular: *Two Cakes Fit for a King: Folktales from Vietnam* and *Dragon Prince: Stories and Legends from Vietnam* (published in 2003 and 2007, respectively). Nguyen looks at variations that occur when stories that were once oral tales are written for English-speaking diasporic communities in North America. Laura Tosi offers a crisp and clean reading of prose adaptations of Shakespeare for children, using as her base the Venetian plays from Charles and Mary Lamb’s *Tales from Shakespeare* (1807). She draws on the Lambs’s own sensitive handling of challenges that arose from presenting Shakespeare to children, an activity which involves a move from dramatic language to a prose narrative marked by the voice of a narrator.
Her essay explores issues of gender (with attention to Mary Lamb’s influence on the function of her brother Charles), and of alterity (concerning Othello the Moor and Shylock the Jew), first in the Lambs’ work, then in that of adapters influenced by them. Lisa Migo concentrates on “school stories” for girls, especially the development from 1925 onward of Elinor Brent-Dyer’s Chalet School series, and the subsequent impact on the series of its online reception. Monika Woźniak’s fascinating essay is an examination of the exuberant but complicated reception in Poland of fairy tales by French writer Charles Perrault (1628-1703). She explores with some subtlety and depth the intriguing cultural gaps and incompatibilities between the culture in which the stories originated, and that in which they were adapted. She points, also, to the imperative in Poland toward a radical “nationalization” of the classic fairy tales, and the tradition in Poland to adapt with extraordinary freedom and little acknowledgement of origins. Woźniak illustrates her arguments by a lively exploration of Polish variants of “domesticated” versions of the Cinderella tale. She laments the recent loss of some of the rich traditions of the fairy tale in Poland with the transition to the “liberalization” of the editorial market after 1989 and the turn toward higher-profit, lower-artistry children’s books.

This volume is filled with a wide range of essays varying greatly in approach, tone, texture, and focus. Lefebvre has found an admirable mixture of studies situated – like the contributors themselves – in a variety of cultural contexts, and at many productive points within adaptation studies and children’s literary studies. His eclectic approach celebrates the expansion of a field in the act of leaping across traditional borders.

Works Cited

Paul Tiessen, Professor Emeritus, English and Film Studies, Wilfrid Laurier University, is co-editor of After Green Gables (U of Toronto Press, 2006) and co-author of the text for Woldemar Neufeld’s Canada (Wilfrid Laurier U Press, 2010), both with Hildi Froese Tiessen. He is working on a new study of Malcolm Lowry’s filmscript adaptation of F. Scott Fitzgerald’s novel Tender Is the Night.