

Title: The Ethics of Adaptation: Russian Examples

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Are stage adaptations of literary texts ethically defensible? The generally favored answer – reflecting a vague prejudice against adaptations as second-rate forms of aesthetic activity – would seem to be no. The deliberate use of someone else’s finished text suggests at best an abrogation of creative prerogatives and at worse artistic plagiarism. Contrasting values of independence, originality, and hard work typically ascribed to good art bring into sharp relief the principles of overt dependence, iterability, and manipulation of someone else’s labor which underlie adaptations. In the following paper, I take some examples from recent theater history, including productions put on by Anatoly Efros, Yury Liubimov, and Lev Dodin to suggest strategies developed in Russian stage performances on behalf of an ethical as well as creative stage process in the uses of literature.