

The Crossroads of Adaptation: a Study on Literary and Film Theories.¹

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Abstract—Between the crossroads that involve literary studies and film studies or even the relationship between literature and interart studies, the question of adaptation continues to attract researchers' attention to the relations between book and image, between literature and cinema as two distinct semiotic systems, but with approximation points. In order to understand some of the points of view on the issue of adaptation, it is important to try to find authors who present proposals for classifying adaptations, compare these proposals and evaluate the links between literary studies and film studies that they reveal.

Keywords— Literary studies, film studies, adaptation, literature and cinema

The complex topic of adaptation presents a set of very different readings, so we consider it pertinent to present a vision that systematizes, albeit in a synoptic way, the main assumptions that can allow us to analyze adaptation according to a possible typology. For this purpose, we have reached a paradox that is difficult to manage: on the one hand, the definition of "adaptation" disturbs the identification of boundaries in our object of study; on the other hand, we can find some proposals for reflection on the possible paths of this process (Cardoso, 2016), which have originated countless reflections from classic authors such as Wagner (1975), Syniard (1986), Peña-Ardid (2009), Morrissette (1985), Garcia (1990), Chatman (1990) or Corrigan (1999) and more recent studies such as Cutchins, Krebs & Voigts (2018). Cruz (2014) argues that the connections between literature and cinema are complex since the early studies about this topic:

The close relationship between literature and film has existed since the advent of cinema due to the strong visual characteristics of both media. D. W. Griffith wanted to film in the same way as Charles Dickens wrote novels. Similarly, Tolstoy wanted to write like a camera films (Paech, 1988, pp. 122–3). George Bluestone, in establishing the limits of both the novel and the film, argues that novelist and film director meet in the attempt “to make you see”, the former through the mind; the latter through the eye. For him, the root difference between the two media “lies between

the percept of the visual image and the concept of the mental image” (1957, p. 137). He considers the end products of novel and film as representing different aesthetic genera, since each is autonomous and each is characterized by unique and specific properties (p. 139). Bluestone states that “a film is not thought; it is perceived” (p. 141). Therefore, film cannot have direct access to the power of discursive forms because it is a presentational medium (except for its use of dialogues). Whereas “the novel discourses, the film must picture” (p. 140). Bluestone had a very pessimistic view of the intersection between the two media. He concludes his chapter by stating that “what is peculiarly filmic and what is peculiarly novelistic cannot be converted without destroying an integral part of each.” (p. 150). Therefore, adaptation would imply destruction, instead of construction of new possibilities of reading and interpretation. Most of the arguments developed by Bluestone have turned out to be inconsistent with the way contemporary works treat their media. There is a blurring of the borderlines of the medium allotted for each art form nowadays, as films become literary and novels become more and more cinematic. (2014, p. 38)

Thus, we found that many authors tried to systematize the impossible (the semiotic and artistic variety of adaptations) and the possible (the paths of reflexive approach to the adaptation process). The universe of the models we chose was governed by the diachronic representativeness of the proposals and their evolution, as well as by the use of narratology as an instrumental vector.

In 1957, George Bluestone proposed six examples of adaptations that make it possible to identify a possible typology. Elect for analysis the films *The Informer* (which exemplifies the director's work in exteriorizing subjective states), *Wuthering Heights* (example of a 19th century English novel that is adapted for a 20th century American audience), *Pride and Prejudice* (an inspired film in a novel that reveals similarities with the script and explores those similarities for progressive autonomy), *The Grapes of Wrath* (film that illustrates the process of altering the novel's basic sequences, modifying the narrative structure evident in the book, in order to fill the

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specific needs of the film), *The Ox-Bow Incident* (adaptation that illustrates the alteration of the end of the film in order to convey both the meaning and the structure of the novel in film language), and *Madame Bovary* (example of failure due to the not using the spatial elements of the novel and the fact that the director did not "think" the book in a plastic way).

The Informer, a novel written in 1925 by Liam O'Flaherty, was adapted in 1935 by John Ford. Best film, best director, best screenplay and best actor were some of the qualities that critics recognized in this film in 1935. Ford's strategy results from a personal synthesis between what Daniel Taradash calls respect for the original and the introduction of elements new. The director included in his film such a set of innovations compared to the novel that the final product is a new *The Informer*. In this sense, we find a first example of adaptation. The director introduces innovations in a cumulative way, whether they are new elements or obliterations in relation to the original. The result is a new semiotic product. In this way, the director sought the novel not as a finished product, but as a raw material from which he created his work of art (just as the novelist himself had done when using his own personal experiences as raw material). Bluestone illustrates this first type of adaptation: «That is why, if one is asked, "How do you like the Greek *Electra*?" one must reply, "By whom? *Sophocles* or *Euripides*?" And if one is asked, "How do you like *The Informer*?" one must reply, "By whom? *The 'Flaherty* or *Ford*?" (1957).

Wuthering Heights, a strong competitor to the 1939 Oscars (year of *Gone with the Wind*), illustrates, according to Bluestone, a second case in the adaptations. When Samuel Goldwyn analyzed this novel, he compared it to *Rebecca*, who quite simply resembled a true script. On the contrary, *Wuthering Heights*, to be adapted to the cinema, would need a radical operation: cuts. In this sense, Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur undertook a task that illustrates a second possibility in the universe of adaptations: they analyzed the novel and decided to make a large set of successive cuts, starting by dividing the book in two, suppressing more problematic scenes - all of which markedly difficult to transpose to the screen due to their subjective nature -, reducing the complex intrigue to a more linear diegetic thread.

Emily Brönte's novel underwent a serious number of transformations that included deletions, some additions and mainly the alteration of the novel's axial sense and its own ending, in order to condense the intrigue and reduce it to its most linear essence. The condensation and economy strategy proves to be important whenever distant spatio-temporal coordinates can affect immediate access to the nucleus of the diegesis. This process, quite common in the film industry, has rarely been questioned. On the contrary, the simple condensation of the novel is an accepted strategy without major reflections or questions. It is, literally, a simple matter of industry protocol.

By nature a complex genre, the novel offers particular adaptation difficulties in certain authors and in certain styles of the time. Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* reflects this problem in an exemplary way. It is a work that reveals the deepest tensions of the writer, and the 1940 film version tried to

faithfully capture these main dialectical tensions related to the exercise of irony on the part of the author. This film illustrates the attempt to transfer the contradictions of the novel to the screen, so the construction of the script proved to be a lengthy process, designed to illustrate what Bluestone calls metamorphosis of words to the screen, at the same time that the screenwriters took advantage a cinematic characteristic of the writer: the possibility of transposing to the camera point of view, the omniscient vision that is evident in the novel.

The film ended up revealing a construction of the dialogues that reflected the literary nature of the source and, at the same time, a plastic interpretation of the book's contents, in an exercise of interpretation and aesthetic metamorphosis of the novel. The care in transposing to the cinema also characterizes the last adaptation of this novel: *Pride and Prejudice*, by Joe Wright, premiered in Portugal in January 2006. In addition to the transposition for television, made in 1995, this last adaptation is revealed, for many critics, such as the happiest, especially for the choice of actors, chosen scenarios and choice of camera movements by the director.

It is not uncommon for some writers to decide, ab initio, to direct their novel and bring it, in advance, to the cinema. Writing becomes contiguous to cinematographic ideals, which favors future adaptations. The novel *The Grapes of Wrath*, by John Steinbeck, proved to be an adaptation so simple that it seemed that it was written as a final script, resulting in an example of texts that favor adaptation and that both illustrate its qualities in the book and in the film .

The team that brought Steinbeck's novel to the screen understood the cinematographic virtues of the book and engaged in an adaptation that, at the outset, was simplified by the author's writing options, that is, by the time the text was conceived, Steinbeck was already think about the cinematographic market and shaped his book to better match the needs and particularities of cinema. On the other hand, the transformations that the film patents reflect the mutation that a linguistic text undergoes when it is encoded according to the audiovisual language. Thus, all occurrences of the author's reflections, moments more lyrical or less close to the empirical reality are not present in the film, but certain fragments were transformed into equivalents in the filmic language, namely because the author himself had already configured these elements in a cinematic way . Perhaps the most interesting factor in this process is the very John Ford's confession that he had never read the novel, which highlights the idea of aesthetic independence of both the book and the film, despite the convergence that we marked.

The question of similarities can be illustrated, in another degree of analysis, by the film *The Ox-Bow Incident*. Walter Van Tilburg, the novelist, says that he only identified two changes in cinematographic transposition. This commentary illustrates a type of adaptation that is recognized as an example of film fidelity in relation to the literary original, and that shows a strategy that can be summed up to an attitude of thinking the book according to plastic concepts.

When the novel grows in dramatic intensity due to an accumulation of details, the film adopts the same strategy, but instead of using words, it uses images, namely through a careful

selection of close-ups and deliberate choices between dialogue and silences .

The director and the screenwriter were also helped by the structure of the novel's intrigue, characterized by its density, and by a typical tripartite architecture of Aristotelian inspiration, marked by three well-defined spaces, which are respected in the film. However, the transposition process reflects the peculiarities of filmic language, which forced the abandonment of a first-person narration of the novel, which overwhelmingly dominates the entire diegesis, as well as the abandonment of typical stylistic characteristics of the novelist, in conjunction with the transformation of narrative summaries in dialogue.

The last example of the typology of adaptations proposed by Bluestone is *Madame Bovary*. The 1949 film illustrates what the author considers a failed adaptation, for several reasons, which include the lack of a pictorial imagination on the part of the director, who curiously did not know how to capture the cinematic female figure created by Flaubert, in conjunction with a script, created by Robert Ardrey, that failed to translate the words of the French writer into images.

If, on the one hand, it is possible, to a certain extent, to transpose the text to the screen through the camera, there are certain characteristics of the novel that do not facilitate the adaptation process, such as the nuance related to meals. In the book, they translate a feeling of monotony, permanent and successive emptiness, of plurality of situations that the director was unable to capture. Likewise, repeated behaviors, words that suggest moods, psychological time, feelings and abstractions that permeate the novel are other elements that the camera does not translate into the film.

Bluestone's proposal does not exactly present a taxonomy of adaptations, but rather a set of examples that typify some of the most common situations in transposing a book to the screen. This reflection does not have a systematic character, but it identifies, in a pertinent way in the context of the diachrony of theoretical models, standard situations that illustrate a proto-typology.

In 1975, in *The Novel and The Cinema*, Geoffrey Wagner opposes Bluestone when he defends that written fiction is an antithetical medium to the film, because although, in essence, the written text uses a basic linguistic support and the film a visual support, Griffith knew from an early age to take advantage of many potentialities that the written text offered him, creating the main cinematographic techniques that are still used today. Basically, it is a question of reiterating what Béla Balázs had already said, that is, it is possible to adapt an intrigue or a diegesis to the canvas, but even though the narrative contents may be similar, we are talking about independent works of art.

According to Wagner (1975), we found three possible forms of adaptation. First, it mentions the transposition, that is, the use of a new instrument to express a content already known. Examples of this process would be the films *Wuthering Heights* (1939), *Jane Eyre* (1944), *Madame Bovary* (1949), *Lord Jim* (1965), *Hunger* (1966), *L'année dernière à Marienbad* (1961) and *1984* (1956). Second, we would find the comment, when the director intends to reveal a different intention in relation to his literary source, not being therefore a corruptor of fidelity, but a renewer

of meanings, preferring, for example, to introduce a new end to diegesis, as happens in *The Heiress* (1949), *Catch - 22* (1970), *A Clockwork Orange* (1972) and *The Stranger* (1967). Finally, we have the analogy of using the original text as a starting point and introducing innovations such as changes of place or time, maintaining a clear link to the written source. Examples of this process are the films *Candide* (1960), *The Trial* (1962), *Cabaret* (1972), *Death In Venice* (1971), and *Contempt* (1963).

The three processes presented by Wagner reveal some interesting aspects. The concept of transposition would classify all adaptations that function as semiotic transpositions of the original work, which gives them aesthetic legitimacy; the commentary, which introduces innovations on the part of the director, highlights the value of the film's aesthetic independence without abandoning the link to the literary source; and the analogy, which would allow the director's deeper interventions, is the film's highest degree of aesthetic independence.

Despite being a very broad model in terms of process boundaries, Wagner's proposal identifies three adaptation paths that try to respect the semiotic and aesthetic independence of works of art and establishes relatively concrete criteria in the difficult elucidation of the concept and degrees of fidelity .

The concept of fidelity is the starting point for the typology proposed by Louis Giannetti (1993), which includes three indexes. Free adaptation is an appropriation of a situation, an idea or a character from the literary source, which is developed independently. This type of adaptation characterizes Shakespeare's texts inspired by Plutarch, for example and, in cinema, the transformation of *King Lear* into *Ran*, carried out by Kurosawa, which maintains several original elements, but situates the conflict in medieval Japan.

A faithful adaptation tries to recreate the literary text, keeping the spirit of the book as much as possible. To illustrate this concept, Bazin would use the example of a translator's work, however, the translation of the text into the film implies distinct semiotic universes. Giannetti considers the film *Tom Jones*, by Richardson, as a faithful adaptation, given that the argument maintains many of the original characteristics, namely regarding the construction of the conflict, characters and events. The film does not prove to be a mere illustration of the novel, as the director sought filmic equivalences for the specificities of the text, constructing visual metaphors.

Finally, Giannetti (1993) proposes the concept of literal adaptation, which would characterize the adaptation of texts written for theater, because the film would be very close to dialogues and action. Nevertheless, even this type is not absolutely literal if we analyze the problems that are posed to the director such as space and time, as well as the very choice of plans that prevent him from simply filming a play - theoretically the closest way to to be true to an original.

The categories proposed by Giannetti are not a sufficiently clear model, but show three classic types of adaptation. Although the concept of literal adaptation is based only on dramatic texts - which limits not only the use of typology but also constitutes an obstacle to its own coherence -, Giannetti reveals a comprehensive proposal that highlights the inevitability of changes during the process of transcoding, or, as he himself

states: «The difference between loose, faithful, and literal adaptations, then, are essentially matters of degree. In each case, the cinematic form inevitably alters the content of the literary original» (1993).

A very relevant reference in the bibliography on adaptation is the work of Alain Garcia (1990). This author presents a typology of adaptations that derives from an initial thought by Henri Lemaître, according to which adaptation is an operation that consists of reconstructing a work in a medium of expression different from the original, which can be originally a novel or a play, for example. In this sense, it is necessary to analyze the web of relationships between the text and the film, unveiling the specificity of each one, in order to overcome the limitations of different authors. For this reason, for Jean Mitry, one can only consider the criterion of fidelity or infidelity to the novel; so do other authors like Tudor Eliad and Mickael Klein who propose, respectively, minimum fidelity, partial fidelity and maximum fidelity; and absent fidelity, more or less absent fidelity, and very present fidelity.

On the other hand, although the ideal is the transposition for Bluestone, and the analogy for Wagner, Fuzellier separates the valorization of the extension of the novel in detriment of the style - if the novel is not very relevant -, or the valorization of the style, in detriment of extension - if the text belongs to the class of great literary works. Truffaut, on the other hand, argues that the adapter filmmaker has only three possibilities: follow the novelist's path, follow the novelist's path, but in a better way, or follow another better path. All these lines of thought reveal problems: from the historical criterion of fidelity, to the ambiguity of the proposed categories.

Garcia establishes a compromise between all these inheritances, closer to Bluestone than to Wagner, and chooses three major categories: adaptation (which includes illustration and amplification), free adaptation (digression and commentary) and transposition (analogy) and ecranization).

Garcia's typology presents the illustration as the first model, which typifies the so-called passive adaptation, that is, the narrative structure is brought to the screen using only figurative or visual elements, resulting in a restrictive product, limited compared to the original, simpler and more synthetic, like Polanski's *Tess* or *D'Urbervilles*. The script becomes an illustration of the novel, often surrounded by the dogma of fidelity, of dependence on the book, in a process of simplification often synonymous with vulgarization.

Regain, from Pagnol, illustrates, for Garcia, the second case: amplification. In this process, not only is the text reproduced, but certain characteristics are also increased, due to the aesthetic option of the director, who, being true to the original, falls into the temptation to build a "literary" film, using the film language not by transposition, but rather as an explanation.

Free adaptation is an exercise in eradicating the literary marks of the text, reducing it to a product that can be filmed, suppressing elements, discovering equivalences between written and audiovisual language, in order to offer the viewer the same sensations as the reader. This adaptation is not limited

by its literary source, which is just a starting point, until a new aesthetic product is reached.

In association with this concept, we would find the designations "adaptation inspired by the novel ..." and "film freely adapted from the novel ...", which also translate this type that can elect an element of the novel as the core of the film, such as character or theme, according to the criteria desired by the director.

The free adaptation includes the tour and comment. The digression is an exercise in moving away from the original, often to overcome the medium character of the novel, but it seems problematic if the director chooses to work on a consecrated text. In the case of *Thérèse Raquin*, a book brought to the screen by Marcel Carné and Charles Spaak, the free adaptation reveals that the psychological study of the novel was replaced by a tragic action, dominated by actions external to the characters (unlike the novel), by sudden changes in rhythm to arrest the viewer, in a touring exercise that the original novel did not contemplate. Therefore, such a process, in the case of a great novel, becomes a sin for both the film and the book. The commentary, in turn, is a filmic speech close to the book, which includes interpretation and analysis. Thus, the adaptation can be increased to the transcendence of the original source. *Tristana*, from Buñuel, illustrates this situation. From a high-quality novel, the director went on to transcend, improving facets of intrigue, introducing valences of meaning, in a dimension between reality and dreams, between lyrical and dreamlike.

Transposition, which integrates analogy and ecranization, is a concept proposed by Garcia, inspired by Wagner, and which, in theory, reconciles decal and creation, overcoming the limitations of the more restricted meaning of the concept "adaptation", maintaining the essence of the novel and looking for formal equivalences.

In Garcia's model, the concept of fidelity takes on a new meaning. It is not a matter of analyzing the fidelity to the letter or spirit of the novel, but rather of translating the original work faithfully at the same time that it is freely created, using analogies, equivalences, in a transcoding process - which we have already mentioned -, of letter to the image. The director becomes an adapter, but above all a translator. And although each translator is a traitor, according to the well-known aphorism, this role of the director would be essential for an adaptation close to the ideal. In summary, if the adaptation betrayed the cinema because it was dependent on excess of literature, and if the free adaptation betrayed the novel because the film moved too far, the transposition did not betray any of the artistic objects.

In this process of transposition, we look for the elements that allow the transition from a romantic aesthetic to a filmic aesthetic, in a moment of complicity between the original text and the film, in a stylistic of technical and aesthetic equivalence. The film *Chronicle of an announced death*, according to the book by Garcia Marquez, illustrates the process that Garcia calls by analogy and that can be summed up to the ability to create a quality film work from a novel, combining adaptation and transposition, proceeding in this way not to a simple transformation, but to a metamorphosis from a language to a language.

Finally, The French Lieutenant's Woman evokes the process called ecranization which is a very difficult example to find, as it typifies the novel that was sublimated and elevated by the film. In this case, cinema rises on its own, taking advantage of a great novel to highlight its semiotic and aesthetic specificity, in addition to the text that inspired it. In the aforementioned film, Reisz was able to deepen facets already marked in the text, to transcend them, namely the conception of the characters, far beyond simple intrigue.

Garcia's model presents taxonomic simplicity as a virtue (three categories and two types for each category), and as a difficulty the subjectivity in the appreciation of certain categories that prevents the identification and classification of films through distinctive and perceptible characteristics. This obstacle is clear especially when we reach the category of ecranization, whose grounds are very diffuse. However, when he argues that what is at stake is not the choice between a literal translation and a free translation, but between an exact translation and an inaccurate translation, he identifies a basic concept: the need to use transcoding processes that allow an adaptation well accomplished, from words to images.

In conclusion, we can say that the relationship between literary studies and film studies will continue to be marked by the phenomenon of adaptation, from the most traditional perspectives, such as fidelity, to the independent but relational analysis between the book and the film, as Alqadi writes:

The creation of cinema has brought new considerations as well as new techniques and approaches of the literary text. Films have been greatly influenced by literature. Adaptations of classics confirm the fact that novels have widely inspired film-makers. Classics provide cinema with ready-made, pretested material, especially successful classics. Cinema is considered to be a visual and aural narrative. Adapting a novel is thus translating words into a succession of moving pictures, telling a story. One pertinent question about adaptation is not the degree to which a film is faithful to its literary reference but the possibilities offered by cinema to treat a literary work. Both cinema and novels have the narrative in common, even if stories may be told differently. Similarly, films have had a great influence on American modern writers of the twentieth century. Several novelists adopted cinema aesthetic and techniques in their narrative. The traditional perception of time and space changed thanks to cinematic methods. The linearity is no longer essential. Time progression is not the same and flashbacks are integrated. The space is fractionated. The pace is rapid and even the language used has changed. Film makers are inspired by literature and tend to translate books, especially classics or best-sellers into screen. Similarly, novelists, especially after WWI, are widely inspired by cinema. Hemingway and

Fitzgerald, among other authors of the twentieth century, illustrate examples of the influence of cinema on their writings. Consequently, it appears clear that films on turn have been greatly influential on modern novel. Cohen cites Virginia Woolf and Truman Capote, to mention a few as examples demonstrating how the modern novel was influenced by the techniques of Eisenstein na montage in particular and cinema aesthetic and methods in general. (2015, p. 48)

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